FORFEITED VALUES

Address at Carnegie Day Exercises, Carnegie Institute of Technology, November 25, 1941.

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The Carnegie Institute of Technology, like most other institutions of learning, faces one educational problem that seems more difficult, more perplexing, than any other. We have struggled with it but have not yet accomplished much, so I thought I should discuss it with you this morning. You are forfeiting important values which are here for the taking—values that would mean much to you in your professional career, in your endeavor to achieve a full and satisfying life, and in times of trial. And having them, you would also, I might add, be much more serviceable as a member of the community in which you will live. You are, I trust, receiving educational guidance second to none in the country, in building the technical foundation of the professional activity for which you are preparing. And I trust also that you are being assisted to acquire an understanding of the social and economic world in which you live. But there is something that many of you are missing, as students almost everywhere are missing, namely, the cultivation of spiritual values essential to the development of character. If you wish to avoid being intellectually lop-sided, if you wish to round out your personality and thus enjoy both personal satisfaction and professional advantage, you should with our help address yourselves to the problem.

It is far from being a simple one. The fact that so little has been accomplished anywhere, though the problem is unquestionably recognized everywhere, suggests its complexity. In the first place, there is unthinking prejudice to overcome; even discussing the matter sounds like preaching, and I know that students do not like to be preached to. They get far more advice than they ask for. That canny Scotsman, Andrew Carnegie, in whose honor these exercises are held, revealed his customary shrewdness
when he said that in the opinion of young people good advice is the ONE article which belies the law of supply and demand. In the second place, such intangible values as those of the spirit are hard to perceive until they are experienced, their fruits difficult to appreciate until they are tasted. Third, it seems that formal class lectures and recitations cannot be effectual; some form of purposeful activity is necessary. A course on reverence, for instance, or tolerance or magnanimity or happiness cannot, as I understand it, bring measurable achievement of any of these things, because they are not knowledge; they are states of mind; they are products or by-products of other activity. Fourth, there is the want of immediate incentives. A postponed satisfaction is not, for most of us, a strong motivation. Values that, if cultivated today, will bear fullest fruit ten or fifteen years hence, do not spur us on; and especially is this so with the less tangible values we are considering. And finally there is the lack of available time. The student's waking hours are already so filled up that little can be added. Thus the problem is extremely complex.

In spite of the difficulties, however, I feel sure that we can do something about the matter, provided we set our minds to it. Hence, I propose to examine with you certain of these precious values which many of you are now missing, and then offer some suggestions as to how, with the help of the faculty and administration, you might approach the problem of achieving them.

I speak of spiritual values in the broadest sense. I mean values that may be achieved by the cultivation of intellectual capacities that are now left to atrophy.

To begin with, I refer to that sense of balance, that sense of proportion, that confidence in one's own judgments, and that poise which are the hallmarks of a cultivated intellect. Most of us who have gone through
college have failed to achieve these values in full measure, and unless you do more than you are now doing to build them up, you too will so fail.

What, for instance, are you doing to cultivate a sense of balance? Do you work all the time and play none? or play all the time and work none? Do you devote all of your study to the courses you like? Do you have no intellectual interests outside of a narrow range of science, or music, or machinery? A football team is not made up of eleven men all of whom try to run with the ball, nor would it be gratifying to listen to a quartet whose members all insisted on singing bass. And as you survey national affairs, are you concerned, for example, that pressure groups in their demands frequently ignore the equal rights of others, forgetting that the total pie contains only three hundred and sixty degrees? Those of you in science and engineering are of course aware of the necessity in the world of physical science of balancing forces, energy, and amounts of matter. For illustration, I suggest to you that any successful engineering structure is a symbol of organic balance. Each part is intelligently related to the balanced whole, and the whole is related to a definite purpose. And to those of you in Fine Arts I certainly need not labor the thought of balance as it is symbolized in your work. I emphasize to all of you, however, that this relationship is not less essential in the realm of human life, and that accordingly the sense of balance in all realms is an extremely important intellectual value.

The sense of proportion is closely related. What are you doing to cultivate it in areas of life outside your technical field? When trying to choose among alternatives, do you find yourself confused and often incapable of decision? For instance, there is not enough time to do all that is to be done; some things you want to do, others you ought to do. Can you decide intelligently? Or, there is a welter of fact and opinion about a
proposal; some of these facts and opinions favor it, others do not. Are you able to reach an intelligent conclusion? In other words, are you confused when you try to distinguish between what is important and what is trivial? When you try to place first things first? Are you developing a facility for framing a mental picture of a situation and placing the several elements in their appropriate positions in the picture on the basis of their relative importance? The ability to do this is a precious asset.

I believe I can name the reason why so many of us have trouble in developing this fundamental sense of balance and proportion. Both of these presuppose a scale of values, a set of guiding principles, some firm intellectual footholds - in other words, a philosophy of life and a reasonable amount of knowledge relating to it. Without these there is no basis for developing such a sense of balance and proportion. They provide a basis for appraisal and judgment. They serve as a guide for decision in the world of personal and human relations in much the same way that fundamental physical laws serve as a guide for decision in the physical world. But there is a great difference between the two. In the physical world - and to a lesser degree in the economic world - the laws are fixed and we simply accept them; there is no alternative. In the physical world we recognize the truth of Huxley's famous analogy derived from the game of chess: "The chessboard is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of nature." In the human world, however, from national issues to individual affairs, the guiding principles are - need I say in a free country? - matters of personal choice or creation. Each person must decide upon his own. An engine will produce power whether it drives a tractor or a tank - physical laws settle that - but for which of these uses the power is to be employed, man decides; and the basis for his decision may likewise be his own choice. It may be the
philosophy of Adolph Hitler or the philosophy of Thomas Jefferson. Or, in more immediate affairs, if a business deal in which you are interested can be put across to your greater advantage if you are willing to engage in some crooked operations, then you may decide the matter according as you have adopted as a guiding principle either the Golden Rule or the policy of "get away with it if you can." It is important to recognize this difference between a physical law and a philosophical doctrine; it is important to know that in human affairs our own code of principles form the sole foundation of our thinking, and our decisions and actions can only be as wise as our principles. And if we have not even begun the development of a philosophy of life - the formulation of ideals and of purpose - we have no basis for cultivating the sense of balance, the sense of proportion.

Yet without these, that poise which stems from confidence in one's own judgments is not possible. Without these, there is nothing by which to form rational judgments; there are no intellectual moorings to prevent one from being tossed about by any wind that blows. Have you ever been thoroughly convinced today on one side of an issue, only to be as thoroughly convinced on the other side tomorrow? and perhaps back again the next day? When I was a boy we played whip-cracker at school. A long line of us held hands, the line running, single file, at increasing speed. Then the leader made an abrupt turn first in one direction and then in the other, as in an S, and this motion was amplified as it approached the other end of the line. The boy on this far end was literally flung helpless from one side to the other. Now I have seen a near counterpart of this in the mental whip-cracker. Forces of persuasion, pulling in different directions and applied to a mind that has nothing to hold to except the persuading hand that may be pulling it at the moment, fling that mind in whatever direction
it is pulled. Have you listened to the persuasive arguments, attacks, and counter-attacks of political candidates? Have you read first one and then the other side of labor squabbles? Have you tried to find your own position on the issue of isolation versus intervention, of government efficiency versus individual liberty, of freedom of the press versus distasteful publicity, or coming closer to home, of clean campus politics versus Machiavellian methods and a spoils system, or of hazing versus friendly welcome to freshmen? If you have, you have probably found yourself in some of these cases confused and wavering. But life is full of such situations that confuse and confound professional people who have failed to cultivate the priceless values that they might as well have had - a sense of balance and proportion, confidence in their own judgment, and the poise which these qualities develop.

Also among the spiritual values that I fear you are not fully achieving, I include the force and strength of character that stem from a mind that, instead of being callous to religious feeling, has become sensitive to those influences - church, chapel, reading, discussion - that tend to stir religious response. It may not be of vital importance which of these influences you favor; it is important, however, that you take an active interest in some of them. Have you ever faced a situation in which it seemed that no earthly power could help you? If not, you can rest assured that you will; such experience is a part of life. That is the kind of situation that tests the fiber of the soul, and millions today are facing it. Then is the time when one can no longer look outward for help or comfort; one must look inward. There, if a callous wall does not prevent, one may find strength and help: the solid footing of a clear philosophy of life, the comforting satisfaction of a few close friendships, the warming influence of humane appreciation and brotherly love, and the inspiration of one's
God. These are values which many of you - I dare say most of you - are now letting slip away; and the farther they slip from you - in other words, the older you grow before doing something about them - the greater will be your difficulty in ultimately capturing them.

We have thus examined the spiritual values which I am urging you to cultivate, namely, the sense of balance and sense of proportion, confidence in your own judgments, poise, and the force and strength of character that stem from religious feeling and conviction - in a word, a cultivated intellect. What can we all do about the matter? What might you do and how might we help you toward achieving these values.

Why not create some campus activities, extending some that already exist and devising some that are new? My thoughts run to group activities in which there would be opportunity for reading, intelligent discussion, and written expression. I hasten to reassure you that I am not thinking of formal classes; I am thinking of informal group activity in which wits would be matched in the manner that physical prowess and alertness are matched in the extensive program of athletic sports that has already been developed on the campus.

I believe I can indicate the essential requirements for the success of such activities:

1. They must be interesting.

2. They must aim to be reasonably intelligent - not merely the naive and emotional talk which characterizes that notorious institution of campus life known as the "bull-session." I mean that anyone entering the discussion should have license to do so through having some knowledge of what he is to talk about; just as, for instance, a participant in a touch-football game presumably has some knowledge of the things he is doing.
3. They must be purposeful. The objectives of the activity must be clear and should themselves be subjects of discussion from time to time as to what they are, why they are valuable, whether the programs are reasonably approaching them.

4. They should be rewarding. They should provide at least these things: the pleasure of performance, the thrill of competition, the satisfaction of achievement.

5. They should be started on a small scale and only after careful planning, and then permitted to grow as experience may indicate.

6. They should not make too great an initial demand upon the time of students.

7. Wherever practicable, they should be related to existing activities such as, for instance, debating teams, the Social Relations Program, the discussion meetings being sponsored by the Faculty Defense Committee and associated student groups, the programs of religious organizations.

I feel confident that if a genuine attempt were made to establish such activities and if the specifications I have just recited were observed, the effort would be successful. Do you want to capture those values you are now probably missing? Do you want to round out your personality, your intellect, your character? If so, we will help you. Let's try.