

*J. Commey  
Ment*

Opening Remarks of the President

June 12, 1937: Degree-Conferring Ceremony

We are met as trustees and faculty, in the company of the graduates, college community, parents, friends and fellow townsmen, to carry through in public the last official decisions leading to the award of the bachelor of arts degree to the second senior class. They have presented themselves here for the purpose.

Our college accepts as one of its functions certifying the abilities of our students for graduate and professional instruction, and for other purposes. The bachelor's degree is such a certificate. Those awarded it are the survivors of a periodic process of selection. They have combined a long period of general education with more concentrated training in one of the important areas of human achievement. They are qualified as useful workers in one of these fields.

It would be disloyal to our educational beliefs, however, to assume undue significance for this certificate as the principal end or aim of our labors together. The qualities and accomplishments of the class here present are not encompassed by the requirements set up for the degree. This college--any college worthy of the name--provides not only instruction; it also offers its students, for a time at least, a way of life. It suggests new habits, new attitudes, new values. It is a place of general growth.

Under the institution's influence young people develop in different ways and at different rates; they begin and they end at widely

different points. Should we attempt to equate them in terms of this broader learning we would condemn ourselves to artificiality or confusion. No stated number of years nor any measuring stick yet devised can assess the development that takes place.

Equally difficult is the attempt to evaluate our particular part in the maturing process of which we have been witness. Back of the college experience lie longer years of schooling, the fundamental, persistent influences of home and family, the subtle but powerful impress of the contemporary environment. Within the four-year span just ending, other agencies, other institutions than those at work on this hilltop have contributed in important ways to the education of these, whom we think of as peculiarly our students. The undergraduates themselves have helped in significant ways to make the institution and the influences under which they have lived. This is uniquely an occasion for the coming together of all those who have been factors in the process of their education to share our pride in their maturity.

It is natural to dramatize this hour as marking a definite stage in the lifelong process of learning. It is false to think of it as a commencement. In college life is lived; it is not pre-existence. Nor is this moment in a real sense culmination. Here for four years the students' experiences, so far as our ingenuity allows, have been contrived so as to be enriching and vitalizing. For the most part they have been day-to-day experiences leaving a gradual residue we later recognize as growth. For the students about to leave us the scene of activity will change. But the experiences and the learning will continue.

If there has been anything stored up for the future it is not primarily the precarious capital of remembered facts, but more fundamentally skill in learning and doing and a continuing desire to learn.

To the communities where these graduates go we commend them. Their presence will yield a modest increment of youthful energy, purpose and competence in fields where many skilled hands and stout hearts are needed for the improvement of our culture.

We shall follow them with interest and affection. We shall be proud of their accomplishment. We shall be disappointed at their failures--their real failures. For the accidents of fortune which masquerade as failure we shall continue to have, I hope, understanding, sympathy and patience. We do not build our hopes, nor encourage theirs, upon the circumstance of falling under the restless, capricious glare of the spotlight called popular success.

Our expectations are in terms of values we have in our life here together agreed upon as enduring. We shall weigh achievement in these terms: honest, useful,--more often than not unobtrusive--work, adaptability, facing of changing realities with humor and sense, the acceptance of responsibility, above all--the maintenance of integrity. These, even more than the natural sentiments of association and friendship, are the continuing and sustaining bonds between us.

---

Will the representatives of the faculty present their recommendations for the award of degrees? - - - - -