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OUR DEBT TO ROME, GREECE, AND JUDEA ¹

IN the course of the baccalaureate address delivered with-
in these classic precincts last year, Dr. Stockton Axson
of the Rice Institute made this weighty utterance: "All
that has been learned in all the centuries concerns you, even
you, contains some guiding matter for you, even you. Not
to discard the past, but to understand it more deeply is part
of your work. With all of your present equipment you
cannot without disaster jettison the past". And a former
member of the Rice faculty, Dr. Lindsey Blayney, recently
reasserted this thought by saying: "Our disinclination, or
inability, to let the clear light of human experience of a long
past illuminate our acts of the present . . . is responsible
for much of the unrest and disregard for the higher things
of life from which we are today suffering".

With such pregnant words as our text and with the con-
viction that "It takes a lifetime to understand that the future
is only the past entered by another door", we recall the
fact that the three greatest nations of antiquity were the
Romans, the Greeks, and the Hebrews, and it will be valu-
able for us to realize what were the qualities, the virtues,
and the characteristics which made these three nations so
preëminently great. So, today let us consider what were the
legacies which these three nations bequeathed to us moderns.
And first the Roman.

¹ Baccalaureate sermon of the eleventh annual commencement of the Rice Institute, preached by Rabbi Henry Barnston, Ph.D., of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas, in the academic court, at nine o'clock Sunday morning, June 6, 1926.

What a wonderful history is his. How did he succeed in laying the largest portion of the then known world at his feet? By what genius did he successively triumph over the courageous Samnites and the warlike Carthaginians, the effeminate Syrians, and the virile Teutons, the ultra-civilized Greeks and the ultra-barbarous Goths? By dint of the qualities which were preëminently his own—belief in discipline, respect for order, reverence for law, unselfish citizenship, and sterling patriotism. Or, to sum up all these qualities in a single word, by his splendid loyalty. That is Roman culture.

Until the republic of Rome commenced its career on the downward grade, nothing in history is more admirable than the demeanor of the Roman citizen towards the State. Never did his beloved country beckon to him in vain. No matter what office he was called upon to hold, no matter what dignity his country required him to assume, no matter what inconvenience was thrust upon him, the Roman was ever ready, aye, ready. Cincinnatus leaves his plow to assume the dictatorship with as great a readiness as Cicero leaves the philosophical school to become a simple quaestor, and mark this point, for it is the Roman's greatest glory, it was his pride to return to civil life, poorer than when he left it, just as was the case with our own statesman, James Stephen Hogg. It is solely to this wonderful disinterested loyalty, to this noble self-effacement that the invincibility of the race was due. By dint of his loyalty the Roman prospered, conquered, governed. The Romans were law-giving because they were law-abiding. They were conquerors because they first conquered themselves. They were preëminently masterful because they were unshakably loyal. They marched triumphantly from victory to victory because they believed in and consequently were amenable to disci-

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pline, and Marcus Curtius hit the nail on the head, when he plunged into the great abyss, with the words: "Rome possesses nothing more precious than her citizens". What then the Roman preëminently stood for is pithily summed up in the celebrated sentence: *Fiat Justitia ruat coelum*. Let Justice be executed though the Heavens be crushed into fragments. For the Romans realized that the State's welfare rests primarily upon Justice. Do you think we need to be infused with the Roman spirit? Is there any occasion for us, a free people, to respect authority and law, order and discipline? There is. And unless we make up our minds to the necessity we shall decline. I know full well that many of us do not believe in discipline. We wish to go our own way, in our own way, for we are impatient of authority. But that is the attitude of mind which produces Leopolds and Loeb's and Dorothy Ellingsons. Lack of discipline it is which makes us break our word, scamp our work, ignore our appointments and prevaricate about our wares, for it implies an absolute indifference towards the feelings of our fellowmen who exist for us only to carry out our own whims. To check such an abomination we need reverence for law and order, respect for authority, a faith in discipline, loyalty to our constitution, more than anything else.

I don't believe in the unwritten law. If it is a man's duty to kill another man whom he finds breaking up his home, let us not be ashamed to say so and put it in our statute book. If it is lawful for a man to shoot another man because he sees him reaching in his pocket perchance for a handkerchief to blow his nose, then let us be honest enough to say so and not skulk behind a hedge, which we call self-defense.

Present conditions are anarchical, and one day there will be a terrible upheaval if law is honored more in the breach

than in the observance. In the time of the Judges every man did that which seemed right in his own eyes, and this anarchy culminated in the annihilation of the whole tribe of Benjamin. The history is too sordid to be told from this platform, but you can read it for yourselves in the last chapter of the book of Judges.

The Roman is always held up as the ideal of good citizenship because he was ever prepared to make self-sacrifices on behalf of his State. Are we prepared to make such sacrifices? I am told that should the occasion arise, volunteers would flock in. But procrastination is the thief of time and to postpone constantly is almost a fatal policy. Says the Ethics of the Fathers: "Say not, when I shall have leisure, I shall do. Peradventure thou never wilt have leisure"; and another adage runs thus: "In a place where men are lacking, strive thou to be a man", and sometimes being men we feel that we must voice an unpopular cause.

I think the words of such national anthems as "The Star-Spangled Banner", "The Marseillaise", and "Rule Britannia" should be revised because they are jingoistic, bombastic, and militaristic. Nevertheless, I believe every citizen should give some years to his country as a soldier, not to fight mythical enemies at the other end of the world, but to defend his land from aggressors, to fight fires, storms, pestilences, vice, to dig from the bowels of the earth, reclaim swamps, and do any such work for which he may be best adapted. I believe we shall always need Roman discipline, but I hope we have outgrown Roman imperialism with its slogan of "Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost". And it is just because we are free men that the duty devolves upon us to prove by our lives that liberty is an unalloyed blessing, but license an unmitigated curse, and

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we can best do that by taking the ancient Roman as our model. Before we can have international peace, we must have national fellow feeling, and this can only be obtained by respect for law and loyalty to the constitution.

But we need other virtues besides that of loyalty, important and indispensable as the latter quality undoubtedly is. There is, it is true, the majesty of the law, but there is also the law of majesty, the law of beauty, the law of congeniality. It would be a sorry world if we went through life prating of nothing but duty and loyalty. We wish occasionally to turn to the brighter and lighter sides of human nature and for this we must turn to the Greeks.

The Greeks have endowed us with taste, culture, refinement. They have presented us to nature. They have reproduced the work of God's hand in marble and stone. They have introduced to an astonished world the marvelous resources of the tongue and the pen. Perhaps the most important contribution of all, they have clearly demonstrated the priceless value of a healthy body. And it is as Hillis says: "It was when the gymnasium had made each Athenian youth an Apollo in health and strength that the feet of the Greek race ran most swiftly along the paths of art and literature and philosophy".

Only think what we can learn from the Greek about the employment of our leisure time. The twin American vices are hurry and worry, and it is the hurry which is responsible for the worry. How many plain folks would to-day listen to Bergson if he discoursed on his philosophy on Fifth Avenue? Yet we know Socrates never lacked his following in Athens. The exquisite literary style of the Greek historians, poets, and philosophers is due to the fact that they could afford to take time over their compositions. And these Greeks were on the whole all-round men. Their

schools prepared them for a life, rather than for a living. Their philosophers could discourse on athletics and their athletes on philosophy. They were determined in Goethe's phrase "Resolutely to live their lives in their totality of beauty and goodness".

But what, after all, are we to learn from a study of Greek life? A great deal. We can read about the manners of this nation of antiquity and observing the good traits in their character can take them as a model for the cultivation of personal refinement. I mean, not that artificial refinement which is an obsession to some people who size up a man by the cut of his clothes, but that sterling refinement which is displayed in every word of conversation, in every movement of the body, in every thought of the heart, and which evinces itself in the purity, delicacy, grace, and sensitiveness of every truly cultured person's life. Mere scholarship will bring a man nowhere unless accompanied by that innate refinement which should be the first fruits of learning. Read and compare the lives of two Victorian literary giants, Alfred Tennyson and Oscar Wilde, to see how true that is. Tennyson leads us to the heights of Parnassus, Wilde drags us to the depths of Inferno, simply because Wilde's refinement was only on the surface, while Tennyson's permeated his every word, thought, and action. Further, we have to follow the Greek model by training our eye for beauty and cultivating simplicity, by occasionally spending an hour upon the paintings, models and engravings of the great masters. Such study will lead us to steel our nerves so as to protect ourselves against the hideous caricatures of ancient architecture and the barbarous blendings of style and color which deface our modern cities. To-day many of us stand in grievous need of a sense of proportion, symmetry, and harmony. Our lives are disorderly because

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our culture and civilization are full of shams and many of our artistic products lack sincerity and simplicity. Plato gave us a great saying when he declared that the True, the Good, and the Beautiful were identical. In my humble opinion our canned music and potted plays are demoralizing our characters and dehumanizing our lives. Let me give a practical illustration. Why should we continue to destroy the tastes of our children by placing the hideous illustrated supplements of our papers in their hands? Why not give them genuine illustrated papers. And if we buy our children a victrola, is it not just as pleasurable and infinitely more profitable for them to have classical records than jazzy airs? Let us try to direct the steps of our children along the paths of beauty, sincerity, and simplicity. One could say much of the exaggerations we use in our ordinary speech, of the excessive use of cosmetics by millions of people, of the over-indulgence in senseless amusements, of overdress and overadornment, of the childish overemphasis placed upon mere population in our growing cities, as if the worth of a city depended upon the number of noses it contained. But sufficient has been said to show how a little more of the Greek spirit would help us in our lives.

And so we learn from the Greeks that sincerity and simplicity are the warp and the woof of true culture and refinement. Shams and artificialities were abhorrent to the Greek's sense of simplicity and proportion. When we think of the Parthenon at Athens we quite naturally associate it with absolute architectural perfection. Why? Because, when the Greeks built the temple their instinct for precision kept them from making one part of it too large in proportion to another, or from adding adornment in the wrong place. For the same reason the South End Junior High School is the noblest building in Houston. The

Greeks teach us that the more we cultivate our sense of beauty, of simplicity, of symmetry, and sincerity, the more worth while shall we make our lives.

We have then both to Romanize and Hellenize ourselves. We have to revere our flag, our country, and our constitution, and we have to banish the ugly and unesthetic from our lives. So closely have the threads of loyalty, beauty, justice, and refinement to be interwoven that it will be no longer possible to disentangle them from each other. A few moments ago I said that if there was the majesty of the law, there was also the law of majesty. The majesty of the law is Romanism. The law of majesty is Hellenism. Let me now add that if there is a duty of happiness, there is also a happiness of duty. The duty of happiness is Hellenism, the happiness of duty is Hebraism. The Jew never believed there could be absolute physical grace where there was any moral disgrace. See what a picture the Bible draws of Absalom: "But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." But in the very next chapter the historian does not fail to remind us that this same handsome man stole the hearts of the men of Israel, rebelled against his own father, and came to an ignominious end.

The ancient Hebrew was the incarnation of religion. Aye, even in idolatry, it was really the spiritual side of his nature that asserted itself. And his religion fathered his legal code, his esthetic code, his moral code. A trifle gloomy you think. That depends upon our frame of mind when we consider the subject. Narrow and unesthetic? Yes, if we make it so. A cult for simple-minded people. Then place the world's greatest among the simple-minded. Those who never feel the urgent call of the soul think every

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man who is grateful to his God is a hypocrite or a fanatic. They find it inconceivable how any one can have faith and jokingly tease him about his getting religion, with a sly reference to the gymnastic feats of the colored sister when she is "under the spell". Little do they know that the very greatest men of all times were most emphatically men of faith. Neither do those who scoff at religion realize what their secularist theories lead to, but I will tell you. They lead to anarchy. Trusts and strikes and unjust tariffs and assassins' daggers are all the offspring of secularism; the doctrine of irresponsibility, of not being answerable to a higher being for our actions is the curse of the age. The secularists would reject the Bible. They claim it is no longer to be taken seriously. Stop a moment. Consider whom they have to reject alongside of the Bible: Herbart and Bunyan and Milton, Haydn and Handel and Mendelssohn, and Spohr, Michelangelo and Rubens, and scores more of intellectual giants whose aspiration was found in the Book of Books. We cannot blink our eyes to the fact that all around there exists an intense secularism, a scoffing at piety and an indifference to morality. We can indeed partly account for this in the fact that for centuries the great motive powers of the universe, steam and electricity, lay dormant. Then suddenly came human brains and harnessed these powers for the benefit of humanity. That God exists in the machinery wheels, that it is the divine intellect which has made these invaluable gifts to the world, is never for a moment dreamt of by the thoughtless crowds. They only see the apparently limitless powers of the human mind and so come to denying the existence of a superior being. "I cannot believe that an all-wise and all-merciful God would allow the good to suffer and the wicked to enjoy", says the secularist. In reply Hebraism sends forth her message of

faith. Neither reason nor science can solve all your physical or spiritual problems. Only faith can do that, only a full realization of Pope's immortal line: "It is but a part we see and not the whole". Nor need faith be unreasonable. I was recently struck by a few sentences from Harold Begbie's novel, "The Great World". "It is difficult to believe that unintelligent forces of nature develop mind, but it is not so difficult to believe that mind brought these natural forces into existence. Therefore, it is easier to believe in God than not to believe in God. Begin with mind, not with matter." And further: "The most striking quality of evolution is direction. It moves intelligently. Whatever else wanes and ebbs, knowledge increases, man is growing in knowledge. His mastery over nature increases. But to grow in knowledge without growing in goodness is obviously dangerous. Mastery over nature without mastery over oneself leads to destruction. Therefore, the moral order is essential to evolution. Evolution, in fact, is governed by a moral principle". And life too must be governed by a moral principle, for a life that has not religion for its basis is a wasted life. That is the message which Hebraism brings us. That is the word for the fulfillment of which thousands have been placed upon the rack and torrents of blood have been shed. But you may object: "Your picture of the message which Hebraism brings us is painted in very somber hues". But that again depends upon the point of view you take. If you think religion is a synonym for sadness your view is not mine. David dances before God's ark and says: "Serve the Lord with joy", "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord". It has been said that a Roman's face was typical of vigorous courage, a Greek's of refined sensuousness, a Christian's of divine sadness. I would amend the last word

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into joyousness. A religious man's face should be typical of divine joyousness.

We, however, stand upon safer grounds when we compare the characteristics of the three languages, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew: the Latin, terse, intense, vigorous; the Greek euphonious, picturesque, sensuous; the Hebrew, grand, rugged, sublime; and the respective characteristics of the three languages admirably sum up the qualities of the three races. Likewise we learn from the evangelist John that the inscription over the cross was written in three different languages, representing the most cosmopolitan nationalities of the time, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Perhaps we in the United States represent the most cosmopolitan nationality of the present day, made up as we are of practically every nationality upon the globe. What we have to do is to make an effort to assimilate the virtues of the different nations and eradicate their vices. But this is only to be done by forming friendships—friendships irrespective of race or creed. In order to prepare ourselves for this noble work we have forthwith to try and raise ourselves mentally, morally, and spiritually. I have pointed out to you the sources from which we may draw. Says Hillis: "Wake up a man's ideas of freedom and he fashions new laws, wake up taste in a man and he beautifies his home, wake up conscience and he drives iniquity out of his heart".

Rome, Greece, Judea—loyalty, culture, faith. Graduates, let us clothe ourselves in these virtues. Let us blend them into one glorious harmonious unity. Let us Hellenize our religion by looking well to the beauty and adornment of God's house and of God's acre. Let us Hebraize our tastes by consecrating God's beauties upon God's altars. Let us Romanize our taste and our faith by loyalty to our constitution, our beautiful traditions, and our God. Let us

try to blend in our own nature that *Kalokagathía*, that wonderful combination of beauty and goodness which typifies the perfect life, and "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands, establish Thou it".

HENRY BARNSTON.