

The Degree-Conferring Ceremony--June 15, 1940

Opening Remarks of the President

We are met here again at the spot where nine years ago Bennington College first dug into the soil of Vermont. There are formally assembled in regular session the College Trustees and the College faculty, for the purpose of carrying through in public the last official decisions leading to the award of the bachelor of arts degree to the fifth graduating class. The members of the class have presented themselves.

Less formally there are gathered here the parents, friends and other members of the community to share a common pride and good wishes for this graduating group.

Bennington College accepts as a function certifying the abilities of its 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 process of selection as well as of instruction. 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 major fields.

It would be a mistake to attach undue significance to this certificate as the principal aim or measure of our labors together. The College provides not only instruction; it also offers its students, for a time at least, a way of living. Habits, attitudes, and values are altered. For the four years work and life here, so far as our ingenuity allows, have been contrived so as to be enriching and vitalizing. For the most part it is day-to-day activity leaving a gradual residue we later recognize as growth. The resulting capabilities of the class here present are in no adequate way defined

petence in fields where many skilled hands, trained minds and stout hearts are needed for the maintenance and the enhancement of our common culture.

We shall follow them with interest and affection. We shall be proud of their accomplishments and 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. Similarly, we do not build our hopes or make our judgments upon the accident of popular success or public achievement.

Our expectations will continue to be in terms of the values that in our life together we have agreed upon as enduring. They are: honest, useful--more often than not unobtrusive--work, the acceptance of responsibility, facing changing realities with humor and sense.--Above all, the maintenance of integrity. These as well as the natural sentiments of association and friendship, are continuing and sustaining bonds between us in the difficult days ahead.