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ACADEMIC LIFE

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I should like to express the hope that we reassemble for a new session's work greatly refreshed by our vacations. It is a very human desire—to wish to come to an end of any task, and get off on a holiday; a person who cannot share in that pleasure is indeed hardly human; but not the least pleasant part of a holiday is the keen appetite it gives one to return to work.

Since we last met we have lost a very distinguished and a most amiable and beloved member of our society. Some of us had been junior colleagues of Professor MacMechan, many of us had been taught by him, all of us, even those who meet here for the first time, knew of him, and have been influenced by him. At the very last meeting of the University in this room, we counted it our good fortune to be able to honour him, and on that occasion it was well said that life was the better in Nova Scotia because he had lived here, and that that man was truly enriched who had known Professor MacMechan as a friend. Much was said then, as much will be said in the future, of

his writing, and the encouragement he gave to younger writers, and to students of Canadian history. I, who enjoyed his friendship for fifteen years, am tempted to break into a direct personal eulogy. But perhaps it fits the present occasion better to say how much the richer our University is because he was a member of it. A university, above other societies, has a continuity, and of a peculiar kind. One sometimes hears a young and restless student ask: "What am I getting from the University?" This, as he presently realises for himself, is getting hold of the matter by the wrong end. A few weeks ago I stood in buildings where there has been a continuous university life and activity for nearly six centuries, which illustrated afresh to me that the institution is mediaeval in origin. The name university means a corporation or guild. Those of you who have studied mediaeval times will know how strikingly some of the ideas of that age imply the willingness of the individual to sink himself, as it were, in a society or association, in order to help to get things done, which the individual could not do alone. The English Parliament is an example of this, and the universities are another. It has often been pointed out, that some of the most brilliant things have been thought out and carried through by men who were quite innocent of any connection with a university. But what is more to the point, in estimating the university, is to ask what things have been done by those associated with it which could not have been done otherwise. Being a member of a university means, then, much more than increased opportunities for

advantage to oneself. It means an obligation to study, to endeavour intellectually, and to be a good citizen, which includes being an intelligent citizen, not only during undergraduate days, but while life lasts. In reminding ourselves of these things perhaps we can best pay tribute to Professor MacMechan. For such was his life.

I have already mentioned those who are newcomers in our midst. To these I wish now to address a few words. In the first place I wish in the name of the University to welcome you, and, as it were, give you the freedom of the city. Of all that Dalhousie is, as an institution of higher learning, you are now a part. Materially she is poor. You might for example have gone to an institution with larger libraries, and greater facilities in many directions. There are, indeed, colleges not a million miles away where freshmen with a turn for football and with nothing else, are housed and groomed and fed like a prince's steed. Yet, having the knowledge to make such a comparative statement, I make bold to say that any eager spirit who has come into our midst has come into a society as rich and rare in opportunities as any that may be found. Even with resources less great than she has at present Dalhousie was long ago famed as a nurse of brilliant students and great men. That was true, of course, largely because year by year her freshmen classes brought greatness with them. Latent and unobserved it was at the time. But it was there. And so I hope and trust it will be with you. You will hear much, I hope not too much, of the Dalhousie tradition. It is in truth a

singularly rich and romantic tradition. Yet the tradition will inevitably be changed by yourselves. Life and the world have been changing with startling rapidity in the last four or five years, and it is impossible to think that you, as a group of young men and women in the year 1933, are a stereotyped likeness of any group that has ever come here before. Indeed, you must and ought to be different. For the world is presenting many new problems, and it may be that we who are older will hardly find the keys to them. That will be the task for you. Meantime we can help you. We can familiarise you with certain leading-threads in the developments of the past. Some of these, undoubtedly, will run on into the future. Certain truths, however the world changes, will remain, and woe to the future that forgets them! Certain high principles too of social and political conduct, already flouted by the cynics and Machiavellis of our day, we hope that you will understand.

And now, one word more. I think I should be doing much less than my duty, if I did not pause to invite you all, this morning, older and younger, to reflect on the terrible catastrophe that has overtaken academic life in Germany. Of the wider life, social and political, I will not now speak. You can fill in the picture for yourselves. (Perhaps to avoid misunderstanding I should add, parenthetically, that I am one of those who for many years have lifted up their voices to have the Treaty of Versailles mitigated and made possible for Germany.) But as a learned society I believe we should realise, and be warned, that what has happened in

Germany is a threat and a potent menace to intellectual freedom everywhere. The human spirit, if it lives at all, must be free. It knows neither Greek nor Jew, neither black nor white. Its "thoughts that wander through Eternity" brook neither Time nor Space. And yet for all its range and power it is sometimes as easy to crush it, as it would be to stamp on the lightest gossamer of a summer's morning. The thing has more than once happened in the past, as the wrecks and ruins of many a civilisation attest. At one moment you have human society, diverse in many ways, and happy or unhappy unevenly, in varying degrees, and yet through and through animated with a hope however faint, and a belief at times inarticulate, that society is capable of endless self-improvement. At that moment society is alive. Poetry and art are possible in it. But at the next moment something has happened. Hope and belief, and the desire to hope and believe, are gone; and, though buildings and roadways and harbours are still there, they exist only as a carcase, or at best a ruin to be admired for its picturesqueness many centuries later. Who could have expected, even as late as a year ago, that in German universities of all places, books of science would be burnt, and scholarship spurned! Nothing like it has happened in Europe since the infamous Inquisition. Another page has been added to history to show what a thin partition divides the noblest and the basest in man.

Make no mistake. This monstrous affair is of vital consequence to us. We need once again to ask ourselves whether we are after all really addicted to Truth, whether we have a living

faith in human Reason, or whether, on the other hand, these things, and Justice, and Tolerance, and Beauty, are mere names to us. We need, I believe, to search our minds about all this, for infection spreads through selfish apathy and indifference. Like other things Intelligence can continue to live only if it has an instinct of self-preservation.

I conclude with the hope that this year, we shall even more than in the past feel our corporate existence, with common interests in large ideas. It is our good fortune not to be too numerous, though we have all the different faculties of a university. Geographically, however, we are scattered. Ever since it was built, we have tried to make this gymnasium building used as much as possible by all the students, men and women. I do wish that there might be built in the near future a common dining-room for male professors and students. Meantime our community of interests might be enhanced by a more general interest in debates, and in the Dalhousie Gazette, and the Dalhousie Review—and also in the public lectures which will be given from time to time in this hall. In particular, I call to your attention that Professor Zimmern, of Oxford, will give a series of six lectures here beginning tomorrow night. Professor Zimmern is one of our greatest political thinkers, and his visit just now is very timely.

I wish you all a very happy and prosperous session.

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