

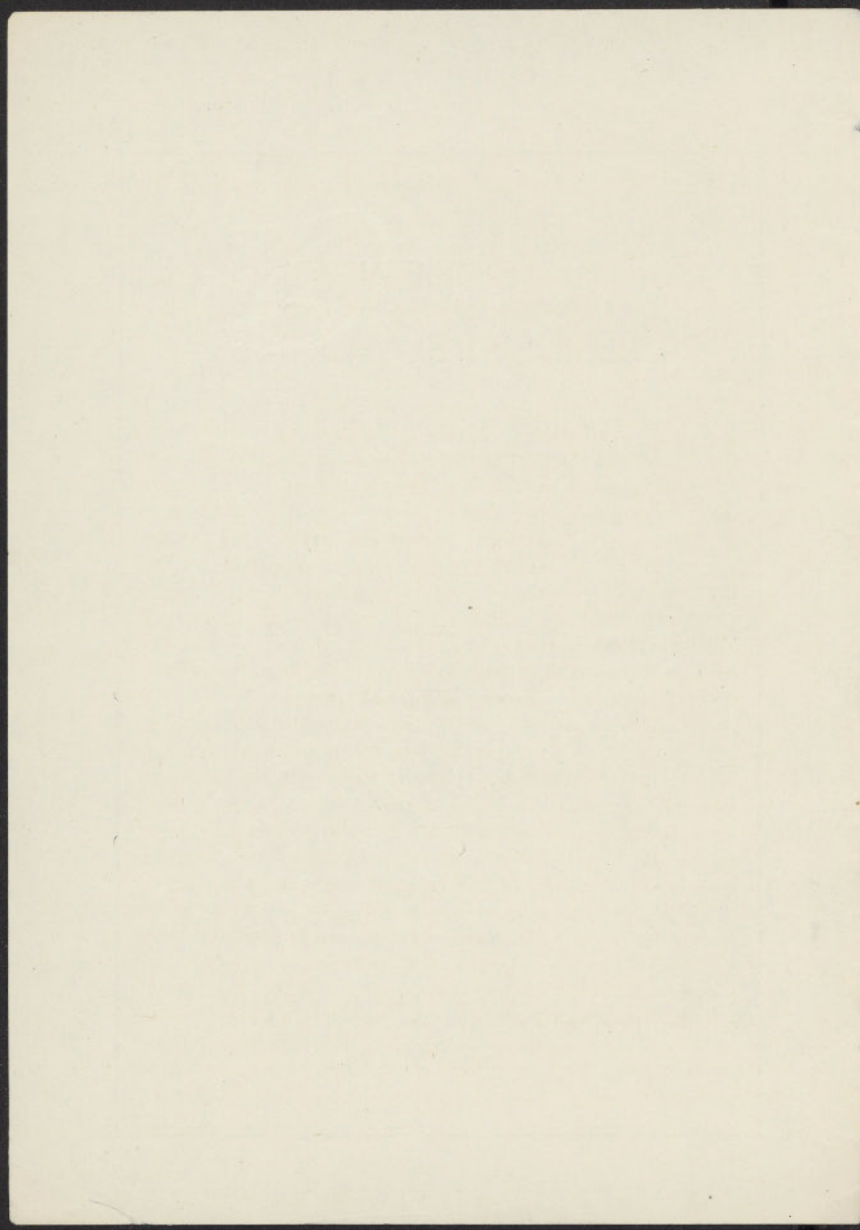
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LIFE AND EDUCATION

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IT is one of the pleasures of my life, one of the happiest duties connected with my office, to meet the members of the University at the season when we begin afresh to unravel our problems, to look anew at the changing world, and measure ourselves with our tasks. First of all I welcome the new members of the University, vulgarly called freshmen, and invite them to be very fresh, very new, very inspiring, to the rest of us. The poet said: "A child brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts." The freshmen have a great responsibility in making themselves worthy of the Dalhousie of the past. They have an even greater responsibility—to make us better than we have been. Indeed, I pray that so it may be. How I wish this morning, looking into so many young, eager faces—a thing which always cheers and inspires me with hope—that I could say to you all: "There is nothing wrong in the world; there is for none of you any doubt, any anxiety, any struggle ahead." And yet should I wish that? Common honesty prevents my doing any such thing, but, suppose it did not—would you find Life and the Future as interesting, as fascinating, if all the problems had been solved in advance for you: and if you had nothing to do really;

nothing to struggle for? Lessing said that if God had given him the choice either of complete knowledge, or the capacity for acquiring knowledge, he would have chosen the latter.

Yes, once again, on the reassembling of the University, I venture to call its members together, including its youngest and newest members, to say a few words to you about our purposes here, which are not, of course, and never can be, aloof from the affairs of the world, and which, if there is any meaning in the word, "Purpose", must point along the main highway of humanity, and straight to the main goal of Life. What years they have been since I began to do this! How the affairs of the world have plunged from cataclysm to cataclysm! How lightly and how madly has life been snatched from millions and millions of men. For how many have these years been—

*"The day when heaven was falling,
The hour when earth's foundations fled."*

In this latest period—let us say since El Alemein, and Stalingrad, and the battle of the Coral Sea—there have again been signs in the sky, and some foundations of a reasoned life on earth have re-emerged. There seems still to be such a thing as Justice, at least. Or is that just our narrow view? Is there any rainbow over China? How lagging the tread of Justice must seem to the Jews of the world! Again, how stale and unprofitable the uses of the world, and the ways of life, must be to millions of hearts wantonly bereaved, and cheated of all that made life worth while!

Once again I try to take, and I venture to urge on others, particularly young people, a steadfast view. This is not, I hope, merely stubbornness of a personal kind, nor is it any sort of Stoicism. I despise such unintelligent creeds. No, I am once again sounding a note to rally the forces, and the purposes, the critical powers and the intelligence, of this university body.

Few universities have had a career at once so ill-starred, and so triumphant, as ours. That, in the latter part, may seem a bold statement, historically considered; and the former part too, especially in view of what has happened to universities all over the world since 1933. Our triumph has been the maintenance, through thick and thin, of certain ideas: the idea of Tolerance; the idea that intelligence should be fostered and given an opportunity in this part of the world, as it had been fostered in Scotland, among poor and rich alike; and not least the conviction that these ideas depend upon higher education having a real content and character—based upon the great literature of the world, and the scientific aspirations and achievements of all mankind. It is our triumph, I say, that these ideas have won through. But it has not been an easy, nor an easily-predictable triumph. Let me remind you that over long periods since its founding, Dalhousie existed only as an idea, and an idea in the minds of few men. We began in 1818, and had hardly a beginning; after twenty years we came to life in science as well as literature—and at a time when there was hardly any science in universities—but it was a spurt that lasted only five years; and we slept for another twenty. There is nothing so

warm and vital as an idea; there is nothing so paralyzing and killing and clammy-cold as apathy. Nova Scotia had every right and duty to respond to the throbbing ideas of Old Scotland; and at times it did; at other times it has been seized by a cold fog. It became plain in 1933 that education and life were perishing in Germany, not because ignorant murderers had armed power, but because learning had folded its hands, murmuring:

*"Creep into thy narrow bed,
Creep, and let no more be said."*

At that time also it was plain to any educated man, that such an attitude could not be confined to Germany, and that everything worth living for was threatened, at least, in all parts of the world. At no period of history has barbarism ever been merely a red sword; more clearly it signifies a canker in the hearts of men, the canker of ease and pleasure, of materialism, of "non-intervention" in great causes such as "Freedom's battle"—perchance because that battle is fought far away, in Spain, or China.

Now, higher education is one of the great causes, and it has sunk to a lower and lower ebb in this country, even since 1933, not because of outside interference from materialistic interests, or governments; nor because of officious twaddle in certain newspapers; nor through the silliness of those thousands of silly publications—which have persisted through a world-wide war, and an acute shortage of paper. There has been interference, I know, and there have been twaddle and a deluge of slush. But these have not caused the deterioration of higher education; they are the symptoms and the effect of it. The real cause,

I am driven to believe, is that those who have to do with higher education, or have the opportunities to do with it, have folded their hands and floated with the stream—with any stream or tide of fashion, prejudice, materialism, or bigotry. They have gone in heavily for “non-intervention” while dunces and boors have denounced the great literature, and the seminal ideas and theories, of ancient Greece, as a proper study for Canadians. These ideas include among other things mathematics, science, music and poetry, philosophy, law, and popular government—the very fabric of a rational life, as we conceive it. If we Canadians had all migrated hither from Baffin Land, or Patagonia, it would have been different, and the things I have mentioned would have no relevance to us. But, the facts being what they are, any dodging of such issues is like an invitation to escape from our own wave-length, and our whole inheritance. The only way a people can do that is to perish, completely and utterly perish, like the dinosaurs of geological time.

Please do not think, when I speak of “those who have to do with higher education”, that I have in mind merely the public utterances of certain professors of education, or university presidents. There has been plenty of time-serving, and mealy-mouthed cowardice, in that quarter, no doubt. No I have in mind, naturally, university students, as well as university teachers as well as deans and faculties, and all their baggage-train. It is obvious, is it not, that any student at Dalhousie who had heard education defined as “coming to know the best that has been said and thought in the world”, could here make at least a good beginning at an education, in that sense.

Our libraries are well stocked, and their books have been selected under no sort of proscription or interdiction. And, if a student did discover an important omission, we should be prompt to repair it. It should be obvious, should it not, that a university student, whether his chief interests are literary, or scientific, or philosophical, or political, is foolish to neglect the opportunity to master the easy use of his own language, and of at least one other language? It is merely another of the lies spread by the dunces that you cannot really learn a foreign language at school or college. Thousands of Canadians did so in the past, wherever they had teachers who knew foreign languages. In Dalhousie we have such teachers. Similarly, the student who had heard mathematics described as the basis of science, and the key to the universe, could here make at least a good beginning in that direction. I have no wish to boast or exaggerate. In astronomy, one of the main branches of mathematics, we are as badly found as are nearly all Canadian universities. I once heard the lack of astronomy called inevitable at Dalhousie because of our foggy climate. Well, if you will read Copernicus, you will hear his lament that his work had to be done in the foggy climate of the Vistula, instead of in the clear air of Egypt, where the Greeks had worked. Yet it was Copernicus who recaptured, for himself and for us, the Greek heliocentric theory, upon which most astronomy rests. And we lack other things, I know it well. To outward seeming, at least, we are little better than Philistines in art and music. I mention these matters deliberately, because, as I said at the outset, I try to rally our critical powers as well as to maintain and renew the strength we have.

An indisputable strength we have. We have always stood for freedom, for sound learning, for scientific enquiry, whether the science was fashionable and respectable or not. We also carried out the idea of our Founder in shouldering the heavy burden of providing this community with professional men—doctors, lawyers, dentists, and, to a certain extent, pharmacists—and it is only very recently that we have received any public recognition for this, or any public assistance in maintaining the staggering burden. In all these matters, in the professional schools as well as in the Arts and Science Faculty, we have maintained the highest standards. Learning enlarges, and scientific method changes, from day to day. We have tried to keep abreast, though it is not easy, or cheap, to do so.

In Dalhousie University itself I detect no weakening of purpose about higher education. But that man is blind who does not see a pretty general disintegration in such matters. I am persuaded that it cannot last forever, Canadians being a sensible people, and steady, and conscious of history, as a whole. But there will be a struggle ahead, if what I have called "our whole inheritance" is to be maintained. A great deal of mischief has been done through the apathy and cold-blooded indifference of those concerned. When the dunces have had a long innings in high places, Ignorance becomes a vested interest. Besides, in the next decade it will seem that there are many Canadian questions which will have to be settled in a hurry. And that may be not the best atmosphere in which to determine the endless difference between getting a living and living the good life. The older one grows the less is one given to definit-

ions and precise statements. But surely, from age to age, the study of how to live the good life, and how to spread the good life among one's fellows, lies close to the focal purpose of education. Here again is another reason why it will be a struggle. No man has ever been able to live the good life without wishing the good life for others—not that in certain periods and under certain conditions the action of the monk and the recluse is not understandable. You remember how Lincoln began by thinking that the great thing was to save the Union, whether by maintaining slavery, or by abolishing it; but later came to see that "this Nation cannot continue half-slave and half-free". Does any one think that Canada can continue, in any real or useful way, if it is one-half educated and one-half illiterate? In Britain, a century ago, such a thing was believed possible. It is not thought possible in Britain to-day.

So there is much for Dalhousians to do, first for ourselves, in the travail-throes of education and the struggle for the good life, and then for others.

This morning, after using repeatedly such words as **life**, and **vital**, I am reminded of a Scriptural text: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly".

One cannot use the word, Education, without thinking of Life. To put it briefly: Education is Life, and Life is Education. **Education** means, etymologically, feeding. Stop educating a man and you starve or kill him. As American slang has it: "A man who has stopped learning is dead

from the neck up". And Life—the good life—the abundant life—means what? For Lessing, as we have seen, it meant the acquisition of knowledge. For Aristotle it meant the highest development in all spheres of which man is capable. Now surely that includes grace and beauty, serenity of spirit, happiness, joy, and much else, the best expression of which is often found in music and poetry.

Accordingly, I wish you all, this morning, good health, good fortune, and at the same time I hope that many of you will have an earnest desire for the good life.



