

miss mack

MESSAGE TO THE GRADUATING CLASS OF HUNTER COLLEGE

For Commencement Exercises, February 1, 1939

As I face you, the graduating class of January 1939, I can wish you the happiness that four years of faithful study and intellectual achievement should give you in a world waiting to receive you with open arms. I can wish you that happiness, but alas! I cannot promise it to you.

A great deal of time, energy, and money have gone into this education of yours. You are well endowed to enter the professions and to enjoy most interesting and intellectual lives. I believe that you have had a better education here than at most colleges, but that this education is all that it should have been, I cannot honestly say.

A recent report of an inquiry by the Board of Regents, called Education for American Life, defines education as "the preparation for living." "Education", the report says, is the process of mastering the knowledge, the tools, the skills, and the institutions which mankind has slowly accumulated, of learning how to work with others, of understanding and making the most of one's self, and of forming ideals and habits."

Does the education we have given you meet this definition? Have we prepared you for living? Indeed, does college education anywhere in the United States offer adequate preparation for living? You have had some guidance, but so-called guidance is not a science as yet, and it seems to me that we have barely begun to train you for citizenship and for <sup>meeting</sup> the social problems of modern life. College education has been traditional. Its plan to date has been largely controlled by accrediting organizations and by self-perpetuating staffs, and limited by financial conditions. Trustees can supervise, but rarely are they willing to interfere. College education on the whole has not had the money or the power

or the time or perhaps the energy, thoroughly to overhaul its processes. If the full educational value of the movie, for example, or the radio, or other, discoveries and inventions were utilized by colleges, the results would be revolutionary, but as you know, there has been little such revolution.

But because I say that college education is tardy in bringing itself up to date, I do not mean that there is any substitute for that education, but rather to point out that it must be constantly and critically alert, if it is to continue to justify itself.

The Regents' Inquiry has said that we do not need any more colleges in the State of New York, only two years more of high school. I do not even know what they mean by two more years of high school. The report does not state what these additional years would lead to. It sounds to me as if some of these additional courses would be of college grade and some would not. If they are not given under college auspices, they cannot be of a nature and type that would be given credit in other states and lead to advanced study. I think if the money could be found, additional high school courses free to those desiring them, might be offered but such courses should be carefully planned and carefully evaluated. Just to give a lot of courses to a lot of people, possibly different courses over and over again to the same people, sounds expensive and I am convinced would be of doubtful value either to the community or to the individual student. I have too many friends of my own who have done this sort of thing to believe that it leads anywhere.

I think that those boys and girls who are qualified--and their qualification should be tested by fresh studies--should go to college and I will meet the hidden challenge of the Regents. I will say that colleges should be suitable in aim and method for the intelligent children of all the people and should not be merely the cloistered walls of tradition. Colleges should teach citizen-

ship and behavior, not as adjuncts to the course, but as part of the course. They should, as you no doubt will realize, bend every effort to help students' to adjust to their environment. Again, the Regents' Inquiry states that college education should make the student ambitious. I agree that education should include the development of a critical attitude but I would not agree that that critical attitude should make you maladjusted individuals.

I have been told that recent studies undertaken by R. H. Macy & Company tend to prove that supposedly intelligent young people cannot adjust to minor jobs of a routine nature. Those young people who have an intelligence quotient of over 100 should not be given the chance to take these jobs. Twenty years ago, the department stores and business generally opened their doors wide to college people without questions asked; now it looks as though they were going to shut them again, still without questions asked. This seems unfair. Without claiming that business should use college people exclusively, it is fair to state that a college graduate has as much right to a job as anybody else and certainly should do better in it. Undoubtedly where a college person is unable to meet even simple situations of a routine life where in case of emergency he may be thrown, it would seem that he should take stock of himself and that educators should prepare him to make proper adjustments.

That such cases are not rare is shown in a survey questionnaire in the February issue of Fortune. The question is asked: "Which <sup>do</sup>/you think has a better chance of earning a living today, a high school graduate who has had four years of experience or a man just out of college?" The mere fact that this question is raised by a magazine of high standing is startling. The replies are comforting, up to a point. Thirty-three and four-tenths per cent of the nation's families believe that the college man has the better chance; 34.4 per cent think the high school student has the better chance. The rest either do not know or they think it depends on the individual. "Executives who do the hiring, however,

give the high school student the best chance by an unqualified vote of 41.6 per cent against 28.6 per cent for the college graduate."

Graduation from college is evidently still considered desirable from the community point of view, but college training apparently fails in some degree <sup>the</sup> to fit/individual to meet a changing world.

I am convinced that we need degrees above the high school level--college degrees. Students should not be allowed to take courses any which way. They need certificates of accomplishment which are degrees, but these degrees should not unfit them for the world; rather they should better fit them to take their place in that world, whatever it may be. These degrees should mean the same thing everywhere; not one thing in one institution and another thing in another institution. There should be a variety of degrees and they should be carefully evaluated.

Such a study of degrees and their evaluation needs to be made and it should be made by a conference leading to a series of studies by educators and laymen to fix standards and degrees on a modern basis, which studies should be given wide publicity. A national conference would be best for this work; a state conference would be a good start.

So I say to you that the mere holding of a sheepskin is no longer an end in itself and that you cannot depend upon it alone to give you the standing that it may once have given. I am sure you will find that most people with college education rejoice that they have it, but in whatever you undertake, you will be valued as ~~an~~ individuals for the contribution you bring to your work and for no other reason. It will be up to you to show results both for yourself and for the credit of Hunter College. We know our limitations and we realize that what we have given you is only the beginning.

OUR BEST MOMENTS

by

Ordway Tead

Chairman, Board of Higher Education, New York City

(Remarks of Greeting to the Graduating  
Class of January, 1939, Hunter College,  
on February 1, 1939)

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Sir James Barrie is credited with the tale of an ancient monk who wandered into the fields and for the first time heard the incomparable skylark sing. Entranced he stood, <sup>lost in ecstacy,</sup> caught up into a very heaven of soaring melody. <sup>Finally,</sup> ~~Then~~ in great elevation of feeling back he went to his monastery. But the doorkeeper did not know him; nor did he recognize the doorkeeper. He told his name but it meant nothing. Finally a search was made in the records of the monastery and it was found that one of his name had been recorded there as a brother a hundred years before. Time, remarked Barrie, had been blotted out while he listened to the lark.

It was this same skylark, you will recall, that stirred Shelley to the famous lines which begin, "Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! Bird thou never wert..." And Mrs. Shelley has recalled the occasion in these words: "It was a beautiful summer evening while wandering among the lanes, whose myrtle hedges were the bowers of the fireflies, that we heard the calling

of the skylarks, which inspired one of the most beautiful of his poems."

You and I may not have written a classic ode out of the insight of our profoundly moving moments. But you and I have had our big moments. We have felt them to be our best moments. They have affected us deeply. They have left us changed.

These moments are unpredictable, but they are inescapable. You and I have known an overpowering sunset; the <sup>grandeur</sup> ~~message~~ of a great symphony; the moment of illumination brought by the mood of a wise teacher or of a book that spoke to our special need; the transcendence of a great ritual in cathedral, synagogue, or church. Or it was a sudden awareness of the depth of a friendship or of the reality of a compelling love. Or, again, it was a sense of being above time in the creative passion of writing a poem, painting a picture, or of thinking through for oneself the answer to a difficult problem.

These fortunate moods of exaltation as we know them are sometimes contemplative, sometimes creative. But they are always rewarding.

"And what we mean, we say,  
And what we would, we know.  
A man becomes aware of his life's flow...  
And then he thinks he knows  
The hills where his life rose,  
And the sea where it goes."

What, then, are these best moments? Why are they? And what purpose do they serve?

Surely these moments need no defense. They are <sup>justified completely</sup> ~~self-justify~~ <sup>vivid</sup> in the ~~strict~~ sense of reality they bring - a reality beyond doubt.

Here is illumination not to be gainsaid. Clarity, insight, perception of that not before perceived, a sense of being caught up into something that transcends the mundane - these are the fruits thereof. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face."

Who can pronounce whence these best moments come? But who can deny the power and the glory and the authority of them? And who should be concerned as to how they come, if only they come. For one individual they come in nature, for another in contacts with people, for another in some mighty work of man. For some they come through all of these.

In this sense, of course, our best moments are private. They are our own. That truth, indeed, in a day of crowded living may lead some of us to distrust their reality. There are some who may even deny us the right to such moments, surrounded as we are by a suffering world.

But I remind you that such moments are a common possession of men; that historically we know that the edge of the veil seems momentarily lifted by experiences which have had common elements and have brought common revelations - or at least revelations which come to be shared by others as meaningful.

Is it, perhaps, that what seems private in these moods is only our reception of them, not that which is received? And do we in some way not readily uttered but still deeply felt, partake in our privacy of a sharing out from a great flood of light and truth, a great reservoir of reality, upon which all men may and do draw. And as they draw, do they not in fact come back to their fellows the better in their fellowship for what they have known?

What I am suggesting is that our best moments betoken a common heritage from which we come trailing clouds of glory, and a common aspiration toward which we grope. They come because we are by nature and through nature that kind of two-legged animal that can thrust his spirit up into the stars.

Our best moments are our response to the reality of "something far more deeply interfused." They are to be trusted. They are good. They

are the breath of a Being upon our countenance to remind us that we are  
of  
not merely/the earth earthy.

And the purpose of these ineluctable moments is therefore  
clear. They are monitors of human mastery, *admonishers of a more than human divination.* They are tidings of truth;  
becknings to beauty. They are reminders and reinforcements to the human  
spirit. As in the great allegorical painting of Michael Angelo, as the  
hand of man reaches up, a finger reaches down to impart a touch at once  
revealing and healing.

In more practical terms, our best moments should, as Matthew  
Arnold suggested, infuse with meaning and hope the long, hard days between.  
For -

"Tasks in hours of insight willed  
Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled."

Such hours of gloom you will have and aplenty. The road ahead  
is troublous, uncertain, even chaotic. ✓

*Hence,* it needs no argument to establish the value of these quick-  
enings. We each need a spiritual bank with ample reserves of our own on  
deposit whence confidence and courage can be drawn on demand. ✓

And I repeat emphatically that these reserves - with their con-  
tinuing new deposits of fresh awareness - are not in any selfish sense pri-  
vate. If they are cherished privately, if we hug to ourselves our superior  
sensitiveness, if we draw our skirts about us believing we have what others  
are too coarse to share, if we become esthetic or spiritual snobs and thank  
God we are not as other men - all as a result of our best moments - we have  
fatally mistaken some emotional titillation for that disclosure of reality  
which ~~REM~~ reminds us that we are but little lower than the angels.

As you leave these years of directed guidance in your intellec-  
tual and spiritual journey and proceed to go it alone, I offer you this word:



Strive to have more best moments. Discover for your own self what occasions of quiet, of strife, or of anguish yield them for you.

Cherish your best moments. Trust the elevation of mood and of insight into meaning and purpose which they bring you.

Be true to these priceless moments. For if you are, you will use them to give a serenity to your own efforts and a courage to your own human associations, without which you may exist but will not live ardently.

The world wants to believe in its and in your unrealized visions. Never more so than today. Those visions and dreams have, I trust, been yours in abundance. But you can give them meaning only in the marketplace, not on the mountain top - in action, not in the academy.

The acid test of the quality of your cherished moods is the *influence* ~~appeal~~ they enable you to have *with others because of* ~~through~~ the spirit and the tactics of your human dealings.

You and I will be true to our best moments as we become able *through the* *years* to say with a prophet of old, "I have been obedient unto the heavenly vision."