V

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE TO THE CLASS

LIFE is like an examination paper, all questions, no answers. In a wide variety of human relationships, life is like that. During four or more of the college years of your lives, Rice has been helping you daily to understand questions and to find answers. In the process all of your faculties have been brought into play, but chiefly play of mind. It is matters of mind and the way the soul of man is affected by them that have mattered most to us. So we have been engaged together in learning how to think and what to think about. We have been concerned primarily with knowing what is most worth knowing. To that end we have been employing reason, memory, imagination, and judgment, with at least three objectives constantly in view: achievement of truth, manifestation of magnanimity, and attainment of tranquillity of spirit.

In these adventures of yours on truth, magnanimity, and tranquillity, you have had valiant allies in your own courage, vision, and patience. Now courage is characteristic of American youth. Nor is vision, if sometimes distorted, lacking in them. But the ascription of patience to youth may seem a bit odd. Yet case after case of that I have seen amongst you. By virtue of such God-given qualities you have thought some of the fundamental things of life through to conclusions, your own conclusions, the moral principles of which you will never abandon. I emphasize moral principles because the foundations of human society are moral foundations,
and for the further reason that you are called upon ever to defend those moral foundations. Stout hearts, clear eyes, and cool heads will gain that end, even as they have gained this day for you, and with this day the future. For you may well be confident that courage, vision, and patience will continue to serve you, your community, state, church, and university, well.

Thus you have become men and women. Throughout the period of becoming men and women, you have been in one valley of decision after another, and you have been obliged to think, work, and choose amidst circumstances at once complicated and conflicting. But all along there has been compensation in the consciousness of a high destiny immediately ahead. That high destiny is nothing else than your individual participation in the triumph and recovery of truth, magnanimity, and tranquillity for the freedom-loving, justice-seeking, mercy-giving, God-fearing peoples of this planet. From every point of view it is a glorious mission, and the stakes are legion: the very soil of your country, the very language of your people, the very existence of your college, the security of your families and homes, the tenets of your religion, the structure of your government, the authority of your conscience, the sacred honor of your word and contract: your ideals, your loyalties, your hopes, your institutions are all at stake. It is no wonder that every instinct of your souls impels you to fight to victory.

Time and chance have happened to you. They will happen to you throughout your inquiring lives. They have brought you opportunities and responsibilities just as they afford all men opportunities and responsibilities. The difference in your case is that you have been trained and made ready to take and receive opportunities and responsibilities. And it is the training and preparedness that make all the
difference in the world. Thus you come to the end of a chapter in which you have received opportunities and assumed responsibilities in scholarship, citizenship, and sportsmanship. These ceremonies of graduation not only mark for you the attainment of another goal, but they start you afresh towards higher goals of truth, magnanimity, and tranquillity. For you now set out as your forerunners of 1916, '17, and '18 set out, and your comrades of 1941, '42, and '43 set out. With every hope and all the solicitude of affection we send you on your way, even as we sent them on their way. We have held them in constant remembrance; even so shall we follow you in memory, in prayer, in spirit. As we sent them, so we send you forth to conquer for God, for country, and for 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.

One word more, and on a very personal note I struck for you on another occasion. To me the most wonderful thing in the whole world has always been to have been born, to be alive, and to be able to work. And I have always believed that the end of it is not here. So I gave you then and I give you now these lines of George Meredith’s:

      Our life is but a little holding, lent
      To do a mighty labour: we are one
      With heaven and the stars when it is spent
      To serve God’s aim.

      Edgar Odell Lovett.