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MATRICULATION ADDRESS OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH ACADEMIC YEAR¹

AT a somewhat hilarious autumnal show, William Edgar Nye, or Bill Nye, as he invariably signed himself, an American humorist well known to our people of a generation or two ago, but perhaps not as well remembered today as he deserves to be, appeared on the platform in abbreviated black alpaca coat and trousers, wearing porous white cotton gloves that barely reached his wrists, and carrying a huge white scroll done up in flowing blue satin ribbons, which he solemnly unrolled, and from which he more solemnly read:

The autumn leaves is falling,
Falling everywhere,
Falling in the atmosphere,
Falling in the air.

Quite as timely and as calmly Nye insisted on another occasion that Richard Wagner's music, then and sometimes now under severe adverse criticism, is better than it sounds. In revolutionary fashion Wagner had started modern music on its way to jazz, and Rossini, an orthodox composer of an older school, was taken by young friends, so the story goes, to hear Wagnerian opera for the first time in his life. The dialogue, after the performance, is said, says Sir John Squire, to have run roughly like this:

DISCIPLES: What did you think of it, Master?

¹ Written for the Class of 1941 of the Rice Institute.

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ROSSINI: I don't think it would be fair to express an opinion without hearing it a second time.

DISCIPLES (*eagerly*): And when are you going to hear it a second time, Master?

ROSSINI (*emphatically*): Never!

Never again will you have to hear this address. Nor indeed as circumstances have conspired are you going to have to hear it at all. It seems too bad, however, or at any rate not quite right, to pass the occasion by even with an acceptable excuse for so doing, because your matriculation as students of the Rice Institute in the Class of 1941 is an event not only altogether unique in your personal experience but most significant alike for you and for us. Accordingly, an honest effort has been made to take the same notice of your coming, as the advent of each and every one of the first twenty-five Rice classes has received, by the writing of a so-called matriculation address for you, which may perhaps become accessible to you in print. As a matter of fact, speaking the piece is not the important thing, for the real object of the assembly has always been to afford an opportunity of meeting the matriculates face to face, and more especially of shaking hands with all of them. To be obliged to miss these informal introductions at the beginning of a new academic year is to the writer a very regrettable deprivation.

For several reasons you are to be warmly congratulated on being here. You got in under a selective system of admission. You stay in under correspondingly high standards of estimate and examination. Entrance, you have found, is competitive, and to a considerable degree the same is true also of promotion. If humanly devised methods either of picking or of passing may never become absolutely infallible, nevertheless the operation of the methods in use in this

institution has proved to be at once equitable, stimulating, and humane. At all events, to maintain the standards, to protect the good name, to keep faith with the ideals, and to promote the good will, of the Rice Institute, we share an obligation that is mutually binding on all of us, because we chose you and you chose us. I therefore earnestly hope that your success and happiness here may justify your choice and ours. And I need hardly remind you that in this place as elsewhere success and happiness are not always one and the same thing.

The place offers a great deal to commend the choice you have made. For example, its simple beauty of form and color catches and holds casual and discriminating observing eye alike. Nor should that circumstance be surprising, for "the love of beauty is not the monopoly of a privileged class—it is the universal inheritance of all mankind," as the late Sir Henry Hadow remarked when delivering a course of lectures here some ten years ago. And as far as my knowledge extends I agree with him. He was speaking more particularly of music. What he was saying, however, applies to the whole wide range of nature and art. Like the love of God, the love of beauty is no respecter of persons. From country to country, and from clime to clime, its appeal may differ in degree and in kind, but it is none the less a universal appeal, independent of place and time, awakening the souls of men to awe and reverence and joy.

To men of all conditions I have had the pleasure of pointing out from time to time details of the beauty of the Rice Institute, and never without sympathetic response. To be sure there have been professional critics. With them I have never been able to cope. They have inclined me to accept Ruskin's opinion, expressed at eighteen years of age, exactly one hundred years ago, that no man can be an architect who

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is not a metaphysician. And there have been critics of another kidney who complained of the cost, and perhaps justly, because you always have to pay for beauty, in time or money or both. Beauty of building or garden, like beauty in a ball gown, costs money. But think of the returns!

The local beauty of which I speak was newer to me than it is to many of you. In the same sense it should be older to me than it is to you, but I cannot think of it as ever growing old, for the very simple reason that to me it is new every morning, as new and fresh as the morning, while every night I leave it as fair as the first star of evening. So will it be to you night and morning. Its silent influences serve to sustain the kingdom of heaven within us. And, believe me, the men and women of our generation need the kingdom of heaven within them.

Next to the impress of its beauty, I think you will feel immediately the spirit of freedom in the very air of this institution. On the personal side, you have here a larger measure of freedom than most of you have hitherto been accustomed to. Excepting class, field, and laboratory schedules, which have been arranged of course with the convenience of the entire academic community in mind, your comings and goings hereabouts are of your own determining.

I believe in this personal freedom. It has its risks and dangers. It may incur losses. It is the only way to make self-reliant men and women. It makes you dependable and safe for responsibility. It ensures the self-mastery of yourselves. The exercise of it, therefore, means self-discipline if you are to remain masters of yourselves, that is to say, your own masters. And by the same token, it accords to others the same rights, and it respects the conventions and requirements of polite society as designed to avoid offense to others. So you will not abuse the personal freedom afforded Rice students. And

you will come to value it more and more. Moreover, your experience will differ from mine if you have anything like the same measure of it at any time later on in life. My own experience very briefly has been this. From my boyhood on, my life has been spent in college communities. I had more freedom in my own college days than I have ever had since. I was trusted then. In turn I have always trusted college students. Individuals among them may fall out of line, but in the lump they will not fail you. I believe in this freedom.

In the opinion that the love of beauty is universal among men I have concurred. What shall we say in this respect concerning the love of freedom? Two things: in the first place, it is more deep-seated among humans, and in the second place, it is even more widespread on the planet because it extends to other orders of creation. It springs from what might be called the instinct of identity. My very existence as an individual is involved in this idea of personal freedom. It is the difference between being a person and being a number.

Now you may have this freedom in all of its forms, physical, social, financial, and still sit in fetters unless the mind be free. One of the high functions of a university is to secure to you the freedom of the mind. The business of that function is to break down a variety of obstacles to the liberation of the mind, such as ignorance, fear, prejudice, superstition, intolerance, and the like. Some of the most stubborn barriers to the open mind are what in these latter days are called complexes. If you must have complexes, let them be superior rather than inferior complexes. For, in my judgment, it is better to think too well of yourself all of the time than to think ill of yourself at any time.

Farther afield on larger horizons than in this longitude are not yet lost horizons: here also prevail the political freedom

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for which your fathers fought, and the religious liberty for which they made provision. Even of economic freedom, about which the greater part of the planet seems to be now in the throes of conflicting theory and experience, there is more within these precincts than without. I wish you could be as sure of the foundations of freedom in our country as we used to be. But in the agitated world of today anxiety for the holding-power of foundations can hardly be avoided. I thought the foundations of our freedom could never be shaken. They have been shaken. For their restoration we need in times of peace the zeal that our forefathers had in times of war, and their spirit. "We fight not for glory," said some of them in a famous manifesto, "We fight not for glory, nor for wealth, nor for honour, but for that freedom which no good man will surrender but with his life."

If in commendation of this institution to you I have placed its spirit of freedom and the beauty of its environment side by side, I would set as a third, and for the moment last, justification, its crowning dedication to the discovery of truth and its advancement in letters, science, and art. For, however fundamental the presence of beauty and freedom may be to a university, and indeed for this very reason, the crowning and distinctive glory of a university rests on its guarantee to support the disinterested search for truth whenever men are moved to it and wherever the trails may lead. This guarantee to untrammelled freedom for research is the university's sincerest tribute to the theory that only truth can bring final beauty to human life. And in this aspect and capacity of its being, the university may very well stand as the last stronghold of human freedom, and foursquare.

Thus the discovery of truth becomes the chief end of a university, and the advancement of knowledge its domi-

nant mission. In the main, this mission manifests itself as static and expository in the library, dynamic and exploratory in the laboratory. I say in the main, for I am well aware that library and laboratory may in these respects change places. I like to think that this idea of a university illumines whatever undergraduate and postgraduate courses are available at the Rice Institute, and whether they are being pursued in preparation either for earning a livelihood, or advancing learning, or employing leisure, or attaining leadership, or enjoying learning for its own sake, or achieving any other lofty purpose of education for life.

At the same time it should not be overlooked that not even does this idea of a university escape the imposition of certain respective limitations on university students and studies. On the contrary it compels them. For so vast has the field of acquired human knowledge become that no man today can take the whole of knowledge for his province, and no institution can any longer undertake to offer instruction or investigation in every subject. I gravely doubt if at any earlier stage any individual or any institution ever did or ever could. On the other hand, no institution is too small to participate in the making of knowledge, and no subject too slight to engage the interest of scientific inquiry and research.

Of three familiar aspects of the Rice Institute I have spoken in turn: its delight in beauty, its animating spirit of freedom, its dedication to the discovery of truth and the advancement of knowledge. These characteristics derive from the generous will and great work of a good man. The opportunities they carry are an outright gift from Mr. Rice to you. You can match the characteristics one by one with qualities quite as striking in his character and career. Those

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qualities constitute an example worthy of all emulation on your part. Your realization of them will go a long way towards justifying our expectations of you.

Like Rossini in the prologue to these remarks, Mr. Rice was conservative and achieved independence. At about your age he was heading from his native Springfield, Massachusetts, to Houston, Texas, to make his fortune. He began by losing all he had, through no fault of his own. He ended by becoming one of the first capitalists of this commonwealth. He lived modestly, saved his money, and put it to work. Making money was his major interest. It is a laudable ambition to want to make money and become financially independent. Not all of you will become rich. I trust that many of you may, and with motives and margins for the further endowment of this institution. It was as rare then as it is now for a young man to be conservative. The young man Rice was a conservative and he continued so to be throughout life. In his judgments of men and matters he was not only conservative but again independent. If he were reading the earlier paragraphs of what I have just written he would probably describe the performance as mostly loose talk, not meaning to be unkind but honest about rhetorical things that usually bored him. And if at this moment he were in the midst of this company he would be a deal more interested in you as young ladies and gentlemen than in the pleasant things you are thinking and I am trying to say about him. He had other qualities as praiseworthy. Let me by way of conclusion lead you to the consideration of one or two more of them.

Through a thoroughfare beginning as a Lane, continuing as a Street, and ending in a Square, all under the same name, I was on my way to a publishing house the other day. On

slowing down a bit in order to look about and check up my bearings I found myself almost directly beneath a projecting sign:

THE SEVEN STARS

A. D. 1602

COURAGE'S

ALE

What a quatrain of ideas! The sweet influences of the Greek Pleiades, serving, before the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers on Plymouth Rock, and still offering, today, the solid strength in English ale, and the Courage brew thereof! But I hurried on.

Like Richard Wagner in the prologue, Mr. Rice had courage and initiative. On the southwestern American frontier of a hundred years ago there was freedom, but it was neither gained nor held without courage to dare and fortitude to bear. There was ample opportunity for the conquest of fortune, but the contrary forces both of climate and of cut-throat competition had constantly to be reckoned with. The administration of justice was summary and not always the fittest survived. To whatever might be untoward in these conditions Mr. Rice brought faith and time. He had the faith that takes the initiative and he had the courage that takes time. He had health. "Give me Health and a Day," said Emerson, his compatriot, "and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous." He took the trouble to take care of his health. But for the tragedy that cut him down in his eighties he would have maintained, I believe, his stride to a hundred. The courage and initiative that served him in his twenties were still going strong in his eighties when

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he could continue not only to turn disadvantage to gain, but to withstand popular clamor and appeal in public concerns. And he stood off worry. Never do today, he used to say, what you can put off until tomorrow. I am not sure that he would press that principle on college students, but with him it worked. He could relax, and in ways that recall a reminiscence of a Virginia home recently recorded by Dr. Rosalie Morton, one of the first women in this country to achieve professional standing and independence in medicine and surgery. Mr. Rice, I think, might have told the story. He certainly would have been as interested as we are in the feathered hero of the story.

"My father," says Dr. Morton, "played whist expertly despite distraction. The only thing that could upset him was an owl which haunted the silver poplar tree outside the library window. Its mournful hoot would disturb his mind and his luck would become spotty. On 'owl nights' the game usually ended with my father throwing down his cards in exasperation, crossing to the window, flinging it wide, and shouting into the gloom: 'Come in here if you are a gentleman, or, damn you, fly away if you are not.' "

Day before yesterday, as I write, I was attracted to a shop window by the display of a pearl grey derby hat. I used to have a weakness for derby hats. But the most valuable exhibit in the window was a framed placard on which appeared: "Whatever else you lose, keep your cheerfulness, for if you lose that you lose all": a doctrine which I have been professing to college students early and late, in season and out, all of my days.

Like Bill Nye in the prologue, Mr. Rice was of an imaginative and good-natured outlook on the world. In the latter respect he was at least, as General Jan C. Smuts lately described himself, a mild optimist. And well might he have

been, for like Sophocles he was ultimately with wealth and wit together blest. I think of him, however, as more of a Roman than a Greek, but I can follow the Greek parallel better. As Pericles said of himself and the Athenians, he was a lover of beauty without extravagance, and of wisdom without weakness. While to him as to the same man of Athens, happiness meant freedom, and freedom meant courage. I have intimated that he was possessed of imagination in high degree. Certainly no man could make a fortune in the way his was made, without imagination. This institution bears witness to his imagination. It is a creature of his imagination. His decision that its development should be deferred until after his death was dictated by sound reasons inspired again by constructive imagination. He had the integrity of mind of his English ancestors and the practical mind of his American backgrounds. And great serenity of mind he must have found in the contemplation of the works that would live after him. Now, reverting to the earlier angle, cheerfulness of spirit such as his rests not on resignation but on hope. Hope is a virtue that can neither stand nor travel far alone, though I would still contend for its creative capacity. It is at its best on wings of faith and charity. And Mr. Rice would tell you that whether you take to the air or not, you cannot travel lighter than with the other four of the seven virtues in your baggage: *prudentia* (wisdom), *temperantia* (innocence), *justitia* (justice), and *fortitudo* (courage), for so he travelled. His formal education stopped short of the stage from which yours now continues. Looking back from this campus to the education he later gave himself one can only conclude that it was formed on such subjects as the science of human service, the grammar of patience, and the natural history of youth. A man of his genial temperament would have

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prized most of all the friendships ahead of you in this place. And in my judgment he would have subscribed to the sentimental side of it even in the somewhat extravagant but none the less sincere terms of Hilaire Belloc:

From quiet homes and first beginning
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning
But laughter and the love of friends.

In any event, Mr. Rice will prove to be, next to your Mother and your Father, the best friend of your youth.

Today you bring to the Rice Institute youth, energy, and enthusiasm, and the institution offers you vision, inspiration, and knowledge. In due time, you who are the inheritors, and we who are the instruments, of the founder's philanthropy, pass on like the leaves that fall in the autumn, but the ideas of beauty, freedom, and truth, like that of the good life, remain and carry on from generation to generation. The individual passes, the institution lives on.

"Even as the generations of leaves are, so are the generations of men," said Homer. I cannot get away from the idea. To the Greek mind the line expressed a melancholy at once of poignant depth and dignity. The melancholy I can comprehend, but to my mind the line conveys only the shell of time. I wish that I could have as little fear about the temporal permanence of this institution as I have of doubt about our spiritual survival as individuals.