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Peace

LET US HAVE PEACE

It has been the immemorial habit of commencement speakers to tell the young men and women of graduating classes that they are the hope of the world, and it has, alas, also become the habit of the wiser graduates to smile and not to believe them. We were simpler in my time, less sophisticated, you would say, and when we were told this in 1898 we eagerly believed it. It is the tragedy of my generation that we can believe it no longer.

Let me tell you briefly why we in the late 19th century believed so readily that we could effect the world's salvation and why, as I see it, we failed.

We believed that advance in science and the progress of humanity were one and the same thing. We believed that, without effort, as a man draws his own shadow along with him, so every

new scientific discovery carried progress in its wake. This, as I see it now, is a grievous error. If there is something in the nature of science that makes for advance, there are weaknesses in man that may make him, and in our time have made him, not only his own but civilization's worst enemy. The fundamental truth which every educated man dare not cease to repeat to himself is this: it is easier to destroy than to build and it is easier to destroy a monument, university, a city or a state than to build one.

In times of complacency, of too easy faith in our own progress, any effective control or mastery over mankind is impossible, and our great problem in civilization will every be not to master nature but to master men. Presumption, that sin of the spirit, can nullify every triumph of man's intelligence. In such times men exploit and do not build. In his private concerns, man insists upon the rights of the individual; in world affairs he insists upon the supreme rights of his nation. Other individuals and other nations do the same, and man against man, nation

against nation drive forward into inevitable collisions. You know you can no longer exploit. You must build.

In a far-off June, under quiet elms by the library, we too in a happier time dreamed of the future. America's golden age lay just ahead. We could afford to leave well enough alone and in the sentimentalism of our complacency we could still repeat Christina Rossetti's lines,

"Tomorrow shall be like today,
But much more sweet."

This blinded us to our responsibility. Perhaps we might have led, but we only drifted. Humanity had believed in progress for a century and a half, and we accepted it as something inevitable. We listened with eagerness to the phrase, "the acceleration of progress". It was possible to resist education, even in our time some of us successfully did so, but it was impossible to resist progress. That was the steam roller of history. As every stone the mason lays tends to lift the level of the wall, so we held that every discovery of the scholar and scientist would raise the level of human life.

I stand before you as a somewhat shaken representative of a time that held those two beliefs: *irresistible* ~~irreversible~~ progress and rugged individualism. When we appear before men of your age now, we almost have to beg you not to shoot. We did the best we could. And let me say one thing for the men of my age now on trial before the courts of yours. They were not vicious. As educated men, however, they were guilty of grievous error. They had forgotten to take into account the major factor in our problem; the need for social control; and it is this lack of adequate social or political control that has vitiated the results of the greatest thirty-five years in the history of science that the world has ever known.

Darwin's doctrine of evolution strengthened within us that notion of "continuing rise" in the scale of human living and led us to that most dangerous doctrine, of laissez faire. Life was a struggle of individual man against his fellow in which the fittest survived. The world at large could take care of itself and progress under its own law. If you survived, that proved you

the most fit. Of all our errors, that is the one which most nearly proved fatal. The law of the jungle is not the law of civilization. The survival of the hive of bees through the hard times of winter does not depend upon how fiercely the workers in that hive fought against each other. Even working bees know better than to fight; they cooperate; they must fill the hive or all will die. So it is in history. We all go up or down together. The chief injunction upon civilized man is not that he struggle for advantage over his fellow but that with him he strive to organize that fitter society which alone can survive. The price we must pay for every advance in civilization, for every new discovery of science, every new energy released, is a fuller recognition of interdependence and the necessity of stricter social control. This must ever be true so long as it is easier to destroy than to build.

A philosophy which implied that justice lies in force, put a premium upon preparedness and upon aggression in the national as in the international domain. This fear of being or only of

appearing unfit, drove us into a panic stampede for power and for riches. In international affairs, a world war and the death of 20,000,000 men did not end it. Within the nation, the unemployment and destitution of 12,000,000 of our countrymen and the dependence of nearly half our population did not end it. But this is the result of that individualism which you found when you entered college four years ago. Ours was the common but the terrible sin of pride.

If it is true that in times of prosperity and self-satisfaction, youth does not protest, but follows rather than leads its elders, it is equally true that in times of hardship, when change is impending, youth has always felt and asserted its power. Yours is such a time.

If, in our private lives, it is true that we rise on stepping stones of our dead selves, in the domain of civilization, it is on stepping stones of dead generations that we must mount to higher things. Therefore, I tell you that the future is yours. You smile at this new irony. Do not smile, I beg you, it is true.

In times like yours, the future does belong to you and to you only. You alone can bring it into being. You already are doing so.

Let me illustrate what I mean by an example. It is not the old men of 1914 who have enlightened us about war. It is not from Marshall Foch, or Marshall Haig or from even the older Hindenburg or our own General Pershing that we have learned this. It is from Sheriff in Journey's End, from Remarque in All Quiet on the Western Front, from Hemingway in A Farewell to Arms. It is from men who were of your age in 1914 that the world has learned how meaningless war has become, how hopeless as a civilizing agency. It is men of your age who have taught us that war, this primitive man's trial by combat, proves nothing, has lost its last idealistic trappings, is an unmitigated evil. It has ceased to be a human way to settle international problems. Courage is common to Europeans and Americans. Germans are not less brave than Englishmen or Americans or Frenchmen, but courage has ceased to avail against the seven-league shard, the deadly gas, the unseen mine or submarine. No matter how brave the heroes, how

righteous their cause, they die in their dugouts like rats in a trap.

In another form let me put before you as simply as I can what seems to me now the law of any civilization in which there is to be real progress. You cannot progress merely by adding one new scientific discovery to another, by multiplying the forces at man's disposal. There can be no progress until these forces are controlled. As these young men have told us, all our immense advances in science did not make the World War more humane but only more deadly. As we make individuals more powerful and rich, they do not automatically curb and check themselves. A millionaire Al Capone with an armored car and a battery of machine guns in the streets of New York or Chicago is far more subversive than a lone Indian with his bow and arrow or a caveman with his stone axe. The city, the state, the nation must increase its power to prevent, to check and to master, in proportion as attack may become more sudden, more insidious and more disastrous.

This lesson it is particularly difficult for us to learn, because we are descendants of pioneers. The pioneer venturing into the forest primeval is free, need put no restraint upon himself, can satisfy without damage to others all his own needs, his own desires. He must and should be rugged. We have been! But if our pioneer crosses a great empty wilderness and enters the meeting-house in the settlement, he must cease to be rugged. If he would join them, share their peace, he must kneel when they kneel, pray when they pray, listen when they listen. He must accept control or their peace is broken. So it is if he enters the city or the state, or even the great business organization. If you are looking for work in a factory of ten thousand men - and I am afraid some of you still are - I would not advise you to tell the manager that you are an individualist, that you are rugged, gifted to pursue your own inclinations and desires. Tell him, I beg you, that you will do everything the people of that factory need to have done, what they all think is wisest and best. It is your only chance. We have learned this at the bottom of our

factory system, we must learn it at the top as well. You must teach this to the chairmen of the boards of directors, to mayors of cities, to the heads of states. You must remember that an era has ended. You must forget that we were once a people of pioneers. What was true in the forest primeval is no longer true in this scientific age when the whole world has become one vast power plant.

Because I have insisted upon the discipline of the emotions let none conclude that it is safe to give up hard thinking. Let it never be said in truth, as we sometimes say in jest, that we are governed by a "brain trust". A brain trust would be the final catastrophe. The world which denies you labor for your hands cannot deny you work for the mind. This is the educated man's margin of safety. Here even the tax gatherer cannot intrude. They may tax what men buy or sell, what men eat or drink, but they cannot tax what men think. In a civilized land, brains are and must ever remain the last thing free.

I am too deeply grateful to this state, to this

university, to that alma mater which gave me my education, as it has given you yours, to come before you rich with her blessings and sound the gong of revolt. But neither can I bring you the old message of complacency and self-satisfaction. Young Americans of intelligence and spirit can no longer be happy in this Heart-Break House of too much misery, of too much suffering, which we in the past have builded and bequeathed to them. In the foolish pride of presumption, we who have calculated the speed of light from the most distant planets, and the orbits of electrons on every atom, have forgotten to solve the simpler, central and far more important problem of how men, after nature has unlocked all her stores, released to us all her energies, shall live happily in justice and in peace.

And now a word to you fathers and mothers and citizens of the state. As you bow under the crushing weight of taxation, it is perhaps little consolation to know that we who are the beneficiaries of your free education shall every look back to you and thank you for the one inviolable gift that age can give to

youth. But it is fair to say that the greatest service which this state within the inland seas has rendered to the nation, lies on yonder hill. Those ivied walls are your proudest monument. To them your favored sons and daughters everywhere look back and as they loom in our memories we rise up and call you blessed. Do not cripple her or diminish her strength. You have taught our nation and the world that it is not only generous but wise to give youth free access to all the world's learning. Remember that it is when states are troubled that the blinder, fiercer discontents arise and the need of education is greatest. Never have the times called for training and discipline more insistently than today, discipline of our passions as well as of our minds. mete out your bounties not according to our deserts but according to our country's need. So long as it is easier to destroy than to build, so long as man more easily sees and responds to selfish interest and instinctive hungers, just so long can the only safety for the state lie in those lessons of interdependence and cooperation which the university must teach.

It alone can illumine what in us is dark. In their yearning for peace within the nation and between nations these young men and women with one accord confess our error. Forgive us and do not restrict for them the opportunities you gave to us. Do not visit our sins upon them. As the Spartan leader said as he pointed to his disciplined young men, "These are our walls". They alone can protect, they alone can give you safety, stability and peace. Though they may not yet believe me you know that theirs is the future.

We used to repeat the saying of a president and soldier who came from the Middle West, "Let us have peace". Once we were content to repeat this with him as the prayer of tired men who had returned from the wars. It has now become the prayer of your generation. It has been evident in the votes you have taken. Many perhaps have censured you. Love thou thy land is a fair injunction and you must still serve her in every good way. I know you will do so, but having said this, we do not censure, we commend you.

They tell the story of that greatest poet of the Middle

Ages, Dante, how at nightfall he knocked at the door of the monastery and when the monk at the gate opened timidly and saw in the dusk this hungry-faced man and asked him what he wanted, he answered in one word only, "peace"; and "all the cloisters echoed peace". So in our colleges it is in this twilight of our civilization. One prayer is in your hearts, one word is on your lips, peace. Not only an end of wars between the over-proud and senselessly contending nations, but peace within the nation, peace between man and his fellow, peace between American and American.

Science has placed the horn of plenty in our laps. Just now it is useless to solicit her for further miracles. For our age she has done enough. Now that we have progressed so far in the mastery of nature, we must progress further in the mastery of man. That was the simple truth which we of my generation failed to understand, and as we of the 19th century abdicate and turn over this world to you, that is our unsolved problem which in confidence we bequeath to you and to which we know that, now,

in this fullness of time, you will find the answer.

Climb the heights we only dreamed of but could not climb. With your victories ransom our defeats. With your richer future redeem our bankrupt years. And now, members of the Class of 1933, go forth upon your dividing ways. In the name of all those who have gone before you, I, out of the past, call down our blessings upon you and in the name of those who have suffered too much, of the young men who through our failure in the late wars died untimely, bid you our last and our heartiest Godspeed. May you have your wish; already the dawn is breaking in your richer day. Let us have peace.