THE CLASS OF 1936.
AN OLD HUMAN CUSTOM -

One of the outstanding contributions of the Class of 1936 has been the extension and consolidation of student government on the campus. Your achievements in this field not only deserve special comment, but merit recognition and the sincere gratitude of students and faculty.

So far as I know, however, you have not yet proclaimed student jurisdiction over the commencement exercises, and hence I am acting within my constitutional rights in reading to you this final message. Relying on the truth of a very old saying that a word to the wise is sufficient, I promise brevity and shall keep my promise.

You are citizens of a nation which proclaims high ideals and noble principles, but which usually falls far short of their realization. Our country adheres in theory to religious freedom but produces the Klu Klux Klan and its more recent, hideous progeny, The Black Legion. The American doctrine of freedom and liberty is a noble gospel, but many who preach it do not take the trouble to practice what they preach. Our ideal of equality of opportunity has lagged so far behind our practice that in recent years many have regarded it as a cloak to hide a rather bad-looking and bad-acting plutocracy. We pledge devotion to world peace and human brotherhood, but do not restrain our intense nationalistic impulses, nor refrain from national policies which endanger both brotherhood and peace.
As you enter more seriously into the duties of citizenship, you'll discover for yourselves this gulf between theory and practice, if indeed you have not already discovered it on this campus. Furthermore, upon broader study and deeper reflection, you may reach the conclusion that your country in these matters is not wholly unlike other countries, and that in the last analysis it's all a part of a rather old human custom—the failure to practice what we preach.

The great intellectual and spiritual leaders of men have sought to elevate our ideals and aspirations, but a large portion of mankind still struggles for the lower values, still fights bloody wars, still lives on the lower levels of human existence. Man with his ideals and aspirations merits the description of the ancient poet, "A little lower than the angels", but man in his dismal failure to attain his ideals merits also the characterization of the nineteenth century evolutionist, "An animal, only a little above the rest." It's all right for man to accept that characterization, provided he insists on the "head's breadth" as the measure of his superiority over his fellows in the animal kingdom, and claims, with the poet, that "a head's breadth above the brute" is a variation significant enough to explain "hell's depths and the height up to heaven, and the thrones of the gods and their halls, their chariots, purples and splendours."

Such a view alone warrants faith in man's ability to control his environment, rather than be dominated by external circumstances, and the conditions confronting our country and the world in the year 1936 call for men and women of this faith.
Plato said many centuries ago, and I think he must have been giving a commencement address, "The social and political ills from which you suffer are under your own control. Given the will and courage to change them, you can live in another and wiser fashion, if you choose to think it out and work it out."

Men and women who heed the teaching of this commencement address of long ago, are needed today to bridge the gulf between man's ideals and his practices. Please note that the possession of will and courage is demanded first of all, and that it is deemed advisable to think it out, before trying to work it out. I trust that you have been helped by the University of New Mexico in your quest for courage and the power to think things out. If you possess that courage and power of thought, I believe I can assure you that your services will be needed in a multitude of ways, and that in rendering such service you will find a large measure of happiness and personal satisfaction.

In closing, therefore, I invite you, and urge you, to unite with those workers of every land who are engaged in the rather difficult task of constructing a bridge that will serve as a passage way for the ideals of man over into the realms of practical experience and life. You and your contemporaries may live in another and wiser fashion if you "choose to think it out and work it out." Accept my sincere congratulations and best wishes for a life of thought and work, sustained by a faith in your university, your country and humanity, expressed in these lines from the Venus Ode:

"The unborn years of God are all thine own,
In thee we trust, we know thy faith is true."