

III  
INTRODUCTION OF THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE RICE INSTITUTE\*

OUR first parents were leaving the garden for the workaday world. Said one to the other, "We live in an age of transition." The observation may be the original of an utterance that is on the lips of every intelligent man and woman in the world today.

Rice is in a state of transition. It is a transition from good to better. Facing extraordinary opportunity, the institution is about to become braver, stronger, sounder, and more beautiful. What of truth has been attained here by teachers and thinkers, will abide. "Change lays not her hand upon truth," said an English poet who broke traditions. What of beauty has been wrought here by architects and engineers, will endure. "Love, beauty, joy, and worship," said Plotinus, philosopher of Alexandria and Rome, "Love, beauty, joy, and worship are forever building, unbuilding, and rebuilding in each man's soul and in the soul of the whole world." What of courage and freedom, of conscience and fair play, has been achieved here by students and researchers, will prevail. "The secret of happiness is freedom and the secret of freedom is a brave heart," an eloquent Athenian statesman affirmed, as reported by the foremost of Greek historians. And at Rice the good life will continue to be lived, but better. In a word—to borrow a phrase from another English poet—what is the least mortal part of the mind of Rice will carry on.

Despite some halting and warping of plans by war and

\*By Edgar O. Lovett, retiring President.

## Introduction of the President 177

depression and war, good fortune has attended the Rice Institute all the way. Fortunate in the founder, and in the leadership of the trustees of his choosing, fortunate in the initial faculty and in the independence of its first students, fortunate in the foresight and loyalty of its early friends and all-time supporters, the institution got off to a good start and made its way under a making sun. And lately it has been especially heartening to have the generous help of many friends from near and far in analyzing the numerous problems which have arisen in recent years. All members of the institution are deeply appreciative of their assistance, and view their good will as a valuable asset to the Institute for the future. These circumstances inspire hope and confidence in the new day already dawned. For time in its natural course has brought Rice a new board of seven, no less highly resolved and competent than their associates and predecessors to build on firm foundations more stately mansions.

This vision is justified by a sequence of recent events: the productive Rincon purchase, which was conceived by Mr. Roy Hofheinz, a former Rice student, and carried through by him with the valiant assistance of many faithful friends of Rice; the handsome bequest of Mr. William M. Rice, Jr., who for nearly half a century served unselfishly the best interests of the Institute; the thoroughgoing analysis of the institution's past and present by the survey committee, with Mr. Harry C. Wiess as chairman; the new long-range program evolved from that survey and adopted by the trustees; the election by the faculty, on invitation of the trustees, of a committee, of which Mr. Alan D. McKillop has been chairman, to cooperate with the trustees in the selection of a new president; the work of Messrs. Claude W. Heaps and William W. Watkin toward reducing to plans the

## 178      Thirty-Second Commencement

library program undertaken half a dozen years ago; the analysis of and reports on the foregoing work made by Mr. John E. Burchard, Director of Libraries at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the progress already made on plans for a new classroom and office building and for a president's house on the campus; and the tentative studies for additional engineering buildings consistent with the original architectural plan of the Institute.

But the most significant of all these events was the final achievement of the trustees' survey and faculty committees in bringing to a successful conclusion the comprehensive search for a president. They found the leader in Dr. William V. Houston, Professor of Physics and Chairman of the Division of Physics, Mathematics, and Electrical Engineering at the California Institute of Technology. The public announcement on January 3, 1946, of Dr. Houston's acceptance of the presidency of the Rice Institute brought great joy and satisfaction to campus and community alike.

At this point, the older trustees of Rice realized their desire to retire from the more arduous duties of their appointments. Under lawful procedure which need not be detailed here, Messrs. Benjamin B. Rice, Edgar O. Lovett, John T. Scott, and A. Sessums Cleveland (listed according to length of tenure) resigned from the board and were appointed trustees emeriti; Messrs. William A. Kirkland, Frederick R. Lummis, Lamar Fleming, Jr., and Gus S. Wortham were elected to life membership on the board; and the board organized itself as follows: Mr. Harry C. Hanszen, chairman; Messrs. George R. Brown and Harry C. Wiess, vice-chairmen; and Dr. Frederick R. Lummis, secretary-treasurer.

To the regret of the trustees, faculty, and students, Dr. Houston could not come to Houston immediately. He had

## Introduction of the President 179

engagements in New York and Washington with the Government, and at home in California, to carry to completion. In the end, and altogether happily, Dr. and Mrs. Houston and their daughter, Miss Harriet Anne Houston, have been able so to arrange their manifold affairs as to arrive in Houston in time to be present at these commencement exercises. It is also a privilege on this unique occasion to acknowledge the presence and distinguished service of the Rev. Dr. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, newly installed President of the Union Theological Seminary, and the thirty-second baccalaureate preacher of the Rice Institute.

History, they say, sometimes repeats itself, though usually with a difference. Several historical repetitions of arresting and auspicious sameness, however, jump to mind. Charles W. Eliot left the newly established Massachusetts Institute in Boston to spend his working days in making a new Harvard in Cambridge; Daniel Coit Gilman left Yale to carry science to the University of California in its infancy, and later recrossed the continent to spend his working days in building Johns Hopkins in Baltimore; David Starr Jordan carried science from Indiana University to the coast to spend his working days in building Leland Stanford in Palo Alto; and now William V. Houston comes from the California Institute to spend his working days in the making of a new Rice in Houston. Eliot, Gilman, Jordan, Houston! Is it not a goodly company!

Thus in Dr. William V. Houston, Rice now has a president who stands head and shoulders beside past and present chief executives of educational and scientific foundations the country over. It is also gratifying to all concerned that Dr. Houston becomes Professor of Physics at Rice as well as President of the institution. In the former respect he proposes not only to teach, but to do and direct research. His

## 180      Thirty-Second Commencement

sound reputation in the very forefront of American men of science is matched by the warm esteem in which his students and colleagues have always held him. And people everywhere say of Dr. Houston, as Pindar said of Theron, "It is no less hopeless to count the sands of the seashore than to count the joys he has brought to others."

In circumstances somewhat similar to those attending the coming of President Houston to Rice, Cicero wrote his friend Curio, "You have no rival but the extraordinary expectations you have aroused." For twenty years Dr. Houston has been coping successfully with such rivalry up and up at the California Institute. May he cope as triumphantly here with the high hopes his advent arouses, and for forty more.

Ladies and Gentlemen of Rice and Houston, the President of the Rice Institute.