Commencement - 1943

MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATING CLASSES:

My message to you as you leave these halls may be summarized in two sentences from an observation of a Scotch philosopher:

> "The faculty of imagination is the great spring of human activity and the principal source of human improvement .... Destroy this faculty, and the condition of man will become as stationary as that of the brutes."

This subject may seem to you, on first thought, to be inappropriate for these times. It need not be unsuitable for the occasion even though the world is fairly well filled with wickedness and all the ordeals of the Apocalypse. At least I promise you that my discussion will not be academic but, on the contrary, objective and practical.

In a real sense a disciplined, creative imagination is the most valuable tool you can carry over from college. Its importance is as great in times of war and other social

catastrophies as in eras of peace. You should have developed this faculty in school, and I contend that you will do well to keep in good condition this indispensable part of the equipment of the good citizen.

No one with as much as ordinary intelligence will deny that you are facing stern reality. Upon leaving college you will immediately be engaged in a struggle which will demand all of your courage, strength, and perseverance. Your very existence is endangered by a powerful coalition of enemies who dislike both you and what you stand for as a group. This threat must be destroyed if you and your descendants are to save your heritage and live as free men and women. You know one thing you have to do to be saved, and you will do it. We are confident you will fight the good fight.

But while it is your responsibility to stem and to roll back the rising tide of despotism which threatens to engulf us, you should observe that force of arms alone cannot assure

victory in the struggle. Success in the field must be accompanied by success at home. We must prepare ourselves for battles to be fought and won, but in order to cultivate our ability to live in peace and justice we must also train ourselves to understand and use our freedoms. It is said of man, "As he thinketh in his heart so is he." Thus, only if we create in our own minds the patterns of existence worthy of free men can we be considered deserving of the form of government, the kind of economy, the order of society, and the way of life which together make up our concept of democracy.

In your school days you should have learned, through the acquisition of information, through the exercise of your ability to reason, and through experience, how to be good citizens. To be sure you will now proceed to forget many of the facts which you were asked to remember, at least until examinations were passed. You may even by this time have forgotten the names of the thirteen original colonies, the kinds of vitamins

in the potato, the differences between a lame duck and other birds, and the name of Paul Revere's horse. Do not let this worry you unless you intend to specialize in quiz programs, some hysterical critics of the schools to the contrary notwithstanding. Some important things to retain are the ability to study, a knowledge of reliable sources of information, and the incentive to construct for yourselves workable concepts of the best possible world for men who would live in justice, mercy, and peace. He only is to be considered educated who continues through life to develop his imagination as the vision of the spirit and "the eye of the soul." But the image built in the mind's eye must be clear and undistorted, not blurred and imperfect as a result of lack of knowledge, experience, and straight thinking.

You will note that I make a distinction between creative imagination on the one hand and wishful thinking and uninformed planning on the other. The differences are important, particularly

in these times when there is danger of sacrificing common sense to emotionalism. We are witnessing a rapidly increasing interest in postwar planning. The incentives of this interest are admirable. We do not want a recurrence of the debacle of the last war. We are tired of sitting on a powder keg. We desire a just peace which gives promise of reasonable permanence. We do not believe in fighting as a method of solving human problems. Unfortunately, most of the attempts to draw patterns for the world of tomorrow are not reassuring. They reveal a regrettable ignorance of the nature of the basic problems to be solved, a naive confidence that we can predict postwar conditions, an exaggerated notion of our ability effectively to police the world, and an unwarranted assumption that somehow other nations can be made happy if they will let us manage their affairs. Our planning must have a more intelligent basis. Postwar programs from the abstractions of the Atlantic Charter to the many tight little schemes for reorganizing the governments, economic

structure, education, and social ideals of the world are doomed to failure if they do not recognize that we cannot make our enemies love us by forcing them into grooves, by forgiving their debts, or by sharing our food with them. We are all brothers and sisters under the skin but this does not eliminate family rows, which, as we know, are often the bitterest quarrels.

The development of a real spirit of democratic common life is beyond the power of any state. This spirit must grow and reside in the minds and hearts of men and women. The fundamental problem to be solved as the basis of a lasting peace is easy to state and difficult to solve. How are we to restore, preserve, and increase the unity which must characterize mankind - the unity which must orient and bring together science and religion and everyday living, the unity which men have been losing as a byproduct of the industrialization of society? The answer must be found or we will destroy ourselves. If we do not first set

our own house in order, we can have no hope of reorganizing the rest of the world. Surely you, fresh from your studies as you are, know all too well that freedom is impossible unless we can heal the divisions in our industrial society, break down the walls of misunderstanding which divide us, and learn to keep our knowledge from doing harm instead of good. Of course it will not be easy to work out methods of keeping private and sectional interests from coming into disastrous conflict with one another and with the common good, but "it is better to wear ourselves out in the service of what is good than to be worn out by the forces of evil."

The seeds of failure to solidify the gains of humanity in its struggle for freedom had been sown and had begun to germinate before this conflict. The war will not restore the vitality of religion, unify the objectives of religion and science, and build a world society free, even reasonably free, from the evil effects of ignorance, disorganized thinking,

selfishness, greed, and intolerance. It will not in itself promote the great adventure of freeing men and women from the fear of oppression and of want. Postwar programs will prove reliable only if they aim fundamentally at the ideal of human brotherhood and are accompanied by serious efforts to keep our minds informed, flexible, and active to consider changing conditions.

This war is on us, and we shall fight it. As college men and women, however, you have the additional responsibility of serving on the spiritual level. This is where your influence is vital. The fate of the world will be determined in considerable part by what goes on in your skulls. It is your individual responsibility to think with courage and hope for the well being and freedom of mankind and to place your ideas in force at the peace table and beyond. Thus we say to you, be always, without apology, with those who can say:

"Dreamer of dreams, we take the taunt with
gladness,

Knowing that God beyond the years we see
Hath wrought the dreams which count with
men for madness
Into the fabric of the world to be."