Changing attitudes toward learning

BY WILLIAM BENNETT BIZZELL

This convocation marks the formal opening of the fortieth annual session of the university. Year after year throughout the history of the university, faculty and students have assembled about this time and considered together the work and the problems of the new year. No two college years are ever exactly alike. A constantly changing student body, as well as rapidly changing world conditions, make each year unique in the life of an institution of higher learning. Today is not like yesterday, and tomorrow will be different from today. This we know from experience. The world in which we live is characterized by change, and we experience all the influences incidental to the silent forces that are at work about us.

Think for a moment of some of the important events that have occurred since we last assembled in this place for our great commencement exercises in June. The president of the United States has proposed a moratorium to the nation of Europe; Germany has passed through a serious financial crisis; and more recently the labor government in England has been dissolved and a coalition government has been formed in an effort to prevent a political upheaval. Only a short time ago, the press of the world reported the renewal of the conflict between church and state in Italy; and Spain, after overthrowing her monarchy, has established a republican form of government. While these events were taking place abroad, our own state and national governments have been engaged in desperate efforts to solve the problems of unemployment, crime prevention, the conservation of our mineral resources, and the stabilization of the price structure.

While political history of the greatest significance was being made throughout the world, men of courage and daring were breaking records through their exploits in the air. August Piccard, a Swiss scientist, soared in a balloon to an altitude of 52,000 feet, breaking the world's record. Harold Gatty and Wiley Post, the latter an Oklahoman, circumnavigated the globe in an aeroplane. They traveled 15,474 miles in eight days, fifteen hours, and fifteen minutes. The day after these daring aviators left New York, Otto Hiltig and Holger Hoiris took off from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, and landed in the late afternoon of the following day at Bremen. A few days later Russell Brederston and John Polando flew from New York to Constantinople, and set a new non-stop distance record by flying over 5,000 miles in forty-nine hours. One morning in July Frank Hawks, who many of you will remember was the pilot for Will Rogers when he came to the university last spring, ate breakfast in London, flew to Rome for his lunch, and was back in London for an early evening dinner. The leisurely flight of Colonel and Mrs Lindbergh over an uncharted route in the far north from New York to Tokio is of recent occurrence.

These events merely illustrate the nature and importance of daily happenings in the dynamic world in which we live. History is being made every day. Traditions are being discarded and precedents are being broken on every hand. The spirit of adventure is in the air. Life is being lived dangerously on new levels of experience.

Some of the things that have happened during the past summer will influence world affairs for all time to come. Educational institutions cannot ignore the temper of the times. Our thinking about life and destiny is being permanently altered. Our attitudes toward many economic, social, political, and moral questions are being profoundly modified by the cross-current that chill and thrill us day after day.

There is not a subject of instruction that can be taught in exactly the same way as it was taught last year. The currents of thought and the spirit of adventure that are so much in evidence must penetrate every classroom. It is true that acids will still react on soluble salts in test tubes as they have always reacted. The smears upon microscopic plates will look as they have in the past. Mathematical deductions will lead to the same conclusions. But all of these facts have new meanings in the light of world events about us. The fact that Colonel and Mrs Lindbergh flew to Tokio gives new meaning to the history of human relations. The historic fact that Ramsey Macdonald placed country above party and became the head of a new coalition cabinet in England makes it necessary for college professors to revise their repertoire of Scotch jokes to enliven classroom instruction.

The conditions of life about us have greatly changed the attitude of freshmen. Until very recent times the transition from school to college was looked upon as an adventure. Every freshman entered college with a sense of timidity and genuine anxiety. I recall the words of President Albert Parker Fitch of Andover Theological Seminary in describing the state of mind of the freshman in 1914.

For that year (the Freshman), says Dr Fitch, is always and everywhere a high adventure. It is compounded of delightful if terrifying uncertainties. It is the exploration, big with fate, which each awakening youth makes into the real world of his fellow human beings, into the real convictions, desires, and powers of his own soul. There still comes once, to every boy, even in our safe and comfortable and commonplace world, a morning when the mystery and thrill of the unknown lay hold upon him; when the call of the undiscovered country is in his ears; when he knows that, at last, he is free to walk on an untrodden path and do and be what no one else has ever done or been before. That is the morning of the day when college opens, and he, once a schoolboy, now an undergraduate, stands, his own master, at his dormitory door.

This description seems far-fetched and remote to us today. The "safe and comfortable and commonplace world," to which Doctor Fitch referred, no longer exists. The freshman does not feel today as he enters college that he is "to walk an untrodden path." While he is fully aware that he is an undergraduate, this does not cause him to have an inferiority complex. The average freshman has an assurance that the freshman of other days did not possess. Sometimes this assurance borders on sophistication, but perhaps even this state of mind is to be preferred to one of depreciation and uncertainty.

In my younger days as a college president one of the most serious problems that confronted the faculty at this season of the year was that of ministering to homesick students. In those days, the first weeks of college students were characterized by frequent spells of homesickness. I became an expert diagnostician of homesickness. The disease took many forms and manifested itself in many ways. But I came to know its various symptoms and, in time, I ac-
quired great resourcefulness in treating the malady. Homesickness, however, like typhoid and smallpox, is on the decrease. I do not attribute this fact to a lack of affection for parents or attachment for home life. The conditions of life about us have widened the experiences of youth and developed a spirit of independence that was not possible in the past.

This does not mean, however, that there are not anxieties incident to entering upon a college career. These anxieties of course change from year to year. I am sure that at this time the economic depression is giving deep concern to hundreds of you. I have never known as many students in any one year to need financial assistance to enable them to enter college. Throughout the summer hundreds of students have sought loans or opportunities to earn part of their expenses. It has been impossible for the university to extend assistance to all worthy students who have applied to us for help, but the earnest efforts that countless thousands of the youth of the land are making to acquire a college education demonstrate the ambitions and aspirations of our young people and reveal a willingness to make sacrifices to accomplish their ambitions that is truly commendable.

Times like these demonstrate the value of a college education. Millions of men are out of work; but, generally speaking, the marginal man is always the first to suffer in vocational competition when periods of industrial and financial adjustments come. In other words, the ignorant and the untrained are the first to experience the adverse effects of hard times. While it is true that the extent of this depression has brought hardships to countless thousands that do not belong to the marginal group of employees, it is, nevertheless, a fact that the marginal man has been the first to suffer and he will be the last to obtain relief. This fact not only demonstrates the value of a college education, but it brings home to every boy and girl the need for preparation for vocational and avocational life.

I remind you, also, that every educational institution in the country is experiencing the hardships that have come to the individuals and corporate groups as a result of the economic depression. Almost every educational institution in the country will be compelled to operate this year on a reduced budget. The University of Oklahoma and other state supported institutions everywhere have been compelled to curtail activities or to reduce their administrative and teaching forces. Some have been forced to do both. This situation has created serious problems of administration. A number of our educational institutions have undertaken far-reaching experiments in an effort to find a way out of their difficulties. It is not easy at the moment to predict what will be the ultimate effects of our present economic situation upon our educational institutions.

But there are compensations connected with every situation of this kind. Human nature is such that mankind can endure just so much prosperity for a limited time. It was inevitable that the fat years following the World war must end some time. We were rapidly losing the sense of relative values. Many had come to believe that speculation could be substituted for thrift, that sophistry could replace clear thinking, and that spiritual values were no longer essential to human happiness.

It is regrettable that it often takes adversity to restore reason and sober-mindedness to a people. In the mad rush of the last decade we forgot that the greatest perils to nations and civilizations come in times of prosperity rather than in times of adversity. History teaches that the seed of destruction in national life is usually sown in times of greatest prosperity. The fall of Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome all bear witness to this fact. The Periclean Age in Greece was followed by the Peloponnesian war, which marked the end of Athenian supremacy. The Augustan Age in Rome was followed by a steady decline in political leadership until an alien people marched through the mountain passes to the fair plains of Italy and occupied the capital of the Caesars. Years of adversity seem to follow periods of prosperity as night follows the day. Natural law seems to underline the one almost as surely as it does the other. Both play their part in determining life and destiny.

What are the lessons that we should learn from the adversity of our times? This seems to be an appropriate question for us to raise and attempt to answer. It was not easy to maintain a spirit of learning during the recent period of prosperity. The years following the World War were hard ones for educators everywhere. Life could be lived so freely that learning seemed superfluous. The exacting demands of scholarship were alien to the temper of an easy age. Money was plentiful and it could buy the comforts of life. Why should one spend laborious years in the study of philosophy, literature, history, science, and art? Successful business men, who measured life in terms of dollars, were telling us that a college education was not essential to success. In times of wide spread prosperity, such preachments are hard to refute. But, I dare say, there are a few men today who would attempt to disparage the value of a college education. While, of course, the intellectual is sharing the hardships incident to our general situation, he is mentally better able to endure the strain, and do it philosophically, than any other type of our citizenship.

I have been interested in the numerous proposals that have been advanced for the relief of economic distress. Some of our most forward looking statesmen have proposed that the way to prosperity lies through vast governmental expenditures for public projects of various kinds. It has been proposed that large sums be expended on public highways. Congress has already entered upon a vast public building program in Washington. Improvement of our water ways and the increase in our water-power resources have been suggested.

Strange as it may seem, no man in public life has proposed vast expenditures on our cultural resources as an aid to the restoration of prosperity. I have no disposition to disparage governmental expenditures for public works as a means of solving the unemployment problem that is so serious today. On the other hand, I think that this movement should be encouraged; however, I am frank to say that any program involving public expenditures that does not include our cultural resources is inadequate and shortsighted. I was gratified to read in a recent issue of the New York Times (Sunday, September 6, 1931) a statement by Carl E. Grunsky of San Francisco, president of the American Engineering Council and recently appointed by President Hoover a member of the organization for unemployment relief headed by Walter S. Gifford, advocating this very policy. He says:

The nation's spiritual and cultural advancement are of greater importance than provision for material well-being. Expenditures of public funds for such purposes are comparable with those for the safeguarding of life and property, for the protection of health and for facilitating the exchange of products which would not be unreasonable; but there is fear of the tax burden.

Under a well-balanced program the nation would get vastly more return for its governmental expenditures than is the case with maintenance of opera companies in all centers of population. Expenditures for these purposes would contribute to the spiritual uplift of the people and to the progress of civilization.

Provision for outdoor recreation should be made throughout the land on a scale never yet approached. Lands should be reserved and acquired that those who get into the open may find suitable places to picnic and to camp. During periods of declining prices there should be also a speeding up of public works on a large program. Recreation to pick and shovel, instead of to modern appliances, is but a trifle
attended the university last year and received a degree in library science will be librarian of the school in addition to the physical
C. E. Costley, '29 educ., is now principal of the Stand Watie elementary school at Oklahoma City.

1930

Al Mayhew, '30 arts-sc., has recently been appointed athletic coach at Claremore high school. Mayhew's teams at Jet had splendid records during his past year as coach at that high school.

Ross Taylor, '30 lib. sc., is secretary to the head of the educational department of the Grolier Society at Kansas City. He plans to continue with work in buying, collecting and selling rare books.

Paul Kennedy, '30 journ., is writing radio continuity for station WKY at Oklahoma City.

1931

A scholarship for one year's study at Southern Methodist university, Dallas, Texas, has been awarded to Clarence M. Ball, '31 arts-sc., by the Oklahoma City district of the Oklahoma conference, M. E. church, S. W. Miss. Mr Ball has served four Normal school terms as a member of the Oklahoma conference of the Methodist church.

Albert Walker, '31 bus., is teaching typing-writing and bookkeeping in Seminole high school. He is also sponsor of the senior class.

Ross G. Hume, '31 law, son of one of the founders of the university (Ross Hume, '98 of Anadarko), made the highest score in the state bar examination held last June. Mr Hume had 1,578 points out of a possible 1,600 points.

Arlo Ralph Davis, '31, versatile all-round athlete, has been appointed athletic coach for Frederick high school. It has been announced. He succeeds Paul Allen, who has been made principal of the school.

Mrs Christine James Tant, '31 mus., has announced the opening of a piano studio at 412 Park Drive, Norman. Mrs Tant, who was a student of C. F. Giard, professor of piano in the university, has conducted studios at Bartlesville and Altus. She has installed a new grand piano for instructional purposes.

Robert Weidman, '31 arts-sc., arrived in Claremore to enter the university where he holds a fellowship for the ensuing year.

Ed Mills, '31 journ., is covering the courthouse run for The Oklahoma News at Oklahoma City.

Ross Maxwell, M. S. '31, of Drumright, is a fellow this year at Northwestern university.

Miss Mildred Armoor, M. S. '31, is instructor in geology at Oklahoma City university.

Benton Ferguson, '31 arts-sc., is on the advertising staff of the Birmingham Post.

1933

Hardie Lewis, '33 eng., of Duncan, Sooner wrangler, was injured June 6 near Chickasha in an automobile accident while en route home from the university.

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above giving a dose with its encouragement of idleness and of return to primitive conditions.

A five-day week and a shorter working day have been suggested as one of the means of solving the employment problem. Unless there is a wider range of human wants, there seems to be no other way out of our existing difficulties. This redivision of vocational opportunity will, of course, enlarge the avocational, cultural, and recreational opportunities for every one; but for society to enlarge its national opportunities without, at the same time, providing for the wisest possible utilization of the free time and energies of the people would merely be shifting the problem from one sphere of activity to another. It seems, therefore, that it is highly important for all of us to see this problem in all its relations. In other words, it is equally as important to provide adequate cultural and recreational opportunities as it is to solve the problems of unemployment by reducing the labor load.

One of our great daily papers said editorially last summer that "There is one debt for which the momentum carries with safety be declared. That is the eternal debt of maturity to childhood and youth—education." After health and physical safety it is the first obligation of the state. Not only should the schools now be kept going at their best, but children and youth who are normally drawn into industry at a younger age should be encouraged to continue their schooling rather than seek employment in competition with older persons, who cannot so readily adapt themselves to changed conditions. This may often mean parental sacrifice, but it is the best investment that can be made when it is at all possible.

Little has been said about the aid that our schools and colleges can render in helping to solve the unemployment problem. There is no question that the schools can assist in this enterprise. Students should not only be encouraged at this time to enter college for their own benefit, but as a means of withdrawing hundreds of them from competition with mature men who have families to support.

I am hoping that you have entered, or re-entered, college today with a full realization of the conditions of life about you. It is possible for each of us to feel a deep sense of our pressing obligations without sacrificing happiness or contentment. The time has come for us to think soberly and seriously about life and its possibilities. As long as we have a time to practice plain living and high thinking, it is now. The student who lives extravagantly this year is unworthy of college opportunities. Student groups of every kind should encourage and practice economy. The closest possible scrutiny will be exercised on the part of university authorities in an effort to impress students with the importance of living simply and sanely.

But there is a much higher obligation resting upon each of you than the mere practice of economy. I refer to the obligation of making the best possible use of your opportunities. I admit this sounds trite, but it is a truism that requires emphasis today. This university is no place for a loafer. Indifference to the acquisition of knowledge and its values is a deadly sin here. Every one of you will be expected to report to classes promptly, to attend regularly, to sustain an active attitude while in classes, and to respond cheerfully to the demands made upon you by your instructors.

That is not all. You will be expected to assume the right attitude toward knowledge. All that any professor can do is to expose you to knowledge. It is your duty to assimilate it. The higher ethics of college life involves responsive attitudes toward truth. No man can live at the higher intellectual levels unless he has an adequate perspective of all knowledge. An adequate understanding of some sphere of knowledge is essential to rational living.

From time to time during your college course you should attempt to make an evaluation of the knowledge you have acquired. I read of a student recently who attempted to do this. He set down a list of things he had learned. Some of them were:

How to sleep in a chair while sitting erect.

How to turn off an alarm clock without waking up.

How to read a book by scanning the first sentence of every paragraph.

That the ancient Greeks were smart people.

That psychology is more interesting in novels than text books.

That Columbus didn't discover America.

That it is bad to always split your infinitives.

We are inclined to laugh at this student's intellectual accomplishments. But, certainly, he had learned something. It is quite an art to sleep while sitting erect in a chair. He certainly did not list all the things he had learned. It is quite apparent that this student had acquired the spirit of fortitude and patience while sitting in class suffering at times from insomnia. I remind you, also, that this youth had learned that an infinitive could be split. There are still some people who are entirely ignorant of this fact.

A university campus is a place where every man and woman should seek the maximum opportunity to enrich his or her life by the greatest possible number of valuable experiences. H. G. Wells in his First and Last Things declares that it is an essential duty of every man to utilize his experiences to this end. "The general duties of a man," says he, "his existend being secured, is to educate, and chiefly to educate and develop him-
self. It is his duty to live, to make all he can out of himself and life, to get full of experience, to make himself fine and perceiving and expressive, to render his experience and perception honestly and helpfully to others." There is no better place in all the world to accomplish these ends than in a university.

I invite each of you to share fully in the life that is lived on this campus. Seek the best that the institution offers to you. Live daily in the consciousness of what is going on in the world that lies beyond our campus. Remember that the spirit of adventure is in the air. Translate this experience into your own conduct by adventuring far into the unknown land of knowledge. Adapt your attitudes toward learning to the changing world situation.

I think I can do no better than to recall, in conclusion, the familiar words of Solomon:

Get wisdom, get understanding: forget not: neither decline from the words of my mouth.
Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.
Wisdom is the principal things therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her.
She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.
Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.
I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.
When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straightened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.
Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.
This is sound advice from a high source. A great promise is held out to those who utilize instruction for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and wisdom, but the faith of thousands has been strengthened by seeing this promise to youth fulfilled time and time again. I commend the admonition of the wise man of old to you today with the utmost confidence that if you heed it thy steps shall not be straightened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

TOWARD RECOVERY

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to make the full conditional payments on reparations a year or more ago, as she is unable now, but she would not have had the present acute problem of staving-off the short-term payments. Also, under those conditions, it would have been necessary to have dealt directly with the reparations question long before now. Short-time loans from bank credit by citizens of one country to citizens of another should be dis-