

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

At the Opening of
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Address of the President
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BALHOUSE UNIVERSITY
DETROIT, MICH.

ADDRESS BY CARLETON STANLEY

President of the University

EVERY year at this season I have followed my self-imposed custom, and given myself the task of addressing the entire student body, and perhaps more particularly the incoming new students. It is not an easy task, and for several reasons: not only are young audiences critical audiences; you in particular, have reason to be critical of me. For how can I be expected to have anything to say which will interest all of you? Some of you are first-year students entering the Arts Course, but many of you are much senior to that; many of you, indeed, in the professional schools, are already university products; and in the several professional schools your interests are very diverse. Again, many of you think, and perhaps you should think, that you suffer from a plethora of lectures. Why add another? These are difficulties in the way of my saying anything of really vital interest to you, and I have always borne them in mind, addressing you and your predecessors. But I have enjoyed the attempt to overcome them: and some of the pleasantest moments I have had have been those when you, and others before you, encouraged me to believe that I had not quite failed to interest you in stimulating your minds about problems of importance, and of eternal interest to the mind of man.

But there has been another, and much greater difficulty, recurring and chronic in these seven years. In remembering that you are a select and chosen band of men and women, who will be especially called upon to deal wisely with the future of this country, and the future of the human community, (and how could I fail to remember that?) I have had to be honest with you, and admit to myself, first of all, that this future, which I had in mind, and which I invited you to have in mind, was an exceedingly difficult one. This has been my chief difficulty in

addressing this audience: to be wisely honest and honestly wise with you: not to insult your intelligence by dealing out easy platitudes to you, about the success that undoubtedly awaited you at the end of your studies here, about the happiness of being a student, and so forth. In common honesty I felt constrained to say to this audience in 1931 that the world, then, was a very dark and difficult one, and that the future threatened to be more difficult still. It gives me no satisfaction whatever to have been correct in my prediction. Would, rather, that my prophecy had been utterly falsified! So difficult is my task in addressing you this year, so little do I feel confident that it is easy for a man of my age, and experience of life and history, to say wise, and yet not absolutely discouraging, words to men and women of your age and experience, that once or twice I even thought of shirking it. I can almost hear some one, who thinks I am treating the matter far too seriously, wish that I had. And perhaps a wit will add that, even last year, the audience, at least, was entitled to a sabbatical rest.

I don't object to being considered serious over so serious a matter. And so I confess that this present address is the fourth attempt. Three other addresses I took some pains with, and then tore up, and consigned to oblivion. What determined me to go on with the business is my conviction that there are still some encouraging things to say. Some of your confidence in men of high places may have vanished, quite to zero. But can other men of trust be found? Men say sometimes, "my idol has been shattered". Isn't that another way of saying: "My own eyes have been opened, for, until he was shattered, I never called my god an idol". In a way, the experiences we are going through today, though more world-shattering and more disillusioning to any easy faith in humanity, or faith in the divine direction of humanity, are very like the experiences every human being in the world has always had in the process of educating himself. Always, in self-education, (which is the only real education), the human mind has no sooner grown a comfortable crust round itself than it has had painfully to break its way through that crust. The commonest characteristic of

humanity is stupidity. Humanity is never comfortable unless it is stupid. That was what a wise man meant by saying that "The cement of institutions is stupidity". As soon as any system becomes really a system, as soon as an individual, put in a position of importance, begins to grow himself mental brass buttons, then you can be sure that the system is a prison, where intelligence is put in chains; and that the individual is a fossil. Education is painful: we learn by suffering, as the old Greek said.

In likening the world's present experiences to ordinary education, of course, I do not mean that there is anything normal, or just, or praiseworthy, or even tolerable, in much of the world as we see it today. Is it possible that any one in this country can any longer think that this country can go its way, heedless of the assaults, which the demons of Hell have made on freedom elsewhere? How can anyone, who claims to be a teacher or a leader in this country, fail to see that volcanoes are tearing up the roadways that he himself must tread? Learning and science are not Canadian commodities, not bales of Canadian merchandise: they are realms of the free mind of humanity. At the earliest moment after Hitler came to power, and immediately destroyed the great universities of Germany, I warned the students of this university as follows: "As a learned society I believe we should realize, and be warned, that what has happened in Germany is a threat, and potent menace, to intellectual freedom everywhere Make no mistake: this monstrous affair is of vital consequence to us." I spoke so emphatically, just five years ago, because I had heard a man say, in Halifax: "what the labouring classes in this country ought to have is a Hitler"; and because there were newspapers in this country which were condoning Hitler and Mussolini, and in the same selfish, money-bag spirit.

Of course, I made it clear, when I uttered these grave warnings, that I spoke out of no hatred for German people or Italian people. More than most, I knew the great literatures of those countries. I had studied in those countries, and used their languages in speech and writing. I am one of those Canadians who were derided at the time

for urging, by tongue and pen, that we who were victors in the last war should discontinue being chauvinistic, and cease to adherence to the last letter of the Versailles Treaty, if the last letter meant injustice or folly. But we men, we students of history and travellers in Europe, knew also the Junker spirit in parts of Germany, and the gangster days of the "Black Hand" in certain parts of Italy; and we warned against any truce, or negotiations, or concessions with Germans or Italians of that type, whether in power or out of power. If we English-speaking peoples had backed the decent politicians in Germany, and they were many, there would have been no Hitler. And let no one tell you that only England is guilty in such matters. How often, during a long period, did Canadians and Americans deride the League of Nations, as a place where men merely talked! We now know that there are worse things than talking, and more expensive things than supporting those who try to settle international affairs by debate.

But I shall not deliver you a merely political harangue. I speak to you as university students. Think, then, of that warning I gave five years ago, only in terms of the university. A university is surely, most Canadians will still admit, an innocent ambition, to found and maintain and cherish. It was in terms of the university, and of civilization, that I spoke five years ago. In how many more countries, since that time, has the university become an impossible thing! You have heard men and women, returning to Canada after a visit to imprisoned countries, say; "But you have to give them credit for draining marshes and building roads, and tidying up the streets". I, who travelled in Italy before the war and after the war, before Mussolini's time, and after Mussolini's time, know that there were vast drainage schemes well under way in 1912, some of which Mussolini later curtailed, in order to save money for militarism. The gangster methods in Italy, and particularly the "Black Hand" in Naples, were suppressed before Mussolini was heard of. He revived these things. I speak to you as university students. You ought to be able to distinguish between the evidence of those who know no history, who do not speak European

languages, and the evidence of those who are learned in both. Not that I ask you to believe me! In my first address to this audience I exhorted them to believe no man, to believe no professor, and above all not to believe me. I exhorted them to be sceptical of everything. But, as I say, you are university men and women. You are obliged by the facts and the nature of things, to understand that in a despotically ruled country there cannot be any university chairs in such subjects as politics, economics, international affairs, law, government. And, indeed, if the despotism is strict, is a despotism where earnest students of truth are put to death, not for crime, or even political opposition, but because they are students of truth, then there cannot even be chairs of history, or comparative literature, or of education or philosophy. In the dismal Macedonian days, which succeeded the downfall of Greek civilization, it used to be remarked that professors of such abstract matters as mathematics, physics, astronomy, were free, even though the subjects I have mentioned just now were stifled. But today—so many more candle-snuffers of freedom have been found—even these subjects are taboo. Perhaps that is because modern despots are so ill-educated that they cannot distinguish between one professor and another? Under the Macedonians Professor's Stewart's head, to use Hitler's bloody phrase, would have rolled in the sand, for talking about philosophy and politics. But in those days Professor Bronson would have been free to go "mooning on" about physics and astronomy. Now, under Hitler, though Professor Stewart would have perished early, Dr. Bronson also would not have had a moment's respite; for, in addition to his "criminal offence" of criticising authority, he is one of those depraved and perverted people — again I use a phrase now current in Germany,—one of those depraved and perverted people who still take the gospel of Christ seriously. And, even had he not been guilty on these accounts, it is doubtful whether he could have escaped concentration camp, at least, as a native of Connecticut.

My young friends, I do not jest, or at least I jest sadly. Sadly, and yet purposefully, and with hope. I somehow stubbornly feel that the natives of Connecticut,

—a small, poor, part of the American nation,—could knock this whole damnable insanity into a cocked hat. The wise man of the last century, whom I have already quoted, Walter Bagehot, said: “The men of New England can work anything, no matter how unworkable it is.” I somehow feel that you men of these Atlantic provinces, the smallest, poorest, part of Canada, could somehow summon up the irrefragable strength of your race, and the tolerance your fathers so painfully and sorrowfully learned: in the settling of your Highland feuds, some of you; in your acquiescence with the English conqueror of Acadia, some of you; in transferring your allegiance from Central Europe to the Atlantic fishing banks, some of you; in tolerating in a new land, some of you, that flag you had cursed in Ireland—if you Maritimers alone, with your political bent, with your instincts for leadership, breathed this gospel of sweet tolerance and co-operation—which you have so well, because so painfully learned—into the racial strife, and the class strife, and the strife of interests, which threaten Canada, what a force for peace and common sense would Canada not become! And Canada, if she turned her back on leaders, so called, who are determined to “nail their colours to the fence”, could be a leader in the world.

I bid you welcome, you newcomers to Dalhousie. We have an age-old tradition of freedom and tolerance here. As that distinguished historian, Mr. H. A. L. Fisher pointed out, in the leading article in the last issue of the *Dalhousie Review*, this was the first university in the British Empire to write absolute religious freedom into its charter. Freedom is a thing hard to claim, hard to secure, hard to maintain, endlessly hard to cherish. An ancient saying ran: “The good and beautiful is one: evil and ugliness is many”. So freedom is one, and uniform; and the enemies of freedom are multiform. The enemies of freedom are not only those sadistic monsters who gloat over torturing human flesh. They are all these respectable, proper, conventional, ease-loving, tuft-hunting, must-be-in-the-swim people, who will not listen to a distant call for help, if that call be inconvenient; who are nervous about expressing an opinion, or damning folly and injus-

tice, until the "right people" have so expressed themselves; who want to serve God and Mammon at one and the same time; who have no real love and no undying hate. These, my young friends, are the enemies of freedom. And, to be honest with you, I should admit that these men and women are, to my best observation,—always have been, so far as my reading of history goes,—and always will be, according to my present belief,—the great majority of men. I said to you, at the beginning, that you were a select and chosen class; and you may have thought that I was merely commending myself to you. I say it again to you now—and invite you to consider your responsibility.

Terrifying is your responsibility. But great, oh, so great is your opportunity! I, who have always respected the constituency of this university, and who have come to love it deeply in the last seven years, have confidence somehow—I could hardly tell you why, even in a longer discourse—that you will not fail, that you will achieve the unpredictable, and do what most would call the impossible. Heaven bless you all.



