

Speech given by C.W.S. at New York  
Alumni Banquet, N. Y. Mar. 26/32.

One thing I feel I know about you, very well, and that is that you are loyal Dalhousians. Two of the Canadian Universities are notoriously loyal, Queen's and Dalhousie, and I have often had experience of both in years past. But never till last June did I know the depth and intensity of Dalhousian loyalty. When it was announced that I was to be the new head I was deluged with letters from many parts of the world, written by old Dalhousians, wishing me well, and assuring me of any support they could give me. Hardly one of them could have known anything of myself. But that did not seem to matter. Dalhousie had chosen a new head; Dalhousie could not make a mistake; ergo, send a message of cheer to the newcomer, Upper Canadian though he was! I assure you, gentlemen, it was a very heartening experience, and if in the future there are difficulties and discouragements, such as life brings to most of us, that experience will sustain me.

When Englishmen, observed how loyal Scotchmen were, and how difficult these loyal Scots made the world for the English, they invented a new term of abuse, clannishness. In Upper Canada, and in Lower Canada, in academic, legal, and political circles, I have often heard the complaint: "You can't do anything with those fellows: they're Nova Scotians". Well, there is nothing Scotch, or Nova Scotian about me. Born in the United States, of a parentage long settled in Ontario, I am racially an almost unmitigated Englishman. But I am a great admirer of the clannish spirit.

The English, though instinctively political, have taken all their philosophy of politics from others. The modern political philosopher, whom the English have most admired, was Burke, an Irishman. And it was Burke who said: "When bad men conspire, good men must combine". That principle is the foundation of party government in modern times. A similar political philosophy was understood and applied in ancient Greece, and from the 16th Century on the English have been consciously emulating the Greeks.

Has loyalty, has concerted political action, any real application to universities, and university men? I am not talking of cheering at football games, nor flag-waving of any kind.

Let's take it on a high plane, first of all. Let us talk for a few moments in terms of civilisation. When we say that a civilisation flowers we use a metaphor of course, which invites other metaphors, and which needs other metaphors to explain it. It would be a simpler and easier metaphor perhaps, though not so beautiful a one, to say that a civilisation grows and persists so long as it can translate its best ideas into action. During the 18th and 19th Centuries, for example, the Irish were obviously endowed with strong musical and poetical tastes and proclivities, - but what came of them? But in the same period the Germans perfected and bequeathed to posterity a great product in both music and poetry. If any race ever had a strong political consciousness, it was the Poles; but during the centuries they devoted to futility another race evolved parliamentary government.

And so it is when civilisation is declining. It is not that men forget their ideas, and principles, it is rather that an organic lethargy overtakes society. Society becomes like a man with the flu, whose head works well enough, but who cannot muster the physical and moral force to carry out his thoughts.

Civilisation has had a bad attack of influenza ever since the War. Everything almost that has been done since that date has been done contrary to the intelligence of the Community. The Versailles Treaty, the concentration of gold, the increase of tariffs, the mad increase of armaments, - we have known better, and yet we have done these things. The world has called its prophets by a worse name than



prophets - it has called them academic theorists, and passed them by. Whether "the world" has been to blame or whether the academic theorists have been to blame hardly matters. What does matter is that knowledge has not resulted in action.

Another way of stating it would be to say that civilisation has lapsed during that time.

Now, since we are all academic people here, I wonder whether it would serve any purpose for us to ask ourselves whether we are not partly to blame for this state of affairs. To put it frankly: the world has changed, and a good many of us think it has not changed for the better. Have we changed? And has the change in us anything to do with the change in the world?

A school is always established, consciously or unconsciously, in order that civilisation may continue. When I say "a school" I do not mean a special kind of school, like a business college, or a night-school for training taxi-drivers; I mean an institution in the ordinary sense, where young people study literature and history, mathematics and science, for the sake of literature, history, mathematics and science.

Have you ever thought of Canadian schools and colleges in that way - as an attempt to keep the people of Canada civilised? I'm not joking. It's not harder to keep Canadians civilised than to keep any other people civilised, but it's not any easier. If you think of it in this way for a moment it illuminates the problem of Canadian schools wonderfully. In the history of the world has there been a more audacious undertaking? A few millions of people, in a great vacant Empire, to be nursed in ideas, in art and music and literature and philosophy and science. A hundred years ago it looked fairly simple. The population was then much smaller, and grouped in a few well-defined areas: the Maritime Provinces, the shores of the St. Lawrence, and the North Shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Besides, there were simple ideas about education: You gave everyone a chance in a lower school, and educated in grammar school and college those who had shown a special fitness for it. Moreover, though there was already some evidence both in Nova Scotia, and Upper Canada, of a fissiparous tendency in education, connected with religious sects, the great hiving-off and dissipation of energy had not yet begun.

What has happened in the Century? Population has sprawled west and north almost inconceivably. Ontario, instead of being a shore-line, is now 500 miles deep. The French population, which every one predicted would be drowned in an English-speaking community, is still exactly a third of the total, as it was then. But Canada has become a nation of 50 languages instead of two. Moreover, sectional differences of all kinds have deepened and strengthened, and in addition to racial and religious differences great social and economic chasms have widened out. Almost a fifth of the entire population lives in two great urban centres in the middle of the country. The four little colleges of a Century ago are replaced by a score of more or less ambitious universities, with as many more little struggling colleges.

The number of colleges has increased more than the population, and the number of those occupied in secondary and higher education has increased perhaps thirty or forty times as much as the population. And the education itself has changed out of recognition.

That is the point I want to make. I want to make it as plain and clear as possible, and invite you to say whether the change has some bearing on our attitude to intellectual leadership. Please understand: I am not blaming any one for these changes. Like most great changes they have just come about, with no one deliberately willing them into existence.



It goes without saying, of course, that Science has thrust into the scene, and wrought great changes. And on this continent, where it was important to harness things practically, it was perhaps inevitable that, in the popular imagination, Science should come to mean applied science. But the changes connected with this are the least of our changes. It also goes without saying that whenever it becomes true that students in High Schools are all the adolescents in the country, instead of a selected group, High School education changes utterly. But the great changes that have come about in our schools and in Arts Faculties have come since the turn of the Century, and indeed in the last twenty years, and have nothing to do with these two changes already mentioned.

Education is a two-fold thing. It means learning as well as teaching. Of the two learning is far more important than teaching, though the teacher is of importance, and can never be dispensed with. I shall come back to the teacher later, but let us have a look at the learner first.

A few weeks ago I was in a boy's school in Halifax. It was a prize day, and a wet Saturday morning. One of the boys read a eulogy of Thomas Edison and invited us to look at the electric lights above us, to think of the movies, the radio, the gramophones, etc., and reflect how this one man had "changed the temple of life". I fell to thinking. More than thirty years separated me from the average age of the boys in that room. Just how had life changed for schoolboys, as such, in that time? I thought of other changes: illustrated newspapers, automobiles, reported sports, the whole world of organised athletics. What did I do, what did my friends do, a generation ago, on a wet Saturday morning? Go to a movie? Wind up a gramophone? "Tune in" on the radio? Look at a lot of illustrated papers, or read of somebody else's hockey, or football? Drive in an automobile? These things did not exist. Some of us lived in houses where there were books, or a piano, or a violin. We made our own amusements. Or we might walk in the woods, or along the shore, observing, musing, thinking the long, long, thoughts of boyhood. Most Canadians then lived on farms, or at least in places not far from open country.

I say, I fell to thinking as I listened to the young orator, and I could not help thinking of all these vaunted improvements in our life as so many colossal distractions from study, and thought and reverie, and a life of imagination and mental activity. Was I wrong? Was I? My thoughts ran on to schools I had known in the last twenty-five years, known as a teacher, known as a visitor, known occasionally as an inspector. Sharp and harsh there rose to my mind the complaints I have heard teachers make in many class-rooms, especially since the war: "The trouble with you children is that you will not concentrate!" Or, "When I was at school, we worked, we did things for ourselves". How often have I heard these bitter things said! And how often I have thought, as I heard them. "Concentrate!?" How can the poor little devils concentrate! With last night's movie running in their heads! The eager talk of their comrades at recess time, or on the way to school, of last night's hockey score! Concentrate, indeed!"

Oh but, you may think, this is just another old-fashioned dirge for the good old times, or at least you may think it fanciful, and overdrawn. My friends, the crux of the whole matter lies here. Suppose my fancies were correct, - what subjects of study, do you think, would be chiefly neglected in consequence? Surely just those studies which require most concentration and continuous effort. Well, that is precisely what has happened. Mathematics and all the studies depending upon that; the more difficult languages, Greek, Latin, and all the studies depending upon them.



And now, what of the teachers in these secondary schools? I spoke at the outset of the great fluctuation in Canadian population in various places. The population in all has increased very slowly, and it would have been possible to increase the ranks of the teachers in proportion had the population been evenly spread. But the fact has been that in some places the school population has doubled in a decade. Now it is not possible to swell the ranks of a learned profession at that rate without lowering the standard. Besides, when the country was most prosperous in the early part of this century, and when living costs were rising, no attempt was made to remunerate teachers proportionately, and though heroic endeavours have been made in that direction since, the profession then received a serious hurt.

Let me put it in a word, the change that has come over the secondary teacher in Canada during this generation. At the beginning of the period he taught mainly those subjects in which he himself had been specially trained in school and college. At the present time that is not so. Over nearly all Eastern Canada, in Protestant schools at least, teachers of Mathematics have received hardly any more Mathematics than the oldest children they are teaching. The so-called teachers of Classics have had no Greek whatever, and hardly any Latin beyond the grade of the pupils they teach.

Does that astound you? Some of us have long known that this was the truth, and the truth has now been made notorious by several published reports.

Another great change that has come over the secondary teacher: He used to be the graduate of the stronger university, now he is largely the graduate of those universities where it is notoriously easy to get a degree. In many parts of Canada he holds an extra-mural degree, which can be had with no attendance at the University at all.

Now, there's the condition - I need not pursue it further into the university, for what I've already said reveals the university's plight. At least it does so if you remember that when schools are bad, universities must be worse, for habits of study and mental discipline are formed at school, if formed at all. The strange thing is that the Canadian university has in the main accepted the situation, though it has roundly cursed the school for it. My belief is that the chief business of the university for years to come is to snatch at the very best material it can find, in the Canadian school or out of it, and train that material intensively for teaching some one thing or other in the secondary school, nay, and even bribe that material to teach in the secondary school. The investment would pay 100 fold.

There is still good material in our secondary schools. The younger generation is every bit as good as we were, and much better than we think. The truth is we are insulting their intelligence. The other day our Dalhousie Faculty increased the matriculation standard. I asked the Registrar what he thought the effect would be on the schools. He replied briefly: "More people will work harder, and just as many will pass". That means, of course, that we have not nearly taken up the slack.

It's this sort of simple little thing that gives me hope! There are so many little common-sense things that could be done, any one of which would have a resounding effect. Suppose, for example, that the majority of the parents in any town in Canada said, on behalf of their children at school: "No more movies. No more radio noises. No more cheap illustrated papers". Any good teacher in that town could safely attempt to bring the children on twice the distance they ordinarily travel in a year. The movement would accelerate in all directions, and enthusiasm grow by infection. Some children would learn to play music and others to read books, and dabble in science outside school hours. This is not an idle dream. It is exactly what Canadian children did thirty years ago, before the distractions existed. It is exactly what European children still do, where the distractions are not allowed to interfere with more important things.



But there are still in our Canadian schools boys who rise superior to these distractions, and to their teachers even. For the most part they come from homes retaining a simple way of life, for the good reason that life has to be simple to continue at all. To these boys, Mathematics and other school tasks offer no obstacle whatever. They are ready to leave school at the earliest possible age. What happened these boys, a generation ago, I need not tell many of you here, for you know as well as I. Some had to plunge into wage-earning, but some of them either before that experience or after, went teaching country schools, and a few years afterward went on to college, and thence into Law, or Medicine, or High School teaching. This is not guess work. It is part of our Canadian social history, which nearly every contemporary of mine knows.

What happens to this type of boy today? A few of them plunge blindly into wage-earning still. But the economic life of Canada is much more highly organised than it was a generation ago. You have heard a great deal about business "using college men", but, speaking whereof I know, I should like to say that a great deal of Canadian business pays no attention to Canadian colleges, whatever, but concentrates its attention on the secondary schools. Canadian Banks, Insurance Companies, Brokers' offices, wholesale warehouses, and large factories, deliberately comb the upper classes of the High Schools for the good material I have been describing. I know a large Insurance Company, for example, that for years has canvassed many Canadian schools for boys who have a "turn for figures" - as the head of the company puts it. Some years ago the same company seized upon the head of the Mathematics Department in a Canadian university, and employed him in instructing their young actuaries - who had been carefully graded and selected from a great number of boys. That is to say, boys with a mathematical turn of mind in a great number of Canadian schools know that they can leave school, step into a paid post, and that if they show merit they have a career open to them. I don't know, but I daresay other insurance companies are doing the same thing. I speak of one company I know, and it is one of the large companies. I know of brokerage and financial houses that follow the same deliberate course with regard to schoolboys with a "turn for figures".

Now, we need those mathematically inclined boys in our Canadian universities. We are not getting such boys in our universities. If you will study the lists of Mathematics instructors at any serious Canadian university you will find that whereas a few older men are Canadians, trained in Canada, all the younger instructors are importations, from Cambridge, from Oxford, from Trinity College, Dublin, from Aberdeen, from Paris. And when the teachers are found to teach the pupils in the universities, the pupils do not come. Neither Dalhousie nor McGill has had a single class of advanced Mathematics for several years.

Now, the world being organised as it is, and these great changes having come about, which unconsciously deprived the universities of their best human material, you would think, would you not, that it would have occurred to some one to endow our universities with scholarships to offset these tendencies? Incredible as it may seem nothing of the kind was done. In Toronto University hardly any new scholarships were added in the Arts Faculty between 1895 and 1925. In McGill University few new scholarships were offered in Arts between 1900 and 1926. But during the same period dozens of scholarships were offered in Applied Science. This of course only accentuated the tendency already existing, to harness the human faculty in a practical way, and prevent its highest development.

Bad as the plight of Mathematics is, the plight of Classics is worse. Except in the Catholic institutions, Greek, the more important of the two classical languages has almost perished from our schools in Canada. Latin lives a meagre, woebegone existence. Yet it is of the utmost importance in a world of changing standards, where journalism has sunk from depth to depth, where the advertiser has left no abyss of vulgarity unplumbed, it is important, I say, that at least a few of us be scholars still, that a few of us know at first hand the stern Roman conception of individual decency and political responsibility,



that a few of us have set before us as an ideal the austerity of Athenian beauty. In fact civilisation is lost unless from age to age a few of those who participate in its advantages know the history of its development. Some of us must be able to read Archimedes and understand how he faltered, when on the brink of the differential calculus. We cannot fully understand Galileo or Leibnitz otherwise. It was only about four generations ago Europeans began to be interested again in biology, but we then only resumed a discussion which the Greeks had carried on, unashamed, for hundreds of years, including a discussion of evolution for three centuries.

You see, in the course of our argument, we have come round to the idea with which we began. We asked at the outset whether the refusal of our generation to take expert advice had anything to do with our philosophers being less philosophic than they once were. And we have been forced to admit that our intelligentsia has proven less intelligent. I have been pleading not that Tom, Dick and Harry, understand the calculus and be able to read Archimedes in Greek, but that there exist somewhere in society (and I think the universities are near that "somewhere") - a nucleus of unbiased scientific knowledge, a sort of egg-cluster (to use a biological term) of ideas. Ideas that are not harnessed to the production of rubber, or some other saleable commodity, that are not the property of some financial group, or political party. But ideas that are the vital expression of the human mind, long trained in a multitude of studies, disciplined in the experience of the ages, ripened by converse with other scholars, mellowed by commerce with the world.

Let me give you another example of the thing as it is, and the thing as it might be. We hear much of economics these days. Every one bandies the word about. Yet economics is a most difficult study - if it were easy banks and governments would not be in their present pickle. Yet, will you believe it, economics is the favourite study of Canadian male undergraduates? They begin to study it, for the most part, in their second year at college, and at the end of the second year they are so bitten with their own jargon that there is no talking with them. Now, if you look beyond Canada to see how economics is studied elsewhere, you are struck with great differences. By far the greater number of distinguished European Economists in recent years have been Englishmen, - an odd Swede, an odd German, a very rare Frenchman. How then do these men, and especially Englishmen and Scotchmen, approach the study of Economics? They obviously believe that there are two methods of approach - one through higher Mathematics, and one through History. The Cambridge School is called, significantly, the School of History and Economics. Our students frankly choose Economics to avoid the study of History. Again, the great Cambridge Economists of recent times have been Mathematicians in their own right. But our budding Economists have had no advanced Mathematics whatever. Are we not compelled to wonder whether these attempted short cuts to knowledge, have something to do with the failure of our short cuts to prosperity?

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And now let me say something of Dalhousie to you, and of the Dalhousie constituency. The Maritime Provinces are the most Conservative part of Canada, and a good deal of the virtue of that Conservatism appears in Dalhousie. It appears in the curriculum, where fewer rash changes have been made than in many others. What is more important, in view of what we have said of schools and civilisation, the human material is perhaps the best in North America, for carrying on West European civilisation. I look upon the speech of a people as a good index of their culture, and though the Maritimes have suffered from the vulgarities of advertising and of the radio, there is a purity of speech there for which I have found no match in North America. The undergraduates' paper at



Dalhousie compares most favourably in this respect with students' papers elsewhere in Canada. Further the Maritime Provinces are not resting on their oars, nor living on their past reputation. The fame of the Prince of Wales College, Charlottetown, and of Pictou Academy, has gone far abroad. But there are movements afoot, during the past five years or so, in the Maritime Provinces and in Newfoundland, to improve the schools, which have not yet been bruited abroad, to any great extent, and yet which are bound to have great results in education in the days to come. The work done by Dr. Munro, Superintendent of Education in Nova Scotia, an old Dalhousian, in improving the personnel of primary and secondary teachers makes possible a great forward movement in Dalhousie itself. The Faculty has already acted upon it, in stiffening up entrance requirements and in improving the curriculum. The Province of Prince Edward Island, and the Prince of Wales College, have seconded us in this. Meantime in Newfoundland, a knight-errant of education, J. L. Paton, after a life-time of service in England, and after winning a veteran's discharge from that fine institution, the Manchester Grammar School, has breathed a new life into education in the old Dominion. For years it has been my privilege to call Paton my friend, and I now have in him a staunch ally for the good of Dalhousie. These are things I have fortunately fallen heir to, as I have fallen heir to many things in Dalhousie itself, set going in the regime of my predecessor, my friend Stanley Mackenzie.

And since I am speaking on American soil I must add my Tribute to the assistance given in these educational improvements by an American society, the Carnegie Corporation for the Advancement of Learning. In the Maritime Provinces and in Newfoundland they have been most diligent in discovering needs, most generous in supplying them.

The debt of the Dalhousie Medical School to the Rockefeller Foundation, is well known to us all. Recently we have been indebted to the same Foundation for a Medical Travelling Scholarship.

Of certain new things at Dalhousie, the magnificent new gymnasium for example, which the Governors have built purely on faith and on their own credit with the Bank, I am loath to speak. I have had nothing to do with these things, and Mr. Pearson, who is here, can speak of them much better than I. Some of you know Mr. Pearson, and will understand how fortunately placed I feel myself to be, in having him for the Chairman of my Board of Governors. I shall let him take up the story.