TO THE CLASS OF 1938

Twenty-five years ago it was said of college graduates that they did not understand the world off the campus. As a member of the class of 1913, after twenty-five years I am able to reply to the critics that their knowledge of that world also had its limitations.

Through loud speakers and screaming headlines you have heard about the outside world during your college days. You have listened to rude shouts sounding out across international boundaries charging treaty-breaking, aggression, tyranny, and anarchy. You have read violent charges and counter-charges which are headlined in the daily news depicting the struggle between those advocating different treatments for our social, economic, and political ills.

Yet there is unmistakable evidence that knowledge and understanding are inadequate in quarters outside academic halls, and an occasional expression of doubt about the existence of omniscience on college campuses.

In your efforts to understand the issues of the moment in national and international life, you will find it helpful to ignore those who shout at you, while giving heed to those who speak calmly in subdued tones. The noisy, as a rule, do not think, and the thinker, on the other hand, does not often cry aloud from the housetops. By so doing you will find that often there exists much of sound and fury signifying nothing in particular in many of the most blatant comments of and about our time.
Much of the unrestrained, undignified, and more or less vituperative language which we hear and read arises out of personal vanity and the desire for publicity. Moreover, to the moving desire of the movies to entertain, superficial minds in education, in literature, and in statecraft have often surrendered. Those who will speak will come out of the great mass of unknown men and women who believe amidst all the turmoil and travail of mankind that there still abideth faith, hope, and love.

When you have disposed of the loud speakers, the publicity seekers, and the entertainers, you will have a much better atmosphere in which to try to think for yourself. Then you may be enabled to hear the more subdued, more quiet, and more thoughtful voices, who utter kindly, courteous, and considerate words, which will help to bring more calmness and sanity into the present turmoil of national and international life.

You should be able to hear above the shouting and tumult calmer voices saying to you that nations cannot restore their national honor by policies that are not in themselves honorable, and that democratic government is unworthy of the name unless it can fulfill the demands of social justice for all of its citizens.

You should be able to hear the quieter tones telling you that those who advocate social reforms in the community or in the nation are not on that account exempt from the fundamental personal virtues of honesty and integrity; that we cannot hope to build a healthy social structure unless the individuals who compose it are themselves men and women of virtue and understanding; that the higher spiritual qualities of the individual constitute the most cherished heritage of the race.
You should as interpreters make it possible that the calmer and saner voices also will be heard by millions of common folk throughout the world who are still sane, just, wise, and friendly, and through whom a wise and intelligent leadership somehow must be made effective.

I make the sincere request to the graduates of this class that you refuse the fellowship of those loud-speaking critics whose vindictive clamor stirs up fear and hatred among men; that you do not accept membership in the many naive and noisy fraternities whose chief purpose is that of seeking publicity and the limelight; that you avoid the company of those engaged in tasks calling for sober and serious thought, who have learned only how to entertain their followers.

I urge you, if you are qualified, to join the company of those whose quiet yet thoughtful counsel is needed to encourage restraint, and tolerance amidst the present turmoil; whose calm, yet convincing words will teach mankind the simple yet often overlooked lesson that kindness, courtesy, and love are still not only the best diplomacy, but also the most healing medicine for the ills of humanity if we will only use them.