TO THE GRADUATING CLASS - 1926

THE CONFLICT IN MODERN THOUGHT

I congratulate you upon the completion of your college life, and upon reaching this goal, your graduation. Your present achievement warrants you in leaving the University with a firm faith in your personal ability to succeed in the tasks you are about to undertake. I entreat you never to lose that faith.

You may hear it said on every hand that student life and student relationships are not what they should be, and the saying is doubtless true. Along whatever path you may go in life you will hear a similar criticism -- that human life and human relationships are not what they should be. And you will find that saying true. After all, if things were as they should be what would any of us have to do? You go into a world that is still young, a world which, in spite of its material development bears every trace of mental, moral, and spiritual youth and immaturity. Along the way, you will meet many who have lost faith in the future of the world and of humanity, but I trust that none of you will ever join the fraternity of Doubt.

Your attention is called to the fact that our thought-world today is filled with cross-currents and complexities. Some of you, I fear, have only skimmed the surface and hence will furnish additional data to those adverse critics who are
On the other hand, I should not advise you to boast of your conservatism, because among the thoughtful today there are few who would wish to see the present crystallized. The change that seems most imminent is one that is moving in the direction of a better life for all humanity. It is being advocated by those who believe that our chief task in this life is the development of an ever higher type of manhood and womanhood. Hence, for your own life, whatever the difficulties, you cannot make a mistake by striving to be the best man or woman that it is possible for you to be.

To this end you should direct your physical life in order that you will have adequate strength and the best health possible. You should select your friends with such care and discrimination that you may have the best friends possible. Then continue the development of your mind so that you will be able to think the best thoughts possible, and finally guide your actions into those channels which will insure your doing your very best under all circumstances. In all things, if you seek to follow the path that leads to the highest and best, you may exemplify in your life the higher standards of manhood and womanhood, and thus honor your family, your University, your state and nation, and humanity at large.

These are my closing words to you. I extend my very best wishes to each one of you.
saying that American college life is shallow and superficial. Others, I trust, have gone deeper and come to a real knowledge of the complex intellectual environment which is ours. During the Middle Ages all thoughtful men seemed to share a common view regarding the universe, and a united judgment as to what constituted the good life. But our modern age seems to be filled with conflicting attitudes of mind toward science, toward religion, toward economic and social questions, and toward national and international problems and policies.

I think it is not incorrect to say that ancient and medieval thought separated the real from the ideal by locating the ideal off in another world. It is the burden of modern thought to seek to unite the real with the ideal here in this world. And so we have many philosophies, many religions, many doctrines of one kind and another, all with their adherents, and the result is much confusion. It is your heritage, and you cannot probe into such a complex thought-world without some confusion, doubt and uncertainty, and it may be that some of you have encountered skepticism and even pessimism.

It is not necessary for you to think you are a radical or a "red" every time you embrace a new idea. You will in all probability discover later that the idea was not new to thinking men and women. Some young people believe they are radical when they disagree with their parents, but I assure you that this has been a habit of youth in all ages, and it is for this reason about the most conservative thing you can do.