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HONEST CITIZENSHIP

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

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HONEST CITIZENSHIP

WHEN Paul stood upon Mars' hill and said to the people of Athens (referring to the altar "*To the Unknown God*") "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you," he had a high privilege that comes rarely to men. For an opportunity to proclaim a great fundamental new truth such as Paul declared comes only once in centuries. At Commencement time, however, every speaker is expected to say something new. Yet nothing can be said in a Commencement address that is new to the world or perhaps to the majority of those who hear it. Nevertheless, it is true that there is much that is not new to the world at large which is new to each succeeding graduating class. Therefore, a Commencement speaker is justified in saying *some* things to the young people whose departure is to make a gap in his life, even though what he says may have a little semblance of age and a little flavor of repetition. This is especially true if the Commencement speaker be, as on this occasion, the President of the institution. For the President seldom has the opportunity, for which he constantly yearns, of looking into the faces of the great senior class and exchanging with them some of the confidences that would be pleasing to him and, he hopes, helpful to them. The absence of such opportunities makes doubly welcome that which is presented on Commencement day of saying a few words in a last farewell.

Some of you have been educated, at least we hope you have been educated, to be engineers; some to be agriculturists, among whom I trust there are some farmers; some to be business men; while some have sought what we call a general education in the hope that they would be especially prepared for leadership in the general affairs of life. But whatever calling you may have had in mind in choosing your particular course of study, there is one field of

duty into which you are all launched on graduation, one sphere of activity in which you all will be required to carry on. It is that field of duty, that sphere of activity, commonly described as citizenship; more largely, membership in a community—political, economic, social, and what not. You will be called on constantly to express your judgment on matters concerning the organization and operation of the political machinery that we call government.

This is a democratic republic, or was intended to be. The name means that the government is carried on by the people at large through representatives. The government, as distinct from the people, is a limited sovereignty, although there are theorists and some people in practical life, mainly office-holders, who have been insisting of late years that there can be no such thing as a limited sovereignty and that, therefore, our government, particularly our federal government, may be as autocratic as any old world government that exists or ever has existed. They magnify the state as if it had an existence independent of the will of the people. They enlarge on ideas of what they call society as if there could be a society apart from the individuals composing it; a separate entity or being, so to speak, with a will, power, and authority, all its own, irrespective of the individuals that make it up. In intention, certainly, our government was intended to give operation to the will of the people expressed through representatives chosen by the people, whose business would be to legislate in the interest of the common weal rather than in the interests of particular classes or individuals. They can not reflect and put into operation the will of the people unless the people have definite ideas of what they want done and themselves as individuals have ideals promotive of the common weal rather than of individual or class interests. That this state of affairs has been and is now far from being realized is a matter that deserves some attention.

During the past few years we have heard much about excessive legislation, over-centralization of governmental power in Washington, the impairment of authority of state

and city governments. Only the other day the President of our country lent the great weight of his authority, correctly in my opinion, to a criticism of this state of affairs. He deplored the excessive growth of federal authority and bureaucracy; the tendency of the states to pass over to the federal government the discharge of duties that properly belong to themselves; the alleged increasing disrespect for law; and, in general, not only changes in the form of government tending to weaken it, but a change in the attitude of the people at large towards their duty as citizens. He ascribes the situation to excessive legislation. I venture to think, however, that there is a more deeply-seated cause. I venture to say that all the evils to which he adverted are results rather than causes, and that it is in the ideals and attitude of the individual member of the community that we must seek, not only for the causes of the evils described, but also for their cure. It is to this point that I wish for a few moments to call your attention because as you go out into active life it will rest with you and others like you to cure the evil.

I think it is Herbert Spencer who remarks somewhere that you can not make a perfect society out of imperfect individuals. You can not make a perfect political organization out of individuals who have false notions of what is excellence in political organization. I venture to say that it is the low ideal of the ordinary citizen of the sacredness of political office or political duty, of his own relation to law and government, that is the basic evil of our present situation. It is frequently said that the people get as good a government as they deserve. There is truth in the statement. Certainly, they get the government that they choose. If the government is bad, it is their fault. If their servants who operate the machinery of government are corrupt, it is their fault.

There is a tradition that every American citizen is a sovereign. But "a sovereign can not take tips." Yet in our American life today there is a large number of citizens who are taking tips. In short, it is amazing how many individuals are trying to get through pull and influence

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privileges that other people do not have. I presume that every officer of every public institution is subjected to demands from people to give them opportunities, privileges, that are not given to others. I presume that any state or federal officer could give you numerous illustrations. Even the officers of state universities could give instances. Take the matter of discipline. Everybody agrees beforehand that the same rule should apply to all members of the institution under similar conditions. When, however, several students come up for discipline for the same offence under the same conditions and the rule is applied, immediately there come pleadings for an exception to be made for some individual. It is a fine thing to expel from the University a student who violates the law by being drunk unless it happens to be my boy. Then it is not merely a hardship, but a terrible injustice. It is necessary and fine to have proper standards of scholarship which all shall be required to reach in order to remain in the University and receive its diploma. But the standard is certainly too severe and the officers of the University apply it with great cruelty if my boy, through carelessness, or indifference, or evil conduct, or inability, does not reach the standard set for all and therefore must be eliminated from the University. It is a fine alibi, if I may use the phrase, at the end of the first semester of each year for those who have failed to stay in, to say that the standard has been raised and that "too many are being dropped." There is, in the words of some who "say what they think without thinking what they say," a great slaughter of freshmen.

The state university is a public institution. It belongs to the people. It is worth establishing and maintaining if, and only if, it serves the purpose which the people have in mind in establishing it. This is true of all public institutions. Unless they serve human need they have no excuse for existence. But like other public institutions, universities can not operate without means. The means must be appropriated. Sometimes those charged with making such appropriations do not see the need as do those whose immediate responsibility is the management of the institu-

tion. So some of their fellow citizens lay the matter before them and urge them to make adequate appropriations. Others are unwilling to urge adequate support of a public institution because their sons or daughters have been under the discipline of the university. Some who urge the support of the institution ask the officers of the institution for personal favors for particular constituents in the student body which can not be granted to all in the student body. Jones wants to be told that his daughter will be assured a room in the Woman's Residence Hall in advance of others whose applications are already on file. Jones asks this because he is influential in his community and may be able to influence a vote. Smith speaks a good word for the university. But Smith publishes a paper and thinks he should have some university advertising as a recompense. Brown is a manufacturer of some kind of apparatus or equipment used by the public institutions. He has helped elect Williams to some board and therefore Williams ought to favor him in awarding contracts.

Now the kind of thing of which I have given a few homely illustrations constitutes what I call taking tips. It is the use of public office to give personal favors, or the payment for support of a public officer or institution by giving personal favors. There are more forms of bribery than the handing over of money.

Public office is still a public trust. The authority and resources of a public office or institution may never rightfully be used for private gain or to promote individual purposes, to pay personal debts of any kind. When Louis XI of France abused the hospitality of his host, the Duke of Burgundy, by winning Comines, the so-called great educator, over to treasonable views by flattery, he was bribing the philosopher as much as if he had passed him a handful of gold. Between the two extremes there are many intermediate forms of bribery. Every attempt to get a special privilege for any individual at the public expense is a form of bribery. It is a breach of trust on the part of the officer who is a party to it. It is a betrayal of the ideal of citizenship necessary for every true citizen of a democratic re-

public. For in a democratic republic no citizen should ask for or obtain any privilege or opportunity that is not open equally to all other citizens under similar conditions. We have departed too far from this ideal in our political life. That departure is corruption. Unless it is checked our government of the people can not endure. For in time government will fall into the hands of those who will grant special privileges to those who will keep them permanently in power and assist them in carrying out their own wills irrespective of the will of the people. Corruption breeds corruption. Unbridled competition for privilege, like unbridled competition in business, is bound to fall to the moral plane of the most immoral competitor.

Some tell us that we can not get efficient government in a democracy. But surely we can get honest government if the individual citizens are honest. Some people believe that efficient government is of first importance no matter what the means by which it is attained. In other words, as President Butler has remarked, "there are no doubt those who sincerely believe that the Prussian ideal of organized efficiency is superior to the old American ideal of personal liberty and freedom of initiative in as many fields of endeavor as possible." I do not believe this. "Good government," in the words of Henry Campbell-Bannerman, "is no substitute for self-government." Inefficient self-government in a democratic republic is more to be desired than efficient government imposed upon the people by authority other than their own. You will believe this if you believe that freedom is our most precious possession. You will not believe it if you think that "getting results" is the most important thing in government. Of late years in America it has become fashionable to decry the importance of individual freedom and to emphasize the importance of economic competence, personal comfort, efficiency of governmental machinery.

Class sectionalism is rampant today. It almost seems as if every class in the nation were seeking special privileges and advantages for itself, irrespective of the influence of its action on the general welfare. The evidence of

this is found, among other things, in the number of organizations representing special classes and special interests. They are seeking their own advantage and attempting to control admission to their ranks by excluding others. So we hear of manufacturers seeking special legislation in the interest of manufacturers. We hear of farmers seeking special legislation for themselves. We hear of railroad employees as well as railroad employers advocating special legislation. We are told that organized medicine wants this, that the organization of lawyers wants that, and that the organization of teachers demands something else; all in the interest, not of all of us, but of the teachers and lawyers and doctors and laborers and capitalists and manufacturers, speaking as distinct economic classes rather than as American citizens. This movement is an indication of the growing weakness of individual character, the lessening of individual initiative, the weakness of the sense of individual moral responsibility. It is a substitution of the brute force of mass power for the mightier influence of moral ideals and moral law. You tell me it is necessary. That is precisely the argument of the advocates of war as against peace, of privilege as against law, of authority as against individual responsibility, of force as against the great law of Christian love.

In my opinion, we need a re-emphasis of the importance of individual freedom in a democratic republic—a government of the people, by the people, for the people. But we can not demand a re-emphasis of our personal liberty unless we are ready to carry the responsibilities that personal liberty entails. We want honest and efficient government and the enlargement of our personal freedom of action. We can get both only if, being personally free, we are individually honest, honorable in our dealings in the discharge of our duties as citizens, and have sufficiently high ideals of the character of those duties. As Dr. Hadley has said, "The whole fabric of American society rests on the assumption that we are going to be honest in our dealings." But we are not honest in our dealings with one another in our relations as citizens. We are not true to our

inherited standards. Too many of us are prostituting our great heritage of citizenship for economic advantage, political preference, or social prestige. It is, to be sure, difficult to stand out against this tendency. It is easier to be wrong with the crowd than to be right alone, and some people prefer the former.

The degradation of the standard of personal responsibility and personal character in the discharge of our duties as citizens has led to the practice of trying through legislation to do a great deal for ourselves as individuals or classes that we ought to do without legislation. We know very well that in the long run we can not accomplish the elevation of humanity through any agency other than the minds and hearts of individual men and women. "Our political economy teaches that measures which are intended to make everybody rich often result in making everybody poor. Our history teaches that the hope of elevating humanity by acts of the legislature is apt to prove illusory. Our science, physical as well as political, teaches us to look askance at all attempts to produce radical improvements in the social organism by mere changes in the machinery of government." However, we shall continue undoubtedly to seek to improve the general welfare by these means as long as we do not insist on clean political and business conditions in our own communities and do not keep our own hands free from the dirt of pull and privilege. In short, it is on the awakening of the sense of civic responsibility in the individual citizen that we must rely to remove existing corruption, to give us clean and efficient government, and to insure the perpetuation of the rule of the people. You and I must wash our own hands if we are to insist on similar cleanliness on the part of those whom we elect as our representatives to manage our political organization. We shall not need then to decry the presence of excessive legislation.

You are going out to be not only engineers and what not, but citizens. You will make a mistake, speaking in a large way, if you think that the success of your career, engineering, or agriculture, or what not, is more important

than your success in the discharge of your duties of citizenship. For your continued neglect of the latter will engender a decay in our system of government which surely will overthrow that government, if not within your day, yet in the days of your children or your children's children. Your own economic success will not be a recompense for its destruction. It is important, therefore, that you carry into the discharge of your duties as citizens the same clean conduct, the same standard of duty, the same sense of responsibility, that you will intend to carry into your business or your profession, and that you will make of yourselves as citizens the best that you can make just as you will try to make of yourselves as business or professional men, the best of the kind. I lay that duty upon you as my farewell word at a time in the history of our country when, in my opinion, the danger to popular government is greater than it has been before, because there is peril to honest government and without honest government popular government can not endure.

I bid you go out, therefore, to make of yourselves the best that is in you, not only for yourselves, but for God, for country, and for Illinois.