

THE
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

To The Freshman Class

SESSION 1931-32



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

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ADDRESS TO FRESHMAN CLASS

By Carleton Stanley

President

MEN and women who have come, for the first time, to work at Dalhousie: I am very glad, indeed, to see you here and to make your acquaintance. I, too, this year am a freshman, and for some weeks now I have been scanning the horizon to find someone as fresh and new as myself. You will understand, then, that when I meet you, 250 strong, and say that I am glad to see you, it is not an idle compliment.

But, all the rest I am going to say, you may take as one long compliment to yourselves. I am going to pay you the greatest compliment in my power. I am going to talk seriously to you.

I shall ask you for a few moments to consider your duties and responsibilities. Frankly, I should wish to talk to you of other things: of some of the new books, for example, or politics, or the Gold Standard. But it may be my duty at this moment, as an older friend, to talk to you younger people of your duties.

This is a golden time for you. Leisure is yours, more leisure than you will ever command again. Freedom is yours, more freedom than you have had at school, and perhaps more than you will ever have again. And youth is yours, which you will never have again. You are off to the great adventure of life. We who are older wish you godspeed, we wish to utter words of good omen, to say nothing that will mar your joy as you set out; and yet we had that later, even if not now, you will wish that you had our counsel to-day.

I must tell you, therefore, at the outset, that you are trustees for the traditions of Dalhousie. To-day you are freshmen, but, in a very few years' time, most of you, as I hope, will be graduates. In the interval, in every succeeding day of the interval, the work of Dalhousie will be made possible only by your strenuous mental efforts. We have no room for slackers. The name of Dalhousie stands where it does to-day, throughout the world, because your predecessors understood their opportunities, seized them, and went forth from these precincts not with a degree, but with a sense of values. And the world is not going to ask you when you leave us, whether you went to so-and-so's classes, but whether you are educated. Nor is it merely what your contemporaries will expect of you. Unless you develop here in your own persons, taste, and judgment and sanity, unless you learn here the power of independent and rational criticism, the world in your time will slip a little further back into the vulgarities and inanities, into superstition. You must not only set yourselves free by learning the truth, you must help to set others free. Free not merely from the thousand and one idolatries which exist to-day, free not merely from the Powers of Darkness and the beastly cruelty which still lurks in the hearts of men, but free from easy credulity, from catch-words, from the jargon of the so-called specialists of our time, and the chattering of the newspapers. The traditions of Dalhousie are above these things. You must maintain these traditions.

Let me be concrete about one thing, and perhaps that will illustrate other things. I wonder whether you realise, keenly enough, that you are the especial guardians of the purity of the English language on this continent. Do you realise that? I have no wish to make invidious comparisons, no wish to flatter you. But I repeat that you obviously are the especial guardians, on this continent, of the purity of the English language. A certain person on this continent announced some decades ago that he "sounded his barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." It was perhaps, in his time, a distinctive piece of self-advertisement. But, as the author

of the phrase claimed to be a poet, and, as any one, after all, can "sound a barbaric yawp," we have had tens of thousands of self-advertised poets since, and their utterance has grown more and more barbaric. Similarly, we are asked to accept the tom-toms of the tropical jungle as music, and that is another din that has been heard over the roofs of the world. But, do not we "who speak the tongue that Milton spake" have a responsibility to speak it, and write it, as precisely, and even as artistically, as we can? If you, in these provinces, fail in that, then the English language is lost in this country. Partly through accident, but partly, I believe, by good sense, you have escaped the mad, uprooting flood of immigration. It is your duty to deliver yourselves and your posterity from the "barbaric yawp."

But you are, no less, the custodians of other things. The chatterers tell us to-day that we live in an age of science. But those who chatter can never know anything of such profound matters as science. Those who are deeply read in history, and who know the meaning of science, have grave fears to-day whether science can long continue with us. The future of science on this continent in particular is very dark. Scientific enquiry can only exist in an atmosphere of the utmost freedom of thought. Scientific curiosity must not only be free from superstitious persecution, it must be untrammelled by materialism. The moment you say to the scientific enquirer: "Be useful, be practical, invent ways of saving time and money"—the moment you say that, you chill his soul. You cannot "endow" science, hedging it about with practical considerations, any more than you can buy poetry by the pound. But that is precisely what is being everywhere attempted on this continent. The scientific mind bioweth where it listeth, unprescribed, undismayed, free. You cannot hitch thoughts which "wander through eternity" to the vulgarities of advertising, or to the increase of somebody's dividends. There are many reasons for this, as all educated men know. But I shall just touch on one reason now. The man who "wants results"—to use a vulgar phrase—always wants the "results" quickly. He is all for taking short cuts.

But there are no short cuts to science. Any one who enters into that Kingdom must travel a difficult road. For example, the appreciation of the importance of classification is fundamental to science. In botany and zoology it is all important. But it is also of the greatest importance in geology, and chemistry, and many other sciences. Now, I may be prejudiced in this, but I have often wondered whether any one can really appreciate the importance of classification who has not read Theophrastus and Aristotle in the original. And they wrote in Greek. Whether that is true or not may be a minor consideration. But there is another consideration of great importance, and it is beyond dispute. The very basis of science is mathematics. No one denies that. But it is one of the most curiously wrong-headed features of our time in Canada that, whereas more and more men and women are called students of science, fewer and fewer men, and hardly any women, are studying mathematics. There is not a province of Canada, of which it is not true, that less and less mathematics is studied in the schools. There is, at the same time, not a province in Canada of which it is not true that more and more students are professing to follow "science" in the universities. These things being so, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that much of the so-called scientific studies in our universities is a sham and a delusion.

I warned you at the beginning that I was going to talk to you seriously. Think about these things. If mathematics was a bugbear to you at school, ask yourselves once again why you have come to university. At least you cannot hope to study science.

To one other subject I must call your attention. The world has fallen on evil days, and I cannot conscientiously omit to mention that. You must all know, if you know anything, that tens of thousands of your fellow-citizens in Canada are this very morning on the brink—I was going to say "on the brink of starvation"—but let me put it this way: on the very precipice-edge of losing their self-respect, on the very thin edge which separates Hope and Despair. For all of us that is a

terrible state of affairs. Again, a good many in this room must have some harrowing recollection of the recent War. In the slogan and catchword of the time, it was called a "War to end war." Yet, for years after it, most of the great nations were spending more on preparations for the next war than they were spending in 1913 and 1914. In 1931, the United States and Europe are spending about \$750,000,000 more to prepare for the next war than they were spending in 1925. No one seems to want the next war, and yet the present tendency indicates to students of history that the next war may, after all, not be far away.

Now, why should I trouble your gay souls this morning with such painful matters? I had much rather not! Those who are engaged by choice, as I am, in education, must necessarily be of sanguine mood. We believe intensely and passionately in the generosity and sanity of youth; we believe no less intensely and passionately in the divine intelligence of things. I speak to you therefore out of no gloom of doubt. But I do speak to you, as I said before, seriously, and gravely, as seniors must occasionally speak to juniors.

It is your business to understand. It is your business to be intelligent. Good-will, patriotism, generosity, enthusiasm are not enough. You must understand. You must be intelligent. You must judge. You must believe nothing. You must believe no one. You must not believe your professors. You must not believe your text-books. You must certainly not make the mistake of believing me. You must be sceptical. You must "prove all things." You must think for yourselves. You must remember that "it is the part of the wise to save the world from the good." Faith, of course, you must have—faith in humanity, faith in "the eternal verities," but above all faith in yourselves and in the conscience and intelligence God has given you. That means, to be precise, that you must not flog yourselves into believing that something is true, when you cannot see, for the life of you, that it goes on all fours. If the programme of the Russian Government reminds you somehow of the Gospels in the New Testament, read the Gospels again, and

the Russian programme again, and ponder, ponder, ponder. Don't chatter like the newspapers. But read the newspapers, too. Read Milton about liberty. Remember another poet, Shelley: "Force from force must ever flow." Are all the triumphs of either Bolshevism or Fascism worth while, ultimately worth while, if purchased at the cost of Freedom?

"Freedom" is a word lightly uttered. But no one can understand it who does not understand the whole history of Europe, and how freedom "slowly broadened down" in the developments of two great peoples, the Greeks and the English. How much do you know, my young friends, of either? It is my pleasant task this morning to welcome you to Dalhousie University, so that we may discuss such things as these.

