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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE TO THE CLASS

There was current in my boyhood an old, old saying that dreams at dawn are true. Though originally perhaps only a poet's passing fancy or pleasing conceit, the saying has persisted. It has stayed with me ever since I first heard it, though I have never been able to reduce the saying to reason. It has always outrun my arguments, surviving superstition and scepticism alike. In the idea I have found a perennial source of refreshment, stimulus, and thankfulness. Despite exceptions, the rule has held true for me. So I pass the rule with a rider on to you, for whatever of worth they may have, for you. They should toughen resolution and hearten courage on an occasion where we stand once more at the parting of the ways, at a point whence many roads radiate, and at the break of a new day to which you and yours have been looking forward, not for days, but for years. Now the idea plus the rider comes to this: if good dreams at the break of day come true, may not great hopes at the beginning of a career also carry through to realization? I certainly think so, yet again without quite sufficient reason. Towards that realization I have wishes for you of things I have long sought, and still seek, for myself. In particular, towards the ultimate goal of your desires, I wish you breadth, kindliness, and mind: breadth of outlook, kindliness of spirit, and purity of mind.

For a little more of precision let us spread these wishes out a bit. Breadth, kindliness, and mind at first glance may seem to be diverse in kind. As a matter of fact, in their
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qualified appearance here they are intimately related. Breadth of outlook, kindliness of spirit, and purity of mind in reality are close kin. Their kinship may be verified in some such way as this. We are accustomed to measure thought, feeling, reason, flight of imagination, and the like, in terms of ordinary dimensions. I think of two striking parallels from the religious realm. You will recall the familiar exhortation of St. Paul, the Apostle, on the love of Christ and the fulness of God made to the Ephesians: "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height"; while in the same moment there jumps vividly to mind the vision St. John the Divine had of the city in the heavens: "The city lieth foursquare," said he. . . . "The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." And is not kindliness of spirit of the same essence? To my mind it is, because when I say kindliness of spirit I think not only of the kindliness of a stout but tender heart and the kindliness under a firm and gentle hand, but also of that kindliness of spirit which tempers our estimates, appraisals, and judgments, of movements and events, of God and of men. And by purity of mind I would understand the clarity, simplicity, honesty, and imperturbable serenity, of an orderly, truth-seeking mind.

Even such priceless acquisitions as these assure no easy passport to greatness. Numerous visas and validations will be required along the way. Indeed, whether from an academic or from a practical point of view, the anatomy of greatness is a difficult subject. In the framework of greatness actually achieved there seems always to have been present either superlative power of mind, or extraordinary energy of will, or both. But there is more uncertainty of opinion as to the relative rôles played by character, good or
bad, and by circumstance, favorable, fortuitous, or unfriendly, in the achieving of greatness. One great man settled the matter in his estimate of another great man. Edmund Burke said of Admiral Keppel that there was something high about him. In fact, Burke wrote: "Lord Keppel is something high." Burke did not mean high gain or high hand or high hat or high stature. What Burke meant, as I read him, was Keppel's height in character, opportunity, and intellect, on his own, and from his forebears.

These aspects of greatness have always had your respect. They have been effective in the manifold activities of your own college days. They cast light on your future careers. You have all the courage, high-mindedness, confidence, and imperiousness of youth. So had we of an earlier generation. But there are many more of you than there were of us, and many more people are disposed to listen to you than were ever inclined to listen to us. You are for the people. So were we. We believed in the people because we thought we were the people. You are about to be mustered out into a turbulent world to set it right. So were we. You are admirably equipped for the task. So were we. In the fact of present wreckage I insist that the last generation did a fair job, but your generation will do a much better job on a vaster scale because you have adequate force of arms and a great deal more of spiritual force behind you than they had.

But my own confidence in this class rests on this. You are fortunate. You are making good use of good fortune. You are fortunate in the time and place of your birth, and in the immediate and remoter background of faith and freedom into which you were born. You are fortunate. You have already enhanced that background through your own experience, training, and attainment, and you have heightened the outlook of adventure, theory, and experiment presently
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confronting you. You are fortunate. You have had the advantage of participating in the life afforded by the founder of this institution, and of profiting from the steadfast fidelity and cheerful efficiency manifested in your interests by the trustees and the teachers of this foundation. You are fortunate. For now you are about to enter the expanding fellowship composed of our graduates and former students who stand ready to applaud and support all your efforts towards attaining the same sort of success they themselves have been achieving.

You can hardly overestimate your power to do good, you will overlook no opportunity for helping others, rich and poor, and you dare not underestimate your duty to meet these obligations to human society. To the welfare of humanity you will contribute the best you have. You will remember the teaching of a very great teacher who taught that without humility there can be neither humanity nor human greatness. Nor will you rest until the best you have to give to humanity bears the clear-cut character and unmistakable mint-mark of a master workman and a master mind.

Thus in the end I have allowed purity of mind to overshadow breadth of outlook and kindliness of spirit, at least for the moment. Good dreams and great hopes may justify life perhaps better for you if they center on and lead to works of the truth-seeking mind. The practical works of man may bring more of immediate glory in their train, but I gravely doubt if that illumination outlasts invention or interpretation in the world of the mind. There need be no violating of experience in the implied differentiation I am making. At any rate, to me, almost instinctively, intellectual satisfactions seem to surpass all others. And I am well aware, as you are, that intellectual satisfactions derive not alone from devotion to literature, science, and art, but
also from the promotion of industry, transport, and commerce, from the advancement of statesmanship, government, and philanthropy, and indeed from every variety of human activity in which faculties of mind are called into play. Wherever the brain of man works, there flourishes a province of the mind. And I could maintain, nor would you protest, that pure and applied science now constitute one of the most productive provinces in the domain of the human mind.

On these high errands of civilization you now set out. You are leaving a very happy life to translate your ambitions into action. And it is in action that most men find their greatest happiness. At each recurring commencement from the first we have sent our sons and daughters of Rice into action under the inspiration of an ancient line of Homer, whose chronicles began moving men and women a thousand years before our era. Even so today, on the occasion of our thirty-first commencement, we confidently send you forth to do battle and conquer for God, for country, for freedom, and for truth, under that same 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.

In your absence you will be held in kind remembrance. You will be warmly welcomed on your every return to Rice. And it will be a braver, better, and more beautiful place than we have hoped for or dreamed of.

Edgar Odell Lovett.

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