To the Class of 1940

June 3, 1940

With Europe in the midst of a gigantic war and our country entering into unprecedented military preparations, your college career ends today. One is inclined at times to agree with the writer who said that humanity in dealing with foreign relations "retreats from reason."

Radical changes in military and political control in Europe seem possible at present. The European grouping of nations after 1919 based as it was upon two contradictory principles, one being the idealism of the League of Nations, the other being pure power-politics, was doomed to a relatively short life. The manifestations of power-politics which we now witness in such strong and violent forms are deplorable, but they do not constitute a great surprise to those who know the history of Europe and Germany for the past hundred years. The large population of Germany, comparatively speaking, its advantageous geographic location, its skill and efficiency, and its desire for power and leadership, constitute a vital problem in Europe's life which was not solved by the last war and its peace.

Why the German people possess this desire for more power and prestige in Europe, I shall not attempt to answer. The important fact for European peace is that right or wrong, they have that desire and are determined to fight for what they think is their rightful place in Europe. The defeat of a single leader has not in the past and will not now destroy that basic urge for position and power of the German people.
After the last war resulting in Germany's defeat with the help of our nation, we decided that we could not help in the most important plans proposed for cooperative and constructive peace. After urging upon Europe the International Tribunal at the Hague, we would have no part in the World Court at Geneva.

Chamberlain announced the aims of the Allies in this war as the defeat of Hitlerism and the creation of a new Europe in which the nations would settle their differences in a conference between equals with good will and tolerance. But it is not reasonable to believe that after this struggle there will be equality between victor and vanquished—that good will and mutual tolerance will prevail.

Hitler's peace terms as announced call for the coming together of the leading nations of Europe to draw up a plan that will insure them all a sense of security. But it is not reasonable to believe that after this war that which would bring security to one side would also bring security to the other.

There are many indications already in this country of a "retreat from reason," and this retreat may be encouraged still further by the naive faith of those who believe that a brighter future will result from this war of "democracies against dictatorships" than followed the other war to "make the world safe for Democracy." With impulses bordering on religious fervor, we entered unconditionally into that struggle to "make the world safe for democracy" with all of our available resources, financial and military. Losing sight of more practical diplomacy in our
high idealism, we did not require from our allies before we entered that war any pledge that a victorious peace would establish, in the European order which was to follow, those high principles for which we fought. We may still argue academically as to the wisdom of going into that war, but our great mistake in not attaching vital conditions to our entrance is, I consider, undebatable. If we ever enter again into another European war, we should at least in advance of going in demand agreements as to peace terms which will, as far as possible, avoid the mistakes and disappointments of 1919 and succeeding years.

When our small nation was launched on these shores democracy did not prevail in Europe, and its future outlook there is not bright today. Neither does democracy face a rosy future here, with almost total secrecy in the conduct of our foreign affairs, with cryptic slogans rather than frankly stated defense plans as explanation for our five billion dollar preparedness program, and with staggering indebtedness steadily mounting. Is it possible that this war-panic is engulfing us, and that we are listening to the drum beats which accompany our own national retreat from reason?

Plans for our future defense, in the light of all recent developments in wholesale mechanized warfare on land, on sea, and in the air, should have the most careful consideration of experts, and the most united support of the entire nation. There is desperate need to build our defense in an atmosphere of calm and thoughtfulness, if that is possible. While possible aggressors are in the process of destroying their military resources, the
chances for us to do this are daily increasing. Diplomacy based on the good neighbor policy for all nations ought to be tried, if it is not too late, to furnish an interval of time for serious thought on our whole defense program. Unless our preparation is intended for participation in the present conflict, it does seem to me that we have time for these things.

The diplomacy and power which built the French and British Empires may prove unable to sustain them. In the face of the present international outlook there can be little doubt that the needs for our defense will require unprecedented military preparations. Diplomatic taunts to totalitarian leaders, unprecedented in American peace-time diplomacy, may be increasing daily the need for greater military preparations. The diplomacy of Britain and France for the past two decades does not furnish a desirable pattern for American diplomacy today. Forbid also that we should adopt the diplomacy of Germany or any other totalitarian power. A diplomacy based on sound American policy with adequate defense to maintain it is imperative. Adequate defense must now include the ability to prevent all possible enemies from obtaining any foothold of any kind on this continent or on adjacent island territory. And it is not too soon to let all nations know that such is our national defense plan.

These considerations, which I am only briefly noting, make it incumbent on each of us to keep our head, to think soberly, and to keep our hearts under the control of our heads. It is impossible now to prophecy as to the outcome of this war, and it
is likewise impossible to chart the course for our own country. In seeking to chart that course we are not aided by pledges that our boys will not go, that our resources will supply all the needs of the Allies, because such a statement does not square with the history of the years from 1914-1917. Would that all the people of our country knew that history!

We are living in the midst of a war age, in all the turmoil of its chaotic and destructive forces. America has been built by brave men, but also by men who had great vision. We, as children of this war age, should not become so engrossed with thoughts of war that we neglect altogether our duty to think and plan for a peaceful world after the war. For after this maddening struggle of war and bloodshed has ended, there must be leaders of nations who can see the needs of a world which will, even though weak, weary and wasted, still want truth and justice and love and peace. I hope America will be able to provide many such far-visioned leaders. I wish we had more of them now. I pray also that members of this class will augment American citizenship and leadership of this type.

With anxiety, and yet with solicitous good wishes to every one of you, I bid you good-bye.

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