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J. L. Morrill

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to be taken for granted. "The college scholar who passes a good  
"Noblesse Oblige"  
has reached no climax of intellectual power," President  
Mr. President, Members of the Graduating Class,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Charles W. Price once wrote in a letter to Owen Wister. "It is  
"Nothing in education is so astonishing," Henry Adams said,  
"as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert  
facts." If this be true, and if an "inert fact" in the brain can  
be compared with an inert pancake in the stomach, it is just possible  
there is some vague feeling of intellectual discomfort among those  
whom we honor on this occasion.

On the other hand, it is well known that the human system has  
a tendency to build up immunity against some forms of persistent  
affliction. This would doubtless explain the remark of former Pre-  
sident Clarence Cook Little of Michigan in deploring the abuse of the  
lecture method in college teaching. "The lecture system", he said,  
"is that process whereby facts are transmitted from the notebook of  
the professor to the notebook of the student without having passed  
through the minds of either."

Notwithstanding these facetious diagnoses, I congratulate you  
upon having attained, at length, to the noble estate of alumniship  
-- for it is a high estate and a worthy one. And I have no sympathy  
with the view once expressed by the distinguished John Jay Chapman  
who shocked a Princeton audience with the outright declaration that  
"the alumni are ignorant, and they delight in it." We may be ignorant,  
we alumni, but we do not delight in it.

Whether we have acquired the habit of "keeping on learning" will  
be the essential test of our college education. This is by no means

to be taken for granted. "The college scholar who passes a good examination. . . has reached no climax of intellectual power," President Charles W. Eliot once wrote in a letter to Owen Wister. "It is by Association, impossible that he should," Eliot said, "because that kind of power -- like athletic force -- should increase in the individual with the lapse of years; and its complete fruition should arrive at forty, fifty, or sixty years of age, and not at twenty-two." The New York Times said recently that "liberal democracy has to face as one of its important problems the fact that a vast majority of college alumni fail to continue their intellectual and spiritual growth after completing their formal studies." "The test of a liberal education," said the Times, echoing Eliot, "is after all not what a young man is at graduation but what the student's breadth of vision is fifteen or twenty years after graduation."

It will give you encouragement, and pride, to know that your own University is one of more than 50 in this country which are regularly conducting educational conferences or institutes or so-called "alumni colleges" to help their graduates in "keeping on learning." The College of Arts and Sciences has been the prime mover in this enterprise at Ohio State. The College of Engineering is considering plans, I am informed, to meet the more specialized technological needs of its graduates for continuing education through an "alumni college" of its own to be held at the June Commencement-time, following the four-year precedent of the Arts College. The Colleges of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine hold post-graduate clinics annually for their alumni. The Colleges of Dentistry and Law have similar plans afoot.

skeptically at the beginning of the sixth Century. "I trust it to be only this: that it imposeth a necessity upon those which are noble, that they should not suffer their nobility to degenerate from the virtues of their ancestors."

This Convocation-Commencement, therefore, need not mean any severance of our connection with your University. You are first of all a member, for one year at least, of the Ohio State University Association, the organization of "the united and useful alumni" with the opportunities that it offers to keep in touch and to serve. Many of you, moreover, will come back to the campus to keep on learning. As you do this, and as the University reaches out to you in the effort to help you accomplish through knowledge and inspiration and encouragement the things you need to do in your work and your leisure, you will have the chance to renew the intellectual enthusiasm which have gripped you in college days, and to know the thrill of new ones. The business of the University is learning, and in our own alumni renaissance of learning we shall come to understand and appreciate the University anew; and will know better how to serve it -- which is the thing that as alumni we really want to do.

There is an old phrase, "Noblesse Oblige" -- from him to whom much is given, much is expected. It comes down to us from an aristocratic age, but its application to the American democracy of this day and to the minority privilege of higher education at public expense will be well understood. And it is ageless in that it appeals to the finest and most generous instincts of human character.

By entering into the "noble estate of alumni ship" you are one among roughly 125 of your fellow-Americans who hold college degrees. In the case of the state university graduate, this privilege and the distinction have been provided at the expense of fellow-citizens, only a small minority of whom have enjoyed the same gift.

"If there be any good in nobility," said Boethius somewhat skeptically at the beginning of the sixth Century, "I trow it to be only this: that it imposeth a necessity ypon those which are noble, that they should not suffer their nobility to degenerate from the virtues of their ancestors."

In a work, noble birth imposes the obligation of noble actions.  
Of the best, the best shall be expected. What, then, can be expected  
of the state university graduate?

Above all, it seems to me, there should be expected an intelligent  
understanding of the place and purposes of the state university in  
American life, and loyalty to those purposes. Not because the state  
university is somehow sacrosanct, or immune from criticism or change any  
more than any other institution of the social order, -- but because it  
is indigenous to America, the peculiar product of American ideals and  
aspirations. The state university, indeed, is America's one distinctive  
and unique contribution to the tradition of higher education in the  
Western World.

Collegiate and university education in this country today is the product  
of three great streams of influence. The first is that of the great  
medieval universities with their intellectual tradition that goes back  
through the centuries to Abelard and his golden glory; to Salerno and  
Bologna, to the University of Paris, coming down more directly to us  
through Oxford and Cambridge in England; and then by inheritance to  
Harvard and the colonial colleges of New England which set the pattern  
from the early liberal arts denominational colleges of the Middle West.

The second was the influence of the great German Universities, of  
Göttingen, Berlin, Breslau, Leipzig, and Bonn, to which a mighty  
pilgrimage of American students and scholars set forth early in the  
19th Century, bringing back with them and pouring into the bloodstream  
of higher education in this country the ideals and techniques of research  
and experimentation, of the laboratory method (almost unknown then in  
America), and of scholarship as specialization in the highest degree.  
grant state universities, of which the Ohio State University is one.

Loyalty to the state university ideal will arise, therefore, from no mere sentimental attachment to the institution which has admitted today's graduates to the noble estate of alumnship. It will arise from the establishment of the University of Virginia. Jefferson, the Great Democrat, was at heart an aristocrat as historians have pointed out. His state university envisioned an intellectual aristocracy, with the most rigid selection of students. His scheme for the state university have been described: first and foremost, that the opportunity of educational advancement should be open to all at public expense; and second, that this opportunity should be open to those who would prepare for the practical vocations of life, not just those who would prepare for the professions or those who, being well off economically, could know."

United States Senator Justin S. Morrill, author of the Act, speaking in 1875 at the Massachusetts Agricultural College, expressed the hopes and purposes of those who saw the need for a new dispensation in higher education.

"These colleges," he said, "were founded on the idea that a higher and broader education should be placed in every state within the reach of those who may choose industrial vocations where the wealth of nations is produced. The design was to open the door to a liberal education for this large class, and to offer not only sound literary instruction but something more applicable to the productive employments of life. The colleges were established on a sure foundation, accessible to everyone, where all the sciences needful for the practical vocations of life may be taught."

Here was a conception to which the American people could respond. It is no accident that far more than half of the student population in the 12 largest universities in America today will be found in land-grant state universities, of which the Ohio State University is one.

Loyalty to the state university ideal will arise, therefore, from no mere sentimental attachment to the institution which has admitted today's graduates to the noble estate of alumniship. It will spring rather from a sympathetic understanding of the philosophy which gave it birth and which has nourished its substantial growth in progressive American democratic society. The well-springs of that philosophy have always been described: first and foremost, that the opportunity of educational advancement should be open to all, at public expense; and second, that this opportunity should be open to those who would undertake the practical vocations of life -- not just those who would prepare for the professions or those who, being well off economically, could

"No state university," says President Lotus D. Coffman of Minnesota, afford the ornament and the privilege of the type of liberal education "could survive in a sheer intellectual emptiness. The state universities offered by the privately endowed colleges at the end of the 19th Century do not reside upon a hill. Their professors do not enjoy a cloistered

"The American state university," said Dr. Norman Foerster in his new book with that title, "has progressively tended to subvert the steadily measuring themselves by the extent to which the life of the people higher interests of American democracy." This it has done, he argues, by whom they are serving has been changed and improved. . . . developing a horde of vocational specialists in place of liberal teachers

"The state universities hold that there is no intellectual service on its faculty; by short-sighted emphasis on the practical at the expense too undignified for them to perform. They maintain that every time they of long-range liberal and ethical training; and by attempting to educate lift the intellectual level of any class or group, they enhance the thousands (of whom you are presumably typical) who are either ineducable intellectual opportunities of every other class or group. They maintain or only passively educable at best. Like President Hutchins of Chicago, that every time they teach any group or class the importance of relying he recommends a rigid curriculum, similar in scheme, if not in content, on tested information as the basis for action, they advance the cause of to the trivium and quadrivium of the Middle ages; and above all a sharp science. They maintain that every time they teach any class or group in selectivity for students" to rake the best geniuses from the rubbish" society how to live better, to read more and to read more discriminatingly, in Jefferson's aristocratic phrase. This attack and the suggested to do any of the things which stimulate intellectual or aesthetic interest

and effort, they thereby enlarge that group's outlook on life, make its members more cosmopolitan in their points of view, and improve their standards of living. Such services as these the state universities would

remedy are typical. They are rooted in the longing for a scholarly but impractical Elysium of a non-existent past; not of the new world in which we live. ~~hat "too many people are going to college."~~ Of some kinds of ~~peopl~~ But it is nonsense, and retreat from reality, to expect that the state university would, if it could, break with the ideals of its actual past or the strong social forces of its present. Universities have always been social agencies, and the state university was expressly created to move out from the ivy-cloistered isolation of the older endowed and somewhat static private institutions to take its vantage point on the very frontier of a swiftly developing social order, strictly native to America and still strongly in flux. ~~said "in many parts of the land, people are troubled~~  
~~by an~~ "No state university," says President Lotus D. Coffman of Minnesota, "could survive in a sheer intellectual empyrean. The state universities do not reside upon a hill. Their professors do not enjoy a cloistered life far from the marts of trade and the madding crowd. They are constantly measuring themselves by the extent to which the life of the people whom they are serving has been changed and improved. ~~diggers. The answer~~  
~~of th~~ "The state universities hold that there is no intellectual service too undignified for them to perform. They maintain that every time they lift the intellectual level of any class or group, they enhance the intellectual opportunities of every other class or group. They maintain that every time they teach any group or class the importance of relying on tested information as the basis for action, they advance the cause of science. They maintain that every time they teach any class or group in society how to live better, to read more and to read more discriminatingly, to do any of the things which stimulate intellectuall or aesthetic interest and effort, they thereby enlarge that group's outlook on life, make its members more cosmopolitan in their points of view, and improve their standards of living. Such services as these the state universities would



not shrink from performing -- indeed would seek to perform."

There is nothing new, -- and nothing true, in the aristocratic lament that "too many people are going to college." Of some kinds of people undoubtedly there are too many: in the colleges, in politics, in business, in the professions and everywhere else. But neither science nor plain common sense has yet produced any infallible test of future capacity and success at the age of 18.

"A high level of generally diffused learning is a presupposition of democracy," the learned Dean Roscoe Pound of Harvard reminded the graduate students at Brown University last June.

"Today," he said "in many parts of the land, people are troubled by an undemocratic and un-American idea that higher learning has been made too accessible and accessible to too many. It is preached that we should restrict the opportunities of everyone to get the best and fullest education he can, for fear there will be too many pressing in the walks of life which call peculiarly for learning and not enough butchers and bakers and candlestick makers, and not enough ditch-diggers. The answer of the American people to this proposition may be seen in the rise of municipal and state universities throughout the land and in the continual provision of university facilities in every important center of population.

"Ignorance plays into the hands of every shallow agitator, every fanatic, every political and economic charlatan on the one side, and on the other side backs up every obstinate reactionary who is fighting a persistent rearguard action against progress. Widely diffused higher learning is the solvent of these things. . . . A little learning is as dangerous in a people as in an individual."

communistic.

The philosophy of the state university is the generous philosophy of opportunity for all -- and who, having come in by the open door, would be so ungenerous as to shut it behind him? equality, not mediocrity --

As alumni in the years to come you will justify the faith of the solid-thinking and generous-minded citizens and taxpayers of Ohio who created this University and who have supported and strengthened it and steadily all these years. They have said, and have taxed themselves to say it, that you should have your chance. And they have done this with two purposes and beliefs.

The first is that every young person is entitled to the fullest development of the best intelligence and capacity that is in him. The second is the belief that the individual thus educated and developed is an asset to his community and to society. He will have, it is believed, a clearer and more sympathetic appreciation of the world in which he lives, a finer and more loyal appreciation of the government which gave him his opportunity -- and he will make thereby a better citizen for the state. Almost every problem seemingly

Only as you have attained to your own best, with the inspiration and assistance of your teachers, and only as you shall make your best contribution, professionally, politically, personally, to the task and the community into which you will go from this day forth -- only in these ways will you meet the high challenge of "noblesse oblige."

Do not misunderstand or misinterpret this American ideal of an educational opportunity for all. You have been neither the beneficiaries of a sultifying dole nor the victims of an academic regimentation designed to turn out puppets for a totalitarian state, fascist or communistic.

"True education," Felix Schelling said, "makes for inequality; the inequality of individuality, the inequality of success; the glorious inequality of talent and of genius. For inequality, not mediocrity -- individual superiority, not standardization, is the measure of progress of the world."

Your education has been the rightful opportunity for free men and women in an enlightened and still developing democracy. A self-sufficiency capable of contributing productively to the social order is the least that can be expected in return.

There is a tendency in these times to expect the millenium tomorrow through the passage of a law; to accomplish the millenium in terms of leveling everybody up by leveling somebody else down; to suppose that some benign bureaucracy can suddenly be endowed with all the answers to problems that the best intelligence of civilized centuries has not yet evolved.

But there is no short-cut to Utopia and no royal road to learning, as your own experience must have taught. Almost every problem seemingly solved opens up new and larger ones to tackle. You have found in college, as you will find in other ways of life and experience, that we take up about in proportion as we put in; that individual abilities and attitudes and achievements cannot be circumscribed within a single scheme.

"It is better to cherish virtue and humanity," said Edmund Burke a long while ago, "by leaving much to free will, even with some loss to the object, than to attempt to make men mere machines and instruments of a political benevolence."

... I read the promise of better times and greater men."

The free will to rise and achieve, through education, is the genius of the American philosophy, and to cherish the opportunity for such achievement is the commitment of the American state university.

Let me leave with you the thought of a great American; one who saw education as the instrument of high ethics and of citizenship; one who, in his imperishable essay on "The American Scholar", shocked the recondite intellectuals of his day by the bold appeal to put scholarship at work on the problems of the present. Speaking to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge in the troubled Reconstruction days that followed the Civil War, Ralph Waldo Emerson uttered a challenge which still holds appropriate and significant meaning for the graduates of a state university in these times. Here is what he said:

"It is plain that a cultivated laborer is worth many untaught laborers; that a scientific engineer with instruments and steam is worth many hundred men, many thousands. . .

"Yours is the part of those who have received much. It is an old legend of juse men, Noblesse Oblige; or, superior advantages bind you to a larger generosity. Here you are set down, scholars and idealists, as in a barbarous age; amidst insanity, to calm and guide it; amidst fools and blind, to see the right done; among violent proprietors, to check self-interest, stone blind and stone deaf, by considerations of humanity to the workman and to his child; amongst angry politicians swelling with self-esteem, pledged to parties, pledged to clients, you are to make valid the large considerations of equity and good sense; under bad governments to force on them, by your persistence, good laws.

"I cannot distrust this great knighthood of virtue, or doubt that the interests of science, of letters, of politics and humanity are safe. . . I read the promise of better times and greater men."