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What Is Required of the Educated Man?

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

BY LAURENCE M. GOULD

IT IS natural that I should have mixed emotions as I stand here this afternoon. I feel an overwhelming temptation to talk about the good old days when I was a student and later a faculty member of this university, but I shall not yield. I am afraid I might not be able to distinguish the line between dream and reality and might end by massaging my emotions, boring you, and, worst of all, talking too long. The first characteristic of any commencement address is that it be brief. Besides, I learned from my

old friend Alex Ruthven, when I was here on the staff, that a speech need not be eternal to be immortal. This speech will certainly not be immortal, nor will it be eternal; it may only seem that way. I reinforce my decision with the observation of Mr. Dooley: "The past always looks better than it was. It's only pleasant because it isn't here."

Instead of taking my cue from the past I shall take it from the immediate present, from these flowers in front of me. Some time in the weeks and months past, seeds or bulbs were planted, and the satisfying beauty here in front of us is the result. In every thing that lives there is an urge toward the fulfillment of its nature. Seeds or bulbs reached the fulfillment of their being in these flowers in complete response to the nature which produced them. For us such fulfillment is more complicated, for while we also are creatures of the earth, we live largely in a world of man-made knowledge. We must ask questions of the Nature that has produced us to fulfill our destiny, or to be educated, if you like the latter phrase better. I wish to ask you four or five questions that emphasize the fact that this is an unending task.

Have you ever heard it said of someone

Untimely rain interrupted the University's Commencement exercises on June 12, 1954, and consequently this address by President LAURENCE MCKINLEY GOULD, of Carleton College, could not then be given. Dr. Gould, B.S.'21, A.M.'23, Sc.D.'25, has gained distinction in three fields, as a geologist, an explorer, and an educational administrator. His earlier teaching career at Michigan terminated in 1931, when he went to Carleton College as Professor of Geology; he became President of that college in 1945. In 1926 he accompanied the University of Michigan Expedition to Greenland as geologist and assistant director and in the following year was assistant director and geographer for the Putnam Baffin Island Expedition. His Arctic experience led to his appointment as second in command and geologist-geographer of the Byrd Antarctic Expedition of 1928-30. Dr. Gould also saw service in both the First and Second World Wars, in the latter putting his knowledge of the Arctic to good use for the United States Army Air Forces. Dr. Gould has received several honorary degrees, to which the University of Michigan added its doctorate in Laws after the abbreviated Commencement exercises.

that he was muscle-bound from the neck up? It is not a bad figure of speech, for the human mind is much like a muscle. It grows lazy and flabby if unused; and the longer it is idle the more difficult it is to bring back its proper tone. You can lose most of the formal education you have received here by just coasting along for a year or two.

These questions are not new; indeed they are very old and timeworn. I think they are the sort of questions teachers have been asking their students from the time of Socrates. Of course, they are prosaic, but what is the use of being a professor and a college president if you can't be prosaic once in a while—especially when you are giving a commencement address!

FIRST of all, have you learned how to communicate with others? Perhaps you have noticed, when Ann Arbor is blanketed in fog, that when you walk along your vision carves out a sphere of clarity round about you beyond which things become vague and indistinguishable. This is symbolic of the world in which each of you lives. Only a small part of what one feels and sees and knows can be transmitted to others. The ability to make one's self understood is not only to add to one's own appreciations but to his usefulness as well. Speech, which is the reflection of thought, is man's greatest achievement and the most precious of all his instruments. No split atom, no achievement of science, nothing man has ever done compares with his words and phrases. These are the most wonderful of all his inventions. You may have failed in mathematics, sociology, or even geology, and still leave this place a reasonably well-educated person. But to fail in English is to be fundamentally uneducated, for the first characteristic of a person who would be educated is that he be literate and articulate. But to be able to communicate with others means not only communicating with the living but with the life that has preceded you. To

view your world in proper perspective you will need the guidance of the great spirits of former days. Take with you, then, as you leave, the keys to the library; they are part of your educational heritage.

The memories of many of us go back to war years when we gave our blood that plasma might be made from it. Plasma is an inert, almost colorless fluid. It is powerless of itself, but when injected into the blood stream of dying men it brings them back to life. In the library, locked up in books, is the "blood plasma" of history. There sit the books, mute, inert, gathering dust. But take down a volume—Plato for instance—and read in the *Symposium* Alcibiades' account of Socrates just home from the wars. The plasma will work, the magic will happen, and a world long dead will be as alive as the world of today.

Secondly, have you acquired manners instead of mannerisms? When I knew I was to talk to you this afternoon, I began looking in my crystal ball and noted that at least two of you will be living in Ottumwa, Iowa, another one in Fairbanks, Alaska, one in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, another in Peoria, Illinois, and so on. And I know that, great and famous as is this university, the opinions people over much of the world will have of it will come from their personal impressions of you. Depending upon you, this university will be noble and great, or it will be mediocre, or perhaps just plain "lousy." Most of you will be spending your lives amongst the kind of people who move their lips when they read. Remember, the great virtues are not limited to college graduates and geniuses, but they are well within the reach of all the people.

Also implicit in this question is the admonition that you should not be content with the "mannerisms" or passwords of knowledge. You may have carried out all the experiments in the chemistry laboratory manual and come up with the right answers and yet not understand what scientific thinking really is. You may know the

names of all the kings in Christendom and the dates of Europe's great revolutions and yet have little understanding of the great sweep of ideas that have motivated man.

Passwords are often a necessary preface to the knowledge they anticipate, but the symbol must not be confused with the substance itself.

THIRDLY, has your heart been educated along with your head? Have your emotions been educated along with your mind? I know that undisciplined emotions have been the scourge of the world. And yet, a world guided by pure reason would be a dull place. I like these words of Judge Learned Hand: "Life is not a thing of knowing only. Nay, mere knowledge has properly no place at all save as it becomes the handmaiden of feeling and emotion. A life of mere acquisition is a poor, unsatisfying thing beside the richer and fuller interests of those who devote themselves to the arts." In other words, education should not be solely an intellectual exercise. As a scientist I realize that science's greatest gift to the modern world is critical analysis, and that it is probably the modern world's greatest strength. I also know that great ideas sometimes run away with men, and perhaps that has happened in the almost universal application of the technique of critical analysis. You should trust your aspirations as well as your thoughts, and if you find yourself viewing the field of knowledge with more sense of appreciation than analysis, don't be alarmed. It is important to feel as well as to think. Man lives by hope and admiration and love as well as by atoms and ergs and electrons and positrons. Some of life's greatest satisfactions lie too deep for thought and do not as yet lend themselves to library analysis or laboratory research. Let me illustrate what I am trying to say in an oblique way with this story of Thornton Wilder's:

An engineer who had a good deal of service in South America was talking to

Wilder one day about the latter's book, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. The engineer was delighted with it because of its authenticity. He reminded Wilder that it was a superb description of the country, but that there was just one mistake about it. He said there was no bridge across the canyon as described in Wilder's book. Wilder insisted that there was a bridge, and the engineer countered with the assurance that he had been all over that country and he knew there was no bridge there at all. Wilder replied, "I know there is a bridge across that canyon because I built it myself!"

What I am trying to say is that there is a spiritual dimension to reality and that it is an essential part of wisdom. Great musicians and artists and poets, above all others, have made this wisdom available to us.

Fourth, have you learned that will is the basal fact of life, that authority is a part of all living? Here, it seems to me, education has more nearly failed than anywhere else. It is difficult to improve on these words of Edmund Burke: "Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere. The less of it there is within the more there must be without." And these words of Thomas Huxley, "The most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not. It is the first lesson which ought to be learned, and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson he learns thoroughly." In other words, when you know something is right, it has to be done. The doing of it makes you a man or a woman, and there is no other way to maturity. The great end, then, of education is to discipline or train the mind to use its own powers rather than just to fill it with information collected by others.

MY LAST question is, have you learned that the privilege of being educated imposes a corresponding obligation upon

you to yourself and to society? I know this question is like an Act of Congress—it covers everything.

Noblesse oblige—From him to whom much is given much is expected.

Not a single one of you has paid his way at this university. It doesn't matter from what kind of homes you may have come, the statement is still true. The taxpayers of this state have paid the major part of the cost of your education, and by accepting that education you have made a contract with society. The least you can do in the interest of good citizenship is to repay your contractual obligation. You will do this in many ways, including active support of this university through its Alumni Fund and in such other ways as may be available to you. But your obligations will not end here.

You will not expect a perfect world as you leave this place. I am sure you have been taught here that any Utopia is a forever unrealizable dream, that it is built of materials which this world does not supply. You have learned that good and evil are never found in isolation in this world, but are always interwoven in a pattern. This means that the picture is never complete. It means that you always have to act upon the basis of partial information, and this in turn means that your judgments will be based upon certain assumptions. You may assume that you live in a world of blind chance. You may assume that the perfection of man can come from the perfection of material things—that you live in a world which has only such values as you yourself give to it. Such assumptions will end in frustration and despair as you try to make a universe about you rather than trying to relate yourself to the one that is. Chesterton once observed that all the people who really believed in themselves were in insane asylums.

But there is another kind of assumption you can make which I would like to illustrate from my own experience. Just twenty-five years ago now I was in the midst of the

Antarctic Continent leading a sledging party of five men and forty-two dogs. In the course of our sledging journey, which covered some fifteen hundred miles, we discovered and mapped mountains and glaciers hitherto unknown and never before seen by man. There was no way to relate these mountains and glaciers to any existing features on the earth. There were no earthly points of reference. They could only be located astronomically; that is, by taking sights on the sun and thus determining their positions on the earth or on my map. In other words, I had to locate them in terms of their setting in the universe. Even as my mountains and glaciers have a setting in the universe, so do you also as individual human beings have a cosmic orientation.

Our cosmic orientation derives from the kind of assumptions we make concerning man and his world. There is nothing novel about starting your life by making assumptions. It is impossible to enter any world of meaning without making assumptions. Science, religion, and ethics agree at this point. In ethics we call the assumptions norms or ideals. In science we call them postulates, axioms, or hypotheses. In religion we call them faith. The assumptions about man and his world that have motivated Western civilization come from two main sources, namely, Greece and Palestine. Many traditions come to us from these two sources, but they converge in one great idea or assumption, that human beings are to be treated as ends and never as means and that respect for personality is the value that includes all other values. This means that man's destiny is essentially personal and is not fulfilled by forces operating outside himself. After all, these are the fundamental, basic beliefs on which Western civilized institutions, including this university, are built. I do not believe it is possible to overemphasize the importance of sincere beliefs or commitments, for it is only if we hold certain basic beliefs in common that we can

search together for the truth. It is only because we believe in the power of thought that we value freedom of thought. All the power in man that leads to lasting effort comes from his belief. We grow strong only from believing. If you have been emptied of all belief, you have been betrayed and your education is a mockery. Whether you will or not, every one of you will give your life for what you believe. If you believe in nothing, then you will give your life for nothing. One life is all you have, and you will live it as you believe in living it, and then it will be gone. But to surrender what you are this day and begin your life without belief would be more terrible than dying before this Commencement festivity is over.

It doesn't take a new Ph.D. from here to tell us how great is the need for renewing the moral values of our civilization. Our great need is a clear statement of belief that the rest of the world can understand. Perhaps we don't have such a set of beliefs any more. Perhaps Sir Richard Livingstone is right when he says that we are "a generation without either illusions or a positive faith, kept from collapse by dead convictions which still influence its conduct but are no longer anchored in its belief." Perhaps we are living in an atmosphere of a faith that has lost its vitality; and yet I cannot persuade myself this is so. I cannot believe that the Greco-Roman, Hebrew-Christian tradition, which has flowered in man's great ages of art and poetry and science, is exhausted. I believe that even though the flowers are faded, the roots are still sound. And I remember these words of Charles Cooley, a great professor of sociology here on this campus many years ago: "A vine may die to the ground, but a new shoot will grow from the root much more vigorously than from a seed."

WE HAVE been so busy protesting what we are against that we have forgotten what we are for. Our task is to bring alive

in terms of the needs of the middle of the twentieth century the great assumptions on which Western civilization rests. Here is how Hartley Coleridge phrases our need:

Think not the faith by which the just shall live
Is a dead creed, a map correct of heaven,
Far less a feeling fond and fugitive,
A thoughtless gift, withdrawn as soon as given.
It is an affirmation and an act
That bids eternal truth be present fact.

This ancient tradition of which I have been speaking is neither narrow nor limiting. On the contrary, all the good and the wise and the noble things that men have said at all times and in all places come well under its broad canopy. This very University of Michigan is a monument to the spirit of this tradition.

It is the same spirit that glowed in the breast of Socrates when he was drinking the hemlock, and in Archimedes as he drew geometric patterns in the sand while waiting to be put to death. It is the spirit that brought into being Plato's Academy in ancient Athens and the long line of colleges and universities which have been heirs to that academy down through the ages. As our schools and colleges have grown, so has democracy grown, for they are the most important agencies that our civilization has evolved to perpetuate itself. Little wonder that they are the oldest and most indestructible of all our secular institutions.

And what is this spirit? I think it is but a continuing dedication to the spirit of free inquiry—carried on still in this university by the same kind of mystical faith that motivated Aristotle—the faith that the truth we seek is good, that it will not disappoint nor destroy us.

But we don't know; and therein lies all the lure man needs to live—that there are still secrets to be solved, that we can never quite explain life, that we never know what is going to happen next.

This is the source of the hope and the everlasting expectation that has caused this

university to be built to last for a thousand years—to last as long as things builded by man shall last.

Now I have finished with my five questions. I told you they were old, but I think they are eternally valid. And of course even as you listened to the questions, you have been hearing this university, your alma mater, telling you that to all of them there is but one answer, a strong affirmation.

And somehow I know more surely than when I began that the great tradition is still valid, for this very day the ancient legend of Antaeus has come alive again for me. I

leave my alma mater with my strength renewed, and so may it serve you down through the years if you will let it.

Noblesse oblige—From him to whom much is given, much is expected.

Michigan bids you to begin your life with high conceptions of it. It bids you not to be content with little things. It hopes that you leave here with such an ardent concern for life that it will never be through your failure that the great adventure of human existence, which still remains in doubt, shall end in darkness.

BEQUEST

Child of God, observe your patrimony!
 Take of life the greatest measure
 For all is yours.
 Accept from life her beauty;
 Live in peace . . . in glory of love.
 For you the rose beside the stream;
 For you the wind-wafted perfume;
 For you the rain;
 For you the snow;
 For you the fire and the ember's glow.
 In your eyes is a radiance
 Like a new and unknown star,
 Born in brilliance from the womb of night.

URSULA A. UTLEY