

Character Building The Basis of True Education

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"Character Building The Basis of True Education"

It is indeed a privilege and also a great pleasure to be accorded the opportunity of addressing this splendid group of young ladies, *at this the 20th Commencement of Ursuline Convent* members of the class of 1933 ~~of the Ursuline Convent High School~~. The scene which is being enacted here this morning, is but the the replica of countless other similar scenes which are taking place throughout the length and breadth of these United States. The undaunted youth of America, numbered by the millions, young manhood and young womanhood, ambitious and unafraid, at a time when the very foundations of our modern civilization are seeming to crumble away, will march forth from our high schools, from our junior colleges, and from our great universities all bearing the stamp of the educated person.

At this critical period in the history of our country, we have great need of men and women with well trained minds; we have great need of men and women of highest patriotism; but we have greater need of men and women of strongest character and sternest virtue to leaven the lump of shallow learning and corrupt morals among the masses and to counteract the degrading influence of corruption on the part of many men and women occupying high places in public and in private life.

I believe that it was Emerson who said that " the true test of civilization is not the census, nor the size of the cities, nor the crops, but the kind of men the country turns out ". At a time when, as never before, the need and influence of education, true education, is felt, it may not be amiss to pause for a moment to consider the meaning of the term "education".

True education means the drawing out and development of all the human faculties and the preparation of the man or woman for the duties and responsibilities of life. It is becoming increasingly apparent, even in many of our non-sectarian educational institutions, that the end of education, that the aim of the true educator, should not be merely the development of the mind or intellect, but great emphasis must be placed on the development of the will and in the inculcation of correct moral principles as the most essential part of the equipment needed to weather the storms and tempests which beset

each and every one on the journey through life.

The consequences of a godless education can be studied today at close hand in any penitentiary, in any house of correction, in any reform school. The absence of moral restraint, which religion alone can impart, is vitally felt by every teacher from the kindergarten to the University. It is felt by every business man from the corner grocer to the president of the most powerful bank. Education without moral restraint fills the courts with litigation, fills the jails with inmates, and fills the cemeteries with corpses.

Our present economic crisis is due in no small measure to the fact that too many of our so-called great educational institutions have for generations, been turning forth into the professional world, into the world of business, into the world of the scientist, and into the world of high finance, too many men of mental genius, men of great intellectual attainments, but alas, too many of whom are utterly lacking in moral principles, with the resultant perverted outlook which means no proper sense of social justice. It is indeed, high time that our educational institutions turn aside from the meaningless achievement of creating a race of intellectual frankensteins, to the more proper aim of the educator, the upbuilding of character in youth. In this lies the hope of America.

Religious education is one of the outstanding achievements of the Catholic Church. The cause of religious education has ever had a staunch defender in our ranks. Our American constitution has been a bulwark for the protection of American religious education. In all of the bitter attacks waged against religious education in this country, the Catholic schools have stood out pre-eminently as the champions of religious liberty. In 1923, when the legislature of the State of Oregon passed a statute known as the Oregon Compulsory Education Act, which required that every person in the state having charge of a child between the ages of eight and sixteen years to send that child to a public school, it was a Catholic school operated by Catholic nuns that attacked the validity of this statute. And battle to

to make secure th God-given right to a religious education was taken to the highest court in the land, the United States Supreme Court, where a decision was rendered that the statute violated the Constitution of the United States. A victory for religious education and religious liberty was thus achieved under the leadership of the Catholic schools.

It is a vindication and a wonderful tribute to Catholic education, that today, a never before, parents, educators, school officials, business men, and church men generally, have raised a hue and cry to bring back religious training to the children of the country.

To you young graduates, it is extremely important, that at this critical period of your lives, in pausing to take an inventory of your equipment for the battle of life, that you realize the value of the protective influences which have surrounded the first part of your educational journey- *the years spent in working for the high school diploma.* ~~your four years of high school.~~ Within the sheltered convent walls, in addition to secular knowledge, you have acquired from your able teachers, the noble and kind nuns of the Ursuline order, an intangible asset of inestimable value- the sound foundations for a correct moral character. However, I would impress upon you that character building is not the work of a moment or of a day. You cannot jump into a character as you would a new dress, unless it be an assumed character, and the person with an assumed character is a hypocrite whom we all despise. Character building is a slow process. It must be worked at continually, and we are building character even when we are not conscious of it.

We add to our character each and every day of our lives- sometimes imperceptibly by little things, little deeds of kindness, loftier ideas, and thoughts of our better moments. Every day of your lives will be a test of your character, you can add to it by habits of thoughtfulness, ~~by~~ by developing moral courage, by exercising your sense of justice and righteousness, by patience in suffering, and by acts of goodness and generosity.

You are singularly fortunate in being accustomed to a certain moral restraint which religion alone can impart. If you will be true to yourselves and true to the school of which you are now a graduate, you need never experience the appalling consequences of a godless education, since you have built this sound foundation which character will permit you to preserve.

The word "commencement" as applied to these exercises means the beginning of another phase of your lives. In these unusual times, many seniors and many mothers and fathers of those same seniors are wondering what commencement really means now. Many feel as if the road to every occupation had an enormous sign- "No Thoroughfare". But in spite of our pressing economic troubles, there is nothing to justify a fatalistic attitude. We have recently heard preached the doctrine that the avenues for success in this world are closed just now, and that it is so difficult to get on, that we must have a revolution in the country to re-open these highways. This is not so. Remember well that men and women die, and men and women come on to take their places, and the avenues of success are always open just the same; they are open for those who travel them with indomitable purpose, with inflexible integrity and untiring energy; and only those get on. It may be true, that in these tragic times the qualities of courage, determination, energy, faith and high heartedness, in short all the qualities of character which true education imparts are needed more than ever.

Education, intellectual and moral preparedness, are qualities that in the long run are not and cannot be wasted. I urge each and every one of you to make the most of your opportunity to continue your education. Your education has not yet been completed- it has only begun. Your school days have been only a start to increase your development. It has been a stepping stone and as you step out into the avenues of life you must look for new food as there is ample to be sought. Many of you will have the opportunity of continuing with College work. Others among you may not be so fortunate.

But all should realize that there is ample education in each and every day of your lives properly spent. Every passing day brings its tests of manhood and womanhood, resulting in education of the body, education of the mind, education of the soul or spirit. In this sense then, the term "commencement" means the beginning of another phase of your education not the close of education.

Today you are going forth into a world which is vastly different from the world as it existed when you began your educational journey toward this high school diploma. The years that you have spent in school have been memorable ~~years~~ years in the history of the world. Young as you are, you could not fail to be fully conscious ~~of~~ of the fact that we have been passing through ten of the most remarkable years in history; a decade which has been filled with wars and rumors of war; with many false materialistic doctrines gaining a foothold and sinking their deadly venom into the life bloods of society; but despite all of this, there has been genuine progress in many fields.

Let us recapitulate briefly some of the happenings of this remarkable period: during it Radio has become one of the outstanding means of communication and perhaps the foremost source of entertainment; during this period aviation has made remarkable progress- Lindbergh has flown alone across the ~~Atlantic~~ Atlantic to gain the plaudits of the world; Byrd has viewed both poles from the air; Post and Gatty have flown around the world in less than nine days; transoceanic flights have ceased to be nine day wonders; air mail and air passenger service have become important adjuncts of the transportation systems of every ~~country~~ civilized country; epoch making inventions are numerous. Governments have crumbled. Ancient monarchies have changed to republics. Dictators have sprung up. There has been genuine progress in the field of ~~science~~ science and medicine. In fact, in every field of human endeavor, the knowledge of mankind has increased and multiplied tremendously.

The truly educated person is wise enough to realize that this increased knowledge is a God-given trust, ~~at a price~~ opening opportunities for the advancement of the human race only if used properly in mankind's service and not as its master. Our increased knowledge of physical facts and phenomena increases the opportunities for the educated person of today, but it also multiplies his responsibilities. This I am sure is fully realized by all of you and you will not be found wanting.

In closing these remarks, I am sure that I express the sentiment of all present in this assembly, when I wish each and every one of you success, provided always that you persevere in the proper conception of what success really means. We all hope and trust that you will reach the very summit of usefulness and honor and we sincerely hope that that summit will be only the commencement for reaching another summit where life is all grandeur and happiness. In the language of the poet Milton, may you never stray from "the right path of a virtuous and noble education".

Members of the class of 1933 : During the period of your long novitiate you have been the recipients of many intellectual benefits. Out of the helplessness of childhood, out of the forwardness of youth, you have emerged into the stature of young ladies, and at each stage of your progress you have found kind hands to lead you where the way was dark, and strong arms to lift you where the way was rough. When you are cast upon your own responsibilities, may the name and memory of this Ursuline convent, your alma mater, your nourishing mother, typifying all the good there is in Catholic education, wherever your paths may lead, or whatever fate may befall you, may that memory never fail to wake in you the Godliness that lies sleeping in ~~everybody's~~ everyone's heart.