

BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

Given by President George N. Shuster - June 18, 1944

The other night, a snatch of an old sentimental song came to mind. You all know it --

"A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers;
There was lack of woman's nursing,
There was dearth of woman's tears."

We couldn't quite manage that sort of ditty now. But it suddenly becomes clear that when those verses were written Florence Nightingale had just appeared -- a great woman who made nursing part of warfare, whose memory is no doubt sacred to every soldier at the front today. I think also of the last line of another lyric which you may also have read. It was written by Lieutenant Stanley Proctor Wright, who was killed on Bougainville Island during 1943, just a year after he graduated from Dartmouth. The line, which is addressed to his sweetheart, reads,

"Tomorrow must be greater than our selfishness."

It seems to me that the poem of which this is a part is the only verse like Rupert Brooke's to have come out of this war. Florence Nightingale would have liked it, because it is a formula which you can use to do even as much as she did.

"Tomorrow must be greater than our selfishness!" You may perhaps wonder a little about that. Most of you have gone through Hunter on what might perhaps be described as a series of shoestrings. You have worked at Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Altman's. You have stayed up with the neighbor's babies. You have done odd jobs for the Registrar at fifty cents an hour. And no doubt a good many of you have sandwiched homework between washing the dishes and dad's session with the radio and the evening news. You have written scores of letters to soldiers and sailors, have pleaded with the Dean, and have hung for hours from the

straps of the subways. Doesn't it seem that after all this, with the often seriously imperilled diploma now safely in tow, there ought at last to be a time in which to cash in? These days numerous Hunter graduates do quite nicely, indeed. They are, as our survey of a recent class indicates, teachers, stenographers, statisticians, journalists, designers, et cetera ad infinitum. Eighteen percent of a class which graduated a year ago are housewives -- a figure that testifies to a degree of acquisitive success which, under the circumstances, is nothing short of miraculous.

But the brilliant lad who died in the South Pacific jungle says that this will far from pay the bill of life. Oh yes, he desperately wanted the girl to whom those lines were addressed -- a slip of a thing, probably, just finishing her second year at college, bright eyed and dark, with a deep concern about how to improve the affairs of mankind. But he had learned to know that the things you most desperately want are hard to define because they are deep inside you -- the craving for satisfied honor, for the chance to live up to one's prophetic intuition of righteousness, for the requisite bravery at a moment of desperate sacrifice. I make the point here because the great women who have so nobly helped to bear the burdens of a creative peace have had just that outlook upon life. Jane Addams, Marie Curie, Lillian Wald, Mary Simkovitch, Eleanor Roosevelt -- these and so many others have changed the world round about them by manifesting the courtesy and humanity they clung to within themselves. It is the old story of being great by reason of what one is rather than of what one has. It newly illustrates the truth that to him who hath much shall be given.

Perhaps it will help to place before you two less well-known women. The first is Henrietta Szold, born in Baltimore, intellectually gifted, destined finally to become the foremost social worker of modern

Palestine. If the Zionist idea has succeeded, a large measure of the credit must go to this indefatigable woman. Her life, not tranquil or satiated, was spent in great part on those battlements where humanity wrestles against despair for the gaining of vision. But her biographer refers on his last page to a meeting at the village of Ben Shemen, where a little Austrian refugee girl spoke. Turning to Henrietta Szold, she promised: "We will follow the road we have taken, forward and upward. And you will be with us on the road." And what could mean more to any mortal creature at the close of life than knowing that one's spirit will live on in the dream and the doing of youth?

I give you another example. Here in New York there lived a little Italian nun. She was never in the newspapers. Her days were spent tirelessly doing good unto others. But when she died the fame of her strange holiness spread. A boulevard was named in her memory. Soldiers and their mothers, of all creeds, pray to her. And the other day an angry man wandered for no particular reason into her shrine. Suddenly he began to chuckle, to snicker, to hide his face, convulsed with laughter, behind a handkerchief. As he went out, another visitor, somewhat shocked, asked what he thought was so funny in that holy place. The man said, "The wife and I had a quarrel, and I left the house with my mind made up never to step inside it again. Then I happened to pass this place and walked in to cool off. All of a sudden it dawned on me how ridiculous our quarrel had been -- about nothing much at all really, we had just been making fools of ourselves. We looked so funny as I thought of us that I wanted to laugh out loud." "That," said the questioner gravely, "was the influence of Mother Cabrini."

Whether it was, or not, I believe that the effect of great human personalities, of the wise and generous human spirit, on the making of history is of supreme importance. And if this be true, all of you

have something special to try to give your country throughout your lives. We talk constantly these days of the problem of power. By this we mean two things: first, the vast accumulation of mechanical and chemical energy now at the disposition of society; and second, the concentration of political strength to a degree sufficient to insure the harnessing of that energy to social objectives. We who cling to the democratic faith are no doubt aware of crucial difficulties which block the way to an efficient solution of the problem. As we often admit, we muddle through. On the other hand -- and the point has probably not been stressed enough -- Herr Hitler was fascinated by his own analysis of social dynamism. He formed a rough but shrewd estimate of what could be done with the energy available, provided a sufficient concentration of political strength could be effected.

But like many in the records of the past who resemble him, Herr Hitler had absolute contempt for the human beings with whose help, and for whose benefit presumably, the problem of power was to be solved. It was this contempt which ultimately brought the free nations of the earth into the war against him. We need not go into further detail, I think, in order to conclude that any plan like Hitler's is bound to fail because it is a plan conceived against rather than with man. And I think we may likewise conclude that democracy will succeed, if it really can live up to its own faith and so both discover and utilize the resources of human nature. And among those resources none is more important than man's instinctive urge to humanize the world. Wordsworth said that the function of poetry is to make the universe habitable. And I am serious when I say that unless the applied sciences become poetry in this sense man cannot live with them. He will die by them as he is dying now.

Let me illustrate again. A college might have the most scholarly instructors, the finest laboratories, the most effective

system of financial control, the ablest registrar, and still be a wholly dead, dreary and useless place. Only if its teaching comes to life, and only if what are called its guidance services are warm and cordial, can it do anything significant for its students. I have preached to you for four years the doctrine that you must make your college life happy if you wanted to make your education worth while. And happiness is neither a guffaw nor a nap. It is the result of purposive living in the company of others -- not beside them, but with them. And why should we suppose that the state, even a world state, would be a bearable place unless it, too, made for happiness?

I have said these things to you because they seem to be the only things which at present are being ignored. We will win the war, and if we can keep the so-called Four Powers together we can make a peace. A formula for some institution resembling the League of Nations will be found. We shall unearth a solution of sorts for the financial and commercial quandaries which we face. But how can we put some life into these things? Mr. Wallace's remark that the babies of the Hottentots ought to have a pint of milk a day has been hissed from many a gallery. But why wouldn't giving them that be just as epoch-making a step forward as was Florence Nightingale's development of nursing? We are told that if we insist upon doing relief work in the stricken countries of Europe, some Americans may not be able to get all the luxuries to which they are accustomed. But who on earth could term our democracy a living faith unless we sickened at the thought of people starving while we sat grinning and guzzling?

What are we doing when we undertake these things other than what we attempt in daily living if we have learned to live at all? The other day the paper carried a picture of a little French girl placing flowers on the freshly dug grave of an American soldier. What could

she have done to show us more clearly the way we must go? We are called upon to give human significance to the countless young graves which are the price this century has paid once more for the opportunity to be free. The men who lie there will have no dreamless sleep. We say that what is mortal in them has put on immortality. And I would repeat that now not in its loftiest sense but in the lower, earthly one that what they had at stake when the sunrise hour saw them to their death lies upon our future like the shadow of righteousness itself. You who are young, too, must find the mysterious fingers by which their spirits reach out to us, even as the spirit of Henrietta Szold reached out to that of a little Austrian girl at Ben Shemen. Those fingers are not shrewd and hard. They have the text in their hands -- "Tomorrow must be greater than our selfishness." There is suffering they have put away from them, and we remember it because it is so very dear. There are the tears that dried so slowly in their mothers' eyes.

Yet there is something far more important. It is this -- the burning desire that Judith and Mary and Carol, going out from college to live in the greater school of America should remember, as they ride the subways, and dine, and scramble after the gold that buys and buys that there is always a challenging sentry at every crossroad. He says, what light is in your window and what high courage is in your stride? How will you be remembered when the end of the journey comes? And above all have you kept the faith of Salerno and Bataan and the Norman beaches? Or have you decided that cynicism will do nicely and what you can get out of it is only half enough? My dear girls, yours like mine will be a haunted generation. I only hope that the ghosts you see will smile as they speak to you in this the twilight which you may still make the morning rather than the evening of the world.

I do not say that you will find all this either immediately

rewarding or untroubled. Storm and cloud are always approaching the landscape of man. But I am sure you will have a good journey even so. It is our hope that the benediction of Heaven may be upon you always, and that you may know with Masfield that in our best moments we all are

"....gathering as we stray, a sense
Of life so lovely and intense,
It lingers when we wander hence;

That those who follow feel behind
Their backs, when all before is blind,
Our joy, a rampart to the mind."