VI

MESSAGE TO THE CLASS

Ladies and Gentlemen of Rice 1943:

There were clouds on the far horizon when you entered Rice, but the road that lay ahead of you was still a white and shining road. It had been built on faith by your forefathers. It beckoned to fame and fortune for you. You entered on it with ardor and ambition to serve and to achieve. Wide freedom of choice and broad field for endeavor lay before you. Then, all of a sudden, between dawn and sundown of a single day, the perspective of your future went wildly askew. By circumstances seemingly beyond human control the way was changed, though not altogether changed, nor wholly for the worse. In fact, we might argue that the darkened road may be the better.

Yet of all days and places this is not the place and not the day for shadows. It was in the early morning yesterday that you laid your token and the pledge of your comrades in flowers at the foot of the Founder’s statue. He faces the rising sun. It is under the rising and not towards the setting sun that you set out today. And when you face the sun the shadows are behind you.

Whether in the shadow or in the light, uncertainty about the future is inevitable. We do not know, nor can we know, the future. To make sense of the universe, in these times more difficult than ever, human reason, for clarity and integrity of thinking, has constantly to take account of this uncertainty. But hope keeps breaking in on the uncertainty and always to say again that the road ahead can be only a
shining road of joy and glory. We take the side of hope in abiding faith, and we have some knowledge also on which to base our judgment. For, whatever branch or rank or action you serve, we who remain behind are confident that each of you will achieve to the uttermost, because we have seen you, one and all, become captains of your own souls. The captaincy of your own soul is a cardinal principle of this institution. It binds our company of students and scholars together. The bond cannot be broken. The leave we are taking today one of another cannot be permanent. It is only temporary, because you, as we, are part and parcel of this place. The place will be here—God grant that many of us may be here—to welcome you on your next return. And may that return be not long delayed.

Yet none the less, indeed all the more, the present occasion is for us, as it is for you, a poignantly moving occasion. We can lift up our hearts, because we have still other good omens for the great adventure immediately ahead of you: you are young, your cause is just, you are clad in the armor of truth. You have not faltered, you know no fear, you will not fail. In memory, in prayer, in spirit we shall follow you. And now with high hopes and all the solicitude of affection, we send you forth to conquer for God, and country, and freedom for mankind, under the Homeric rubric of Rice,

To be brave. To win renown,
To stand the first in worth as in command,
To add new honours to your native land,
Before your eyes your mighty sires to place,
And emulate the glories of our race.