THE COLLEGE GRADUATE AND HUMAN VALUES

Perhaps the most characteristic element in what we term modern civilization is the advancement of the material, political, social, and cultural well-being of mankind. This advancement has come about through the realization of certain outstanding human values which people have regarded as of sufficient importance to struggle to attain. At a time when our material values seem to be disintegrating and declining, we may, if not with profit, with consolation at least, attempt an appraisal of these and other human values. Professor Parker, of the University of Michigan, has recently listed these values as follows: self-preservation, pleasure, ambition, workmanship, love, knowledge, play, art, and religion, with a fundamental notion of justice or morality underlying all of them. Such a list may be modified to suit the individual student, but in any event most appraisers of human values would probably agree that broadly speaking they can all be classified under the heads, material, political, social, and cultural.

In thinking of how we may realize these values today, we naturally ask, how have they been realized in the past? And the answer, as far as western civilization is concerned, seems unmistakably clear. They have been realized, never perfectly be it admitted, very largely through the contributions of science, democracy, and education -- science in making possible the multiplication of human comforts and the enlargement of human activities; democracy in seeking to give voice to the wishes of the many; and public education working to extend its benefits to all.

Today skepticism concerning the efficiency of science, democ-
racy, and education as vital factors in human progress is prevalent, much of which is due, in my opinion, to unsound predictions and somewhat fanciful dreams of a generation or more ago setting forth the magic-like power of this social trinity to transform human society. People who, relying too much on material values, expected a millenium are doubly disgruntled and disillusioned by a depression. Only a few years ago, through an extension of the principle of democracy in the form of self-determination of peoples, we were engaged in a war to end all war and had visions of an international millenium of peace.

Science is under a cloud just now because its machinery has been so much multiplied in industry that an ever decreasing number of people are necessary to produce the goods which we are using. Democracy with its numerous inefficiencies has lost many supporters, who being devotees of the efficiency of the machine would like to see such efficiency realized in government in some form of dictatorship, while public education has great difficulty in proving its long-term values when the public mind is temporarily absorbed with unbalanced budgets, and mounting taxes.

The type of thinking which could heretofore embrace crude prophecies of social millenia now reveals a tendency to accept the depression as proof of the failure of all of our social institutions. Having listened for a generation to the astrologers of perpetual prosperity, we seem doomed for another generation to hear wailing divinations of an eternity of depression.
In what sense, let us ask, has science and the so-called machine age failed? Only in this sense, that it has not fulfilled the conditions spoken by certain would-be prophets who thought they knew in advance what science would do for society. One who believed that science would make all rich and none poor in the short space of twenty-five or fifty years is now quite naturally very much disappointed with science. Science has been able to show the technical possibility of abolishing poverty, but it could not overcome deep rooted antagonisms in class, religion, nation, and race in a short time. It has taught us how to create new plants and animals, but to modify the order of human beings aided by all of the new technique in psychology, government, and economics will take more time. We aren't likely, I think, to destroy the machine which science has made and revert to more primitive ways of living, but I believe it is likely that we shall see destroyed a blind faith in the magical power of the machine to redeem society, and the result will be beneficial.

The guiding principle of democracy is that not a few men, but every man, shall have a voice in government, and shall have the right to resist injustice and abuse in whatever form it may appear. Although this principle has not yet been established, it must not be confused with certain wishes, dreams, and prophecies of a political paradise just around the corner. People accustomed to envision such an emotional utopia are, of course, disappointed with democracy and ready to espouse the cause of a dictatorship either Fascistic or communistic. But the more thoughtful and hence more patient will
probably bear with many more inefficiencies and weaknesses in democracy before surrendering to a dictator no matter how efficient, because they have not yet seen enough of that outstanding human experiment which seeks to establish the right of every individual to oppose wrong and injustice. Indeed this right may yet prove of infinitely greater value to humanity than any temporary efficiency.

Public education has not made a perfect citizenship nor has it given us any immediate hope of a perfect society, but it has in the for example, United States given us already about ten times as many college trained young people in proportion to population as can be found in the most advanced nations of Europe today. If science and democracy can make just claims for credit in raising the material and political levels of men then education can with equal justice claim to have advanced their social and cultural levels, and this surely enough to claim for it.

But we want to know how to appraise and how to realize human values today, with economic depression, overproduction, unemployment, crime, high taxes, and all the rest of the glaring imperfections of our present social order. And at once we are met with comments tinged with prophecy about capitalism, socialism, and communism which are rapidly supplanting in conversation and in literature the place held for a decade almost unchallenged by sex and alcohol. We have probably heard the last of the rebellious critics of the industrial order of a generation ago -- the Reeds, Andscons, Durants, and Cartels. Many of us have at least learned to accept the
fact that we are children of the scientific and industrial order and have settled down to the task of adjusting that order to the whole field of human relations. The machine doesn't care what you say about it, although it has taken some of my college generation half a lifetime to learn this fact. We are on the road to greater knowledge of how to realize human values when we accept calmly the facts of human environment. Earnest efforts to appraise capitalism, socialism, and communism in relation to human values are it is my contention that most commendable, and the sincere student of the economic problems of today must judge these systems by the degree to which they are capable of contributing to human values.

If we meditate seriously upon self-preservation, pleasure, ambition, workmanship, love, knowledge, play, art, and religion, or any other list of human values, we will discover that some of them are stressed far more by some people than by others. Humanity has not yet placed any uniform appraisal on these values. Hence when we discuss capitalism, socialism, or communism, we should always keep in mind this variation in the standards of human values. As a general rule economic systems and political systems too, for that matter, are not changed suddenly. The uprooting of one and the immediate transplanting of another very rarely take place. In this country we are most familiar with capitalism, the dominant economic philosophy under which our nation has developed, with its virtues to be commended and its vices to be deplored. We know that it has been modified, especially in the last twenty-five years, and we confidently expect and hope that it will undergo many changes in the
near future, changes that will grow out of our own traditions with possibly meager importations, and that will conform to our standards of human values. The student of social science of today must not commit the errors of a generation ago by accepting shallow prophecies as to the future of human society. He must recognize that as yet it is exceedingly difficult if indeed not altogether impossible to foretell events in human relations. He must give more heed to scientific planning for the immediate future and less heed to the prophets of far-away human perfections. This is true whether we study conditions of local, national, or international scope. The student of human values in our present social order must first of all know the facts. Disregarding every form of false propaganda he must comprehend what is actually happening now in his state, his nation, and in the world. The number of those who really understand what is taking place in these depression years is altogether too small.

For a casual glance at what is happening in our country alone we may for convenience turn to the American Yearbook for 1931. The record of the amount of work done by American scientists in that brief year is almost unbelievable. Mathematicians, astronomers, physicists, chemists, biologists, medical experts, engineers, and technologists proceed with their scientific research without waiting for the depression to pass, and probably preparing for new depressions in the future. In any event, changes will inevitably result from their incessant labors.
Governmental activities of community, state, and nation are shown in general to be multiplying and growing ever more expensive if not more efficient. North Carolina, Georgia, and a few other states record significant consolidations resulting in unusual economies in both state and local government, with more intelligent and less archaic systems of taxation. May these examples multiply in 1932.

The story of organized bootleggers, crime gangs, racketeers, robbers, murderers, and kidnappers occupies too much space in our annual record, sharply reminding us that many things must be changed before our American life attains the level which good judgment and self-respect demand.

The scope of American foreign relations in the year 1931 is
gigantic. To the activities of our far-flung foreign service is added our negotiations regarding foreign debts, World Court, disarmament, and many others. The record is not yet complete either for the imperialist or for the internationalist. The Lausanne Conference is upon us with its probable new lessons as to our relation to a world economy.

The record of American life in 1931 should be studied in the light of its vast possibilities for the larger realization of human values both at home and abroad. This study gives little encouragement to those who rely on the doctrine of prosperity for the few and material insecurity for the many. The total picture to one whose mind is sensitive to human values reveals a host of good things that are being done, and a still greater host of things yet to be accomplished. It is a story that appeals with power that should move to action every educated man or woman who realizes that over and above all temporary questions of the machine age or of the depression there arise the endless questions of an endless human age in a day when the greatest human values of all time are striving for realization.

In making such a study we are shocked by the inefficiencies of democratic government, by the admitted failure of justice in our industrial system in our political practices and in our organized crime movements, by the intellectual and moral inadequacies in leadership, and by the indifference of the multitudes of followers. But we would not be shocked by present conditions unless we still retained within us that deep sense of justice and morality which has been basic to the realization.
of human values in all ages. The possession of this conception of justice is vastly more important than any temporary question regarding production, distribution, or unemployment.

Listening to the fears and forebodings of some of our leaders today, one might be led to believe that the loss of economic equilibrium and political stability spells the absolute ruin of society. But we must remind ourselves that human intelligence is still our human heritage. Those to whom money has been more precious than mind will not and cannot be expected to lead us out of the depression or into justice and human values. The human mind, which evolved science, democracy, and education along with all the human values we have attained or can visualize is still with us — our only competent guide in this or any future crisis. We have moved on from the poverty and squalor of the past, from the fire, torture, quartering, and guillotine of earlier times, from the degradation of justice and ignorance of human values of witchcraft and slavery in more recent days. To those who place their faith in human intelligence, neither the economic depression nor the social unrest nor the political turmoil of these present days are symbols of catastrophe and defeat. They will rely very little on social prophets or on political prognosticators. They will not seek to foretell the future of science, education, and democracy or of any other agency or institution of the social order. They will demand the facts of every situation minus demagoguery and prophecy, and array those facts on the side of enlightened human interest and human values.

Those with faith in human intelligence are becoming impatient
with an economic, social, and political leadership which embraces the findings of science as applied to material development, but which proclaims its faith in traditional and archaic doctrines of human relations originating in the eighteenth century before the advent of the industrial revolution. Such leadership is still powerful in human affairs and constitutes the greatest single obstacle to national and world recovery. Our troubles are real, not imaginary; they are exceedingly complex, and there is no easy road to their solution. They will yield to the untiring efforts of human intelligence alone, and it is utterly futile to rely on anything else.

As a suggestion to the members of this graduating class concerning the attitude which should characterize your personal efforts towards success in realizing human values, the only type of success worthy of the efforts of an educated person today, I think I can do no better than to enumerate five elements in the definition of culture recently given out by the American Association for Adult Education as follows: (1) openness of mind; (2) objectiveness of attitude; (3) a sensitive appreciation of human values; (4) an original point of view or philosophy of life; (5) a development of the possibilities of the human being.

A brief interpretation of each of these five elements follows:

Openness of mind tends to discourage dogmatic opinion and finality of decisions on all questions. For example, those with open minds freely admit that they do not know what the final goal of human society is to be. But an open mind does not require the denial of the reality of those values for which all humanity is struggling.
Objectiveness of attitude encourages cool and clear thinking on subjects so often clouded by an emotionalism growing alone out of custom and tradition.

A sensitive appreciation of human values is destructive of that narrow, blind worship of wealth and material prosperity which has been and still is the greatest single handicap to the realization of our best and noblest ideals in this country.

An original point of view or philosophy of life represents our most outstanding personal achievement and furnishes a chart for our conduct in practically all human relations. It is a chart that by its very nature can guide adequately only the life that makes it. This chart for some leads through doubt to pessimism and despair, for others through faith to optimism and great joy, but for most of us perhaps it leads to some of those innumerable attitudes which intervene between the two extremes of joy and despair. Neither the inability satisfactorily to settle all questions relative to human origin and destiny, nor the uncertainty of final realization of all plans for human perfectibility should dull our sense of the importance of present human values. Perhaps the most challenging view of this life or of any other form of life to come is found in the simple and yet sublime philosophy that it does not yet appear what we shall be. With this philosophy and accepting as real the values we at present strive to attain, there is every reason, it seems to me, why we should seek to live always at the highest possible level of human existence.

If, then, we believe that all other men, as well as we, should
have the opportunity to live at the highest level of which they are capable, we will not deny to any class or race of men the right and the opportunity to develop all the human possibilities which lie within them.

These are the qualities of mind which characterize the cultured individual, and I trust that every one of you will seek to possess them in a high degree. They are the present fruits of science, democracy, and education whose final fruition has not yet come. In you and in many thousands of other graduates throughout the land chiefly rests our faith in the future evolution of these qualities of mind and heart and their effectiveness in the realization of present and future human values.

While I do not particularly cherish it, I cannot escape the view that life, in a personal sense and for society as a whole, is a struggle in which we are often tempted to the lower levels, "as some men standing on the edge of a cliff feel a desire to throw themselves below". Perhaps for most of us "the way down" has its lure only because of the roughness and struggle of the "upward way". But the upward way also has its lure; it is the way that leads to ever higher human values.