



## EDUCATION AND SERVICE

*The Commencement Address, June 18, 1938*

By ALEXANDER G. RUTHVEN

OF recent years there has been much talk of social security with little evidence of any very general appreciation of the significance of the term. In fact, most persons seem to consider it to be synonymous with economic security rather than a name for the conservation of human resources. To the careless thinker it is the securing, rather than the justification of, the financial safety of human beings. Surely economic security is in application little more than maudlin sentimentality unless the recipient of aid and protection is worth saving; whereas, when based upon the expectation that the individual will continue to give of his best to the service of his fellows, it becomes, with the assistance of education, the essence of social security—the best utilization of human resources for the common good—the tempered mortar which secures the whole structure of civilization against the vicissitudes of time.

If a man is to be worth his salt he must realize that his education does not cease with the acquisition of a diploma: "The wise and the good are they who grow old still learning many things, entering day by day into more vital communion with truth, beauty, and righteousness." One must also remember that a college training alone cannot be blamed for a poor life, if an individual fails after his college years to try to grow in wisdom and in the favor of God and man. Some failures may be the result of faulty college training, but many are the consequence of later attitudes and influences.

To be very specific, Michigan has among its graduates quack doctors, shyster lawyers, teachers whose development was arrested at Commencement, business men who short-change their customers and steal our natural resources, unethical dentists and pharmacists, ministers who are careerists rather than pastors of souls, vain, selfish, and gossipy women, narrow-minded, bigoted, and intolerant men, and alumni who become less rather than more socially minded and cultured with the passing years.

It is cold comfort that other schools have a similar record and that we hope these failures of our educational efforts constitute but a small proportion of the total product of higher education. Neither can we get much satisfaction from the reflection that the defectives among our alumni are partly the result of ineffective guidance in college and that instruction and techniques in most fields are being improved. For we know, even though we do not readily admit it, that we shall continue to have alumni who fall short of our hopes and their promise as students through sheer laziness, lack of knowledge of how to continue their efforts to become well-rounded individuals, or ignorance of the necessity for continuing study.

You young men and women are today in a dangerous position. Experience permits us, your teachers, to realize that many of you still have the notion that the college exists to force youth to learn. Some of you have the impression that you are now beyond the period when study is

required except, perhaps, in the techniques you will employ in gaining a living. If you have these beliefs, your development has been arrested and you have already begun to degenerate mentally and spiritually and perhaps physically. This Commencement does not mean for you, as it does for your wiser colleagues, the continuation of an independent effort to have a clear conscious view of your own opinions and judgments and to promote self-development in thinking, intellectual honesty, tolerance, kindness, and social mindedness.

In college every effort is made to encourage study, and the failure is appraised and sent home. But the schools have no method of detecting failures after graduation, although the improper yardsticks of financial success and social standing are, it is to be regretted, sometimes employed. Our schools have, however, two definite obligations to adults, even though they may not be able satisfactorily to discharge them. They must offer facilities in the field of adult education and they must continuously admonish each generation to understand life as at once a desire and "a quarry out of which we are to mold and chisel and complete a character," and to recognize the two aspects of life in each of us, the life of action, and that of the mind and the heart, both of which must be continually and properly cultivated if the individual is to be a healthy

and respectable human being: "To attain understanding or wisdom one must first thirst for it, and then it is acquired only at the cost of much labor."

Members of the class of 1938:

When the wind blows, the windmills go wheeling round all together.

But there is another wind, I mean the Spirit, which is sweeping nations with a broom.

When you have it unchained, it sets all the human landscape a-moving—

I, therefore, give you this charge. Only if you are willing to give not only all that you are but also all that you can be to the service of your fellow men will you have any right to expect security from society. It is pure effrontery to ask God or your neighbors for your daily bread if you do not try to deserve it, for, we are taught, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." From now on your University will not be able to apply a marking system to your progress for your encouragement or enlightenment, or even to recall your degree if you become a total loss. We hope it will do all it can for you, but, for yourselves, "Sum up at night what thou hast done by day, and in the morning what thou hast to do; dress and undress thy soul; mark the decay or growth of it. If with thy watch that too be down, then wind up both. Since thou shalt most surely be judged, make thine accounts agree."

