

20

ADDRESS BY CARLETON STABLE

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

CONVOCATION

May 16, 1939



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Halifax, N. S.

THE
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

CONVOCATION

May 16, 1939



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Printed by

ADDRESS BY CARLETON STANLEY

President of the University

ON this day I wish to speak more particularly to the graduating class. This is their day. It is also the last day—it fills me with regret to think of it, though I am not sure that they will all share my regrets—it is the last day that I shall ever be able to speak to them. My young friends, you will soon be assailed by more strident voices than any you have heard during your stay here. I should like for just a few moments to review with you what it has all been about, what was your purpose in coming here, and what has been our accomplishment together. It is for the good of the university, rather than to snatch, pedantically, at a last chance for giving you advice, that I do this. If we have not failed with you, you do not need any admonishment today from me. But for the sake of the university, I wish you to consider at this moment what we have been trying to do together. If today you will consider that, and if later you do not entirely forget your thoughts of today, it will stead the university well in the days to come.

Universities are perishing today by scores and by hundreds; but I am not daunted by that if I can believe that youth is considering, is weighing values, is making up its mind that other things than money and worldly power are worth preserving. I think the most encouraging thing I have heard in recent years, amid all the discouraging and disheartening things, is the story that has reached us, bit by bit, and piece by piece, of the

resolute will to live on the part of the universities of China. Eighty-three universities and technical colleges in that country were wantonly destroyed by Japanese bombers. That is to say, the bombers thought they had destroyed them. They left hardly a roof or a wall intact. But they seem merely to have quickened the zeal of surviving Chinese students and professors. These learners and teachers first stumbled among the ruins to see what they could salvage. One found some books, one found a microscope, and, with such bits of equipment, these bands of scholars trekked to the mountains in the west, hundreds and thousands of miles, there to build themselves huts, and continue their studies, and thence to send messages to Europe and America, begging for further equipment. Already books and instruments have been sent them by universities in Great Britain. Can all the powers of Darkness prevail against that sort of resolution? To be quite honest, I am not sure. History has a varied tale to tell. We used to be sure, a generation ago, about the efficacy of the "blood of martyrs", and so on; but today the shadows lengthen, and doubts assail us, as never before. Don't be dogmatic about anything, but take what courage you can, as I have taken courage, from those patient and heroic deeds in China.

It is not wise, however, while you "survey mankind from China to Peru", to miss what is happening to the universities in Canada. Any one who fails to see the dangers and threats to the existence of universities in Canada is indeed blind, blind in both eyes, blind in mind and heart. There is the outer danger, which most men realise, that war may call our young men, students and

teachers, to leave their studies. That has happened before. But there is a greater danger—that the weakening and worsening of our universities may leave hardly anything worth fighting for. The universities of Canada, from earliest days, have had to struggle for existence. The materialism common to all new countries, and the sectarianism peculiar to communities in North America, were not a congenial atmosphere for university life. The university is rooted in deep human needs, in eternal human aspirations; and yet it is a delicate flower, when all is said; and there are other forces in the hearts of men—greed, envy, ambition for power, superstition—which can frustrate that delicate bloom, and blast and destroy it. At different periods in Canadian history it was these ugly forces that won the day. But never, never, so far as my knowledge of our history goes, have these ugly forces been so menacing as they are now.

Then again, there is the danger—and this is the greatest danger of all—that the universities, through fear, and lassitude, and financial anxiety, become infected with the poison of their enemies, and the lethargy of their fair-weather friends. Financial anxiety, as the moralists in all ages have shown, is a fearful enemy to rectitude and decency. Financial anxiety is a fearful enemy to Canadian universities today. It causes them to treat professors shabbily, and drive good teachers to other employments. It causes them to demand tuition fees which exclude some of the best university students. It causes them to be fifty years late in teaching the accepted views of the scientific and scholarly pioneers, lest these views run counter to convention. On any long

view, to be sure, these hostilities could easily be resolved; for it is not a saving, it is not in the interest of the community, to take these narrow and prejudiced positions. But the long view requires imagination and winning eloquence on the part of the few, and unselfishness and public spirit on the part of a good fraction of men; and only particularly favoured communities are blessed with both. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof".

Will you not, for your own good, and for the good of the communities that have bred and fostered you, consider all this? Here in Dalhousie, for years past, we have been making a struggle, in which many of you have shared, against the untoward forces. In the face of great difficulties we have strengthened our teaching staff. Our fees in Arts and Science are low, lower than is generally realised. We have maintained academic freedom. These things have been your privilege and your advantage. What will you do with your privilege and advantage? How can you repay these things? I hope you will wish to do so by treasuring a grateful recollection of your days here. But I hope still more that you will try to find some way of putting happiness and weal into the valley, or village, or shore line, that reared you, and coloured for you the long, long thoughts of youth. I know, very well, and indeed the history of this university is full of such examples, that you can go, and take your place, and make a career, in the wealthy communities of North America. Some of you, no doubt, will do that. If you do, still think of your native place, still think of your country school, and spare a hundred dollars to bless it with books, and gear, or a scholarship to this

university. But I do hope that most of you will stay here, in these Atlantic provinces, which have been so neglected, where so many needs and problems call for brains, for imagination, for an ideal of public service. In so many fields there is a call for the direction of intelligent men and women: in public health, education, slum clearance and town planning, the scientific improvement of grass lands and wood lands, the creation of local industries of all sorts. You can supply that intelligence. In so many ways could imagination bring lovely things into our midst, music and poetry perhaps, but certainly lovely buildings, and lovely streets, instead of ugly ones which cost just as much. Cannot some of you supply that imagination? What about getting into municipal politics, and on school boards, and bringing your training and ideals to bear there? Dalhousians have a way of becoming Cabinet Ministers, Prime Ministers, Chief Justices. So, I have no doubt, it will continue. But all Dalhousians should be geared to the service of the community, in tasks great and small. In that light your careers are as nothing, the enlargement of life is everything. As a class you have won the confidence of your teachers here. May your lives from this day forth be an inspiration to your fellow-citizens, and an influence for every kind of good in the community. Heaven bless you all!

To this audience as a whole I now wish to speak plainly of the financial needs of Dalhousie. This is the only university in Canada maintaining medical and dental schools which does not receive state support. For some time past we have proposed that the three governments, in the proportion of students attending these

schools from the three provinces, collectively give us an annual grant of \$55,000, and we seem to have made it clear that relatively to other causes supported by them, as well as relatively to grants received by other medical and dental schools, this is a very modest amount. The three governments have listened to us in a very friendly way. We hope soon to be able to report progress.

But the financial campaign upon which we are embarked concerns the rest of the university, besides the Medical and Dental Schools. Let us glance at a cross-section of our history: In 1863, when Dalhousie re-opened, after a long lapse, and in all the critical periods since 1863, there was always found some man, or group of men, to give us financial assistance. In 1863, two warring sects, who had been struggling in vain to maintain two feeble so-called colleges, agreed to suppress them, and to pool their resources to aid the non-sectarian college. Sixteen years later, George Munro began a series of gifts to enable Dalhousie, small as it was, to comb the world for brilliant teachers, and to comb the Maritime Provinces for promising scholars.

In the 1880's, Dalhousie had a rosy time, but its very growth and activity led to difficulties. In the 1890's, as I have heard the late Hector McInnes say many times, the friends of Dalhousie were asking whether it would not have to close again. For another decade, or more, there was a fierce struggle. Then gifts began to flow in, and the campaign, which began in 1909, brought in about half a million dollars. A decade later, more than two million dollars came in. Again, in the prosperous period, from 1925 to 1930, nearly two millions were given

us. Since 1930, there has been only one large gift, and the total amount in this last period has been less than one million dollars.

There may be some who will wonder whether this is a propitious time to launch a campaign for money. With "excursions and alarums" resounding throughout the world, will the still small voice of the university be heard? I think it very hard to pronounce on that. But on reflection, I am inclined to think the odds are in our favour. Perhaps, on reflection, you will agree. Surely it is true that men and women are thinking more seriously than they have ever thought in modern times about what is of ultimate value in life, about what is most worthy of preservation in the world. Surely that is true. And if so, shall we not all find the university bulking more largely in our thought than it has ever done?

A free press, religious freedom, civil liberties, government by discussion, freedom for science, the treasuring up of libraries, freedom to teach, and freedom to learn—once you and I took them all for granted. Years ago, in his book, "The Idea of Progress", J. B. Bury warned us that we must not do this; indeed that our readily taking these things for granted was a serious threat to civilisation. We did not listen to him. But, recently, it has been seared into our brains and into our hearts that we cannot take these things for granted any longer—if they are going to continue, we must, everyone, be eager rather than willing to defend, to maintain them, to pay for them with any means that we have—yes, and with our blood, if need be. "Taking things for granted."

Would it not be a ghastly epitaph on our age—"they took things for granted"! Taking the university for granted means being careless about its standards, allowing cheap and vulgar thought to intrude into what should be the temple of learning, science, philosophy, and the highest art. But taking the university for granted also means being careless of the university's financial welfare. I say this in no carping way. But if scholarship, and science, and modern professional schools are to be maintained in a community, that community must pay for them. Fees collected from students make up only half the cost. Graduates of the university ought to remember that. The whole community should be made aware of it. For many years now we have had to struggle too hard, for our own good, to make ends meet. Dalhousie now asks her friends to deliver her from bondage. In many ways we are tied and shackled and cannot do the things we are expected to do. We are not asking for money to build up new departments, or for any large programme of buildings, but for just enough to get on with the job: and yet that means a great sum of money.