II

TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN

Jeremiah XLV, 5—"Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not."

Luke XII, 48—"To whom much is given, of him shall much be expected."

A FEW years ago a company of tourists were visiting the battleground of Concord. A high school student, who probably now would be about the age of these who are being graduated, offered himself as a guide. He showed his credentials which indicated that he had passed rigid tests qualifying him in the history of early America. He was so enthusiastic that the tourists hired him. With accurate information and fervent interest he conducted the party about the battlefield where the Republic was born.

He showed them the spot where the first British soldiers fell. Then he took them across the stream "where once the embattled farmers stood and fired the shot heard round the world."

It was quite evident that this young man felt that he was born out of time. He yearned to have been back there and to have taken part in that momentous battle of Concord. It would have been hard to have persuaded him that in this twentieth century he was a part of an era as important, perhaps more important than that at the creation of a new nation.

1Baccalaureate sermon of the twenty-ninth commencement of the Rice Institute, delivered in St. Paul's Methodist Church by the Reverend Dawson C. Bryan, D.D., Pastor of the Church, at nine o'clock, Sunday morning, February 27, 1944.
Twenty-Ninth Commencement

I. THE POSSESSORS OF A GREAT HERITAGE

Today, it would probably not be so hard to convince him that this is a critical hour in the history of our civilization. Probably now, even more than ever before, he would recognize that we are the possessors of a great heritage.

No one with intelligence would claim that ours is a perfect state. But in spite of all the weaknesses and shortcomings which our civilization possesses, no age has ever inherited so much. Whatever mankind has achieved in the long ages of history is ours to use or misuse. There is hardly any other locality upon our earth where the products of intellectual, cultural, political, and religious freedom are available to the people.

Anyone who has eyes to see, or ears to hear, or sensibilities attuned to life's richness is amazed not only at the achievements, but also at the inherent possibilities of a greater civilization ahead of us.

If anyone does not see this, I can but refer him to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's apt verse:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
And only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

II. THE FUTURE DEPENDENT UPON THOSE HIGHLY FAVORED

Most young people of today recognize that we are the inheritors of the best which the ages have provided. They consider it trite when anyone says that the highly-favored people of our generation hold in their hands the destiny of the future. They have been told that so often that they consider it platitudinous. Two plus two equals four has also
been heard often, yet it is still true. The square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides is also not new, but it is always valid. It is just as true that a terrifying responsibility rests upon trained and qualified men and women in any hour of crisis. It is further true that the young people of today have the personal responsibility of preserving our culture.

War takes its first toll from the finest youth of the land. When this war is over, not only Europe and the Orient, but also America as well, will have increasingly difficult problems with a small company of young men and women capable in mind and spirit of meeting those problems.

One of the tragedies, if not also one of the mistakes, of this war, it seems to me, is the depopulating of our institutions of learning—as though the problems of rebuilding the world were not as great as those of destroying it.

It is all the more reason to ask yourself, "Who shall control the world of tomorrow? Shall it be those with least intelligence and the baser motives, or those best fitted and best qualified?"

A personal question also demands an answer: "Are you going to give back to the world more than was invested in you, or has this critical age made a poor investment in you?"

In a perilous time Jeremiah went apart into a mountain and a still small voice said to him, "What doest thou here?"

And in this perilous time the same still voice is questioning us, "What doest thou here?"

THOSE WHO WASH THEIR HANDS OF RESPONSIBILITY

In response to this demand there will be one group who, confronted with the world's great need, will want to wash their hands of responsibility. Always when the world becomes wretched and chaotic, monasticism in some form
arises. Men want to get away from the mess, particularly sensitive men. They hate its rottenness. It obtrudes its sores upon their eyes. It smells to high heaven. And so they retreat into the integrity of their own souls. They withdraw into private life, into a laboratory, or a personal circle, or a restricted social class, to live as private individuals with no sense of social responsibility as citizens or as Christians.

**Those Tempted to Self-aggrandizement**

There is a second group who are out to get all they can from life, who climb to any place of advantage over the bodies of their fallen comrades. Evidence the man who has one motive for attending college, namely, to get all possible information and skill in order to exploit his fellowmen for personal gain. The worst of these are buzzards of civilization who intentionally profiteer in war and who are secretly saying in their hearts, "When the lid flies off in victory, then I'll be the first to grab my share."

But the great majority of them will raise no poisoned heads to strike society. Instead, they will be the great millstone of selfish indifference which the social order will have to drag along if any progress is made. Their only generosity will be like the Scotchman who put into his will "five hundred pounds to the widow of the unknown soldier."

One student remarked concerning another, "The trouble with Jim is that his brains all went to his head." The trouble with some people is that their self-interest all went to selfishness.

When the war is over all some people will want is cheap merchandise and a little time with the gullible public. There are two forces contending for the body and soul of this generation—one is self-aggrandizement and the other is a high sense of public duty. See in what contrast the light of history
Baccalaureate Sermon

throws the motives of certain people. In a public building in Houston are inscribed words written two thousand years ago:

"No Athenian should ever confess that he abandoned public service for private advantage."

Unless we can have a kind of public service that puts the nation and the world above selfish interest and equips it with real intelligence to make it effective there is nothing that can save us.

This is an individual and not a social problem. In a perilous day Jeremiah was trying to save the Jewish Nation from their fate, and his nephew, Baruch, who became the private secretary who preserved the records of Jeremiah's life, was tempted to a selfish individualism. He was a member of a prominent family. He, too, had a great heritage, and he had as good a chance as anyone to serve his private ambitions. He saw his own brother achieve political prestige, and he, too, was tempted to a selfish life. Then Jeremiah, seeing how desperately critical the social situation was, challenged him with words that flame across the centuries: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not."

THOSE TEMPTED TO USE MATERIAL MEANS WITHOUT SPIRITUAL ENDS

In the face of this great crisis there is a third group. They are sincere, believing that we can solve our problems by dependence upon material means without seeking social and spiritual ends.

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick says that modern civilization's crucial problem is how we shall divide the two factors, the means by which we live, and the ends for which we live. This is true of both the individual and of our era. The fact which distinguishes our day from previous times is obviously the scientific means of life. But when we turn our thoughts
from the means by which we live to the ends for which we live, are we so sure that we are on a correspondingly higher level than our forefathers? Someone has said, "We have many things by which we live but few of us have anything for which to live."

And here is the real conflict between science and religion: in the pragmatic field of getting things done.

When I was in college the conflict between science and religion was intellectual. Proponents declared that we must choose either one or the other, science or religion, geology or Genesis. That controversy was featured by more heat than light.

The fallacy of such "either-or" choice was apparent even then. At that time there were true men of science and true men of religion—often combined in the religious scientist—each of whom felt that there could be no conflict in truth, that science and religion were each aspects of the same reality; that we lived in a universe and not a multiverse; that what was true in one part of the universe would be true in every part: in nature or in man, in the physical or in the spiritual.

Today you rarely hear the old arguments of that conflict rehashed. For we have discovered that the accurate description of geology in no way conflicts with the greatest interpretative poem ever written about creation as Genesis portrays God as the Creative Process of life. But there is still a real conflict. It is in the realm of the practical. Science provides for all our wants, all our needs. Increasingly it takes care of all the requirements of life. Therefore, some say, if all our wants can be taken care of through an understanding and adaptation of nature, why do we need religion?
Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick for this purpose has paraphrased the Twenty-third Psalm in this fashion:

Science is my shepherd.
I shall not want.
Science maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
It leadeth me beside the still waters.

True, science does provide for the multitudinous needs of mankind. It provides food and drink, and shelter and pleasure not dreamed of even by kings of ancient times. The material needs are granted by the magician, Science. So far this interpretation of the Psalm is true. So let us continue:

Science restoreth my soul!
Science leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.
Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil
For science is with me.

Hold a minute! It is incongruous, isn't it? Science cannot do that! In the realm of righteousness science has no control; for it is non-moral. Instead of comforting us, science may send hosts of men to death with unheard-of and terrible weapons. If we do not take care, science may damn our souls and destroy not only our lives but also our civilization.

It is not sufficient to know the operational laws of nature. It is not enough to be able to control them, with whatever skill and success. There is inevitably forced into the picture the matter of human motives. The primary question arises: "For what purpose is nature to be understood and used?"

Let us remember that there is no greater scientific knowledge anywhere in the world than that displayed by the Germans and other nations—for a purpose, a heinous purpose.

These two realms of life, man's control of nature and
man's control of himself, are not mutually exclusive. They are interrelated. Unfortunately our moral effectiveness has not kept up with our scientific advances. But the future, if there is to be one of any adequacy or satisfaction, must find superior men intelligently in control of nature but also intelligently using social and personal moral controls.

Sir James Jeans says, "Because I am a scientist I am apt to see human life as a chain of causes and effects: the life of tomorrow will be what we make it today; as we sow, so shall we reap. Man is an absolutely new arrival on earth. He has possessed and governed it for less than a thousandth part of its existence.

"Shall we suppose that man has come to stay? Rather it seems to me that he must still establish his claim to be the permanent governor of the earth. His own acts will determine whether he is fit to rule in perpetuity or not. We must maintain our position by fighting for it. We have fought against the wild beasts and won. We have not yet conquered the microbe—we must. We have also to fight against famine, against vice, against disruptive social tendencies, against bellicose tendencies to self-destruction. These fights have not yet been won. The issue is still in doubt.

"We have one weapon in our possession to make us rulers of the earth—scientific knowledge.

"It is our use of this weapon that will mold the future of our race for good or for ill." And he concludes, "There is nothing to prevent our making the earth a paradise again—EXCEPT OURSELVES!"

Aye, there's the rub! EXCEPT OURSELVES!

III. THE ACCEPTANCE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is just at this point where we ourselves become the crucial issue in any progress of civilization. It is at such a
moment as this when we must turn to the divine sources of power and strength for moral control of man to implement our scientific control of nature.

An interview with Benito Mussolini was quoted in Nation’s Business a few years ago. Mussolini had at that time brought Italy out of a depression with his Fascism. In pride he told the editor of Nation’s Business, “You tell America that the trains run on time, that in Italy order, discipline, and business operate as never before.”

Upon his return the editor made this comment, “The casual visitor in the presence of moral tragedy must ask another question, ‘Does justice also run on time?’”

Yes, human dignity does run on time, and it catches up with those who are careless in the presence of moral tragedy.

An age that bows down before method and technique, rather than spirit and truth, breaks the first Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me!”

The issue is again presented to us as it was to those in the days during and following the last world war: What shall we do with our responsibility as moral creatures before God?

Walter Lippmann in his book A Preface to Morals describes that generation as “Men and women enfranchised by the blood of heroes who cannot be induced to take an interest in their own destiny.”

Nor did they take an interest in the destiny of their children, nor future generations. So now look at our world!

We do know how great a heritage is ours. But we cannot know how great is our personal responsibility, nor how crucial is our opportunity. The clock of civilization stands veiled until after the hour of destiny has struck. There are moments in history when Tomorrow is Today.

From the ancient Sanskrit comes a very modern word—
Look to this day!  
For it is life, the very life of life.  
In its brief course lie all the varieties and realities of your existence:  
The bliss of growth;  
The glory of action;  
The splendor of beauty;  
For yesterday is already a dream,  
And tomorrow is only a vision;  
But today, well lived, makes every yesterday  
A dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope.  
Look well, therefore, to this day!  
Such is the salutation of the dawn!

In that heroic train of those who become greatest because they are the servants of all, stands Jesus, the Pioneer of life, calling to the builders of a new civilization.

On one occasion someone bought a picture painted by Whistler. He invited Whistler to come over to his home where he was to place the picture in one of the rooms. The man tried to put it one place and then another. It didn’t seem to go anywhere. Finally, he said, “I can’t seem to fit this picture into this room.”

Whistler replied, “Why don’t you try fitting the room in with the picture?”

Just so! You cannot fit Jesus Christ into a life or a world order already arranged without reference to Him. But there are those who, having been given the best of Christian civilization, will rebuild this world so that the moral supremacy of Jesus Christ shall be the directive force in the use to which we put nature. There are those in this class and congregation who feel called to a great and supreme loyalty—to attain the highest skills possible, but also to be moral beings under the Eternal God. Some of you in this class will find your duty in military service; others equally devoted in civilian life.

It is possible some in this very congregation will have their light snuffed out in some quick untimely catastrophe,
but not before your flame helps the lights to come on again all over the world. After that there will be an obligation in peace, no less than in war, of a high sense of loyalty to personal and social living of the noblest kind.

There is a story with which I want to conclude. I don’t know whether it is true or not, and it does not matter, for very definitely it is a parable of contemporary life. It is the story of the way in which they train the fine Arabian steeds to carry on that particular strain of horses.

Each year they take the best Arabian horses they have—each generation that comes along. Then they train them to have intelligence, to obey, to be able to do the things that will require strength and skill. And among other things, they teach them this: there is one supreme loyalty. When the trainer blows a particular call upon the bugle the horse must come. It does not make any difference what the horse is doing, he is to go to the trainer—across water, over hedges, through barbed wire, against stone fences, somehow to force his way around, through, under, over; somehow to get there when the trainer blows this particular call upon the bugle.

Then when they have done everything they can to give the horses the best kind of training, they put them to the final test. They take these horses and put them in a great corral at the top of a hill, and leave them there without water—a day and night, then through the next day. It is burning hot and they have no water.

If it is torture for a man who is a thinking being to go a long time and have no water, imagine the torture it must be to a horse. These horses have now gone thirty-six hours without water. Then another night goes by, and then another day—a maddening day with no water. Then night comes on again. The horses mill around the great corral,
butting themselves against the sides of it. At the bottom of that hill is a lake filled with cooling waters, calling to their fevered bodies. They can feel it. And still they have had no water. In the morning of the third day after the heated sun comes up again, the trainer comes to the gate of the corral. He slips the lock on the gate and the great gate swings wide. There before them, down the hill, lie the cool waters of the lake, shining in the sun. You can imagine the stampede that results as down that hill those horses begin to tear. Then when the stampede is at its height, the trainer back by the door of the corral gives the final test. He blows the call upon the bugle to come back.

Those who turn back are considered worthy of carrying on the blood.

In our generation only those who hear the call of the supreme loyalty are worthy to carry on our heritage.

"Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not! For to whom much is given, of him shall much be expected."

Dawson C. Bryan.