

THE SIXTY-NINTH COMMENCEMENT

Commencement was held for the first time in the University's new Auditorium on Thursday morning, June 26, 1913. The academic procession formed as on the previous day; the seniors, gathering each class at their respective building, and led by a bugler, taking their assigned place in the line, which was headed by the Faculty, the officers of the University and those who were later to receive honorary degrees. The alumni, who were admitted by ticket, formed at the Alumni Memorial Hall. Though the day was warm the great Auditorium was comfortable, and no one had any difficulty in hearing the speech of the Commencement orator, President George E. Vincent, of the University of Minnesota. President Vincent's address in part was as follows:

"THE SENSE OF THE STATE."

Commencement has its ritual of phrase and imagery. Mile-stones, the sea of life, battlefield, playing-field and stage, suggest metaphor and analogy. Individual success, scientific research, liberal culture, professional efficiency, loyalty to Alma Mater, service to society, are well-worn ideas. Graduates are urged to confront the problems of the day and to play a steadfast part in solving them. The growing emphasis upon the common life offers us a theme to-day.

These men and women of the graduating class owe much to Michigan. This honored institution is an organ of the State, a West Point of Science and the Arts, an expert adviser of the Commonwealth. The state has trained these young citizens. What to-day does the State mean to them? How do they think of it? What sentiments does it arouse? How are personal purposes and ambitions related to these forms of life together that men call commonly, city, state and nation? The people have the right to ask. The University is answering as the years go by.

Two decades ago Mr. Bryce told us that to Americans the State is not as to the German or the Frenchmen an ideal moral power charged with the duty of forming the characters and guiding the lives of its citizens, but rather a huge commercial company. And only the other day Mr. H. G. Wells declared that the American has no "sense of the state." "I do not mean," he explains, "that he is not passionately and vigorously patriotic, but I mean that he has no perception that his business activities, his private employments, are constituents in a large collective process; that they affect other people and the world everywhere, and cannot as he imagines begin and end with him."

This charge of "state-blindness" arouses our resentment. We reply with warmth that the American is keenly alive to the idea of his country, his commonwealth, his city. In national crises has he not responded with eager devotion; has he not endured bravely the hardships and tragedies of war? Did the men of '61 have no "sense of the state?" Yet, as we reflect upon the full meaning of our critics' assertion our confidence falters. In every-day life does the American see and feel himself intimately related to his community? We begin to seek excuse. We catch ourselves upon the point of explaining that we are a young country. (How much longer can we attenuate our adolescence?) Let us review the different attitudes—"senses of the state"—which Americans as individuals or as groups assume toward community life.

Every nation has a collective egotism—a kind of co-operative self-satisfaction. Americans have been no exception. Mrs. Trollope and Dickens thought us insufferable boasters and braggarts. They did not understand how much we needed the comfort of hope. We invented the gentle art of "boosting"—a process of reciprocal hypnosis by which we turn disaster into victory. Americans are not lacking in that good opinion of themselves which comes from a reassuring ignorance about other nations; and there survives a measure of that earlier vanity which in a subtle way was transferred from the nation to the individual. This "sense of the state" turns out to be

only in disguised form a sense of personal importance. Yet it gradually grows into a national pride which becomes a source of strength and purpose.

To millions of Americans patriotism is a glorified geography. They rejoice in staggering statistics of areas and crops. Images of boundless prairies, yawning chasms, towering mountains, majestic rivers, mighty water-falls and copious geysers give them a feeling of exultation. These natural phenomena take on a proprietary character and seem to contribute to the citizen's personal significance. The very stretch of territory expands his mind and stimulates his imagination. If this is not the whole of patriotism, it nevertheless plays a part in making vivid to the American a certain "sense of the state."

There are magic words in the lexicon of every people. "Destiny" is talismanic in America. Early habits of living for the future and enduring the present still persist. Things may be far from satisfactory just now, but a dazzling destiny is in store for us. Why concern ourselves with problems when an automatic millenium is assured? Beneficent cosmic forces are conspiring for our golden age. This blind faith in a national destiny has too often been a substitute for painful thought and sturdy effort. Whatever its value in giving heart to a hard-pressed generation, it has long been a soporific to a people who should be stirred to the pursuit of a national purpose.

Like other nations, Americans have assumed that they enjoy monopoly of Providential oversight and aid. To be the special instrument of Divine purpose is a rôle which we accept with as much humility as we can summon. This again contributes to our sense of personal importance, but like the destiny doctrine, it fosters a feeling of irresponsibility. We are coming happily to a larger, more inspiring conception. When we think of all nations as together working out a Divine plan of civilization, each making its own contribution, our "sense of the state" is changed from an attitude of complaisant ease into one of earnest endeavor. An assurance of indulgent special favor changes into a call for loyalty and service.

To a multitude of Americans—especially to the capable, initiating, aggressive sort—the community has seemed not a cause to be served but a mine to be worked. This is the natural outcome of the ego-centric theory which has so intensely stimulated American ambition, activity and achievement. America has so long spelled personal Opportunity that we must not expect it very quickly to reform its spelling into public service. When we remember how earnestly we have preached the gospel of success, how we have rewarded and exalted the men who have won it, we must not be impatient with the citizens whose "sense of the state" is chiefly that of an arena for individual gain and glory. We must slowly change this extreme individualism into a philosophy which shall in increasing measure identify private ambition and public weal. There are signs of this change on every hand.

Perhaps the most common view of the state is the police or umpire theory. Ambitious individuals and self-seeking groups are engaged in constant rivalry and struggle. The state sees that justice is done; that there is fair play. Thus it becomes a form of compulsion or control. It is set over against the citizen. It taxes him, spends his money, thwarts him in many ways. It is hard to feel much enthusiasm for the State looked at in this fashion. It seems chiefly negative; it lacks positive and constructive force. "That government is best which governs least." Spencer's ghost haunts this conception. It is reminiscent of Bentham and of Manchester. If graduates carry into life only this "sense of the state" they will hardly spend themselves lavishly for the commonwealth.

Against the exploitation and the police views of the state there has been a growing protest from those who see in the collectivistic idea an all-inclusive organization. The socialist offers a "sense of the state" which merges the citizen into an encompassing whole. The state becomes the one agency of the life in common. To the ardent collectivist this is compatible with the spontaneity and self-direction of the individual. To most of us, however, this theory of the state seems destructive of the independence and responsibility which are essential to the most vigorous type of personality and to an expanding, advancing society. Just as on the one hand an exaggerated individualism leads to arrogance and to aloofness from the community,

so on the other the socialist "sense of the state" tends toward the submerging of individuality in the mass.

Efficiency is a current shibboleth. Business methods are being carried into community life. Municipalities are declared to be nothing more than big corporations which should be managed by experts and pay to citizens dividends of health, comfort and happiness. We have, it is said, no further need of parties and sentimental loyalty. Business is politics and politics is business. The theory is being extended to state organization and administration. There is strong appeal in this conception. It fits into the practical spirit of the age. It demands good service and applies more searching tests. And yet this business "sense of the state" cannot touch the imagination and arouse the devotion which our common life demands.

Nevertheless, the demand for business efficiency springs from real needs. Whether we like it or not the community has more and more regulative and constructive tasks forced upon it. Shall we be apathetic or obstructive, shall we endure the change as a necessary evil or shall we welcome an opportunity to enter into a constructive co-operation? There is a new "sense of the state" as a vast agency of a purposeful, advancing society in which individuals find self-development and self-expression. Public health, popular education, taxation, control of public utilities, challenge attention and demand more than negative treatment. We are entering a new phase of community life—team-play for positive ends. We are yielding to the spell of a new "sense of the state."

This call to constructive co-operation implies the moral ideal of the State which Mr. Bryce missed in us twenty-five years ago. Back of this change is the conviction that the state is more than a business corporation. It is an ethical force. It seeks justice, tolerance, mutual understanding, respect and good will. It cannot rest content with a technical or administrative efficiency which neglects the moral development of its citizens. It seeks their spontaneous, intelligent, self-directing loyalty. Through the conflicts and turmoil of our times, through the policies that are urged and the devices proposed there is struggling for expression a quickened "sense of the state" as a moral agency.

Moral earnestness is fostered by an idealism which has religious fervor. Church and State are separate in America, but this does not mean that we Americans are irreligious. Quite apart from theological differences is a unifying spiritual power which kindles our enthusiasms for common tasks. No thoughtful student of our national life can doubt that immense spiritual energy is finding expression in many forms of public and social service. There is a faint glimpse at least of an ideal which makes the state an object of inspiring idealism. Only a few perhaps have yet caught this vision, but these men and women are the prophets and leaders of our times.

There are then in American minds many "senses of the state." These different attitudes have grown out of widely varying conditions. All of them have had, most of them still have, value. They vary in insight and in inspiring power. They arrange themselves roughly in an advancing series. Each larger conception includes and perpetuates what is best in that which it supersedes. No education can be called liberal which does not arouse men and women to a true patriotism, to a "sense of the state" which shall sweep up into a noble vision, a chastened national pride, a thrill of future greatness, a submission to just control, a demand for technical efficiency, a deepened feeling of comradeship, a loyalty to common tasks, an enduring moral earnestness and fidelity to an ideal national aim.

May the graduates to-day catch a glimpse of this vision! Mere intellectual assent will not serve. No calculating repayment of funds advanced will provide a motive. Toynbee once said "Enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things, an ideal which takes the imagination by storm and a definite, intelligible plan for carrying the ideal out into practice." Here is an ideal that may well take the imagination by storm—a noble seat of learning, skill and idealism, founded and sustained by the people, sending out men and women to enrich, and arouse and serve the commonwealth. Each graduate, with his abilities, training, ambitions, loyalty becomes a part of the definite plan for carrying this ideal—"this sense of the state"—out into practice in the common life.