

SWARTHMORE IN A CHANGING WORLD

Remarks by Thomas B. McCabe, '15, on
Alumni Day at Swarthmore College,
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This day is our day. All of the other days of the year belong to the college but this one is exclusively ours.

To the casual bystander this celebration, with its parade and stunts, must seem fantastic. To the cynic we must appear as simple sentimentalists. But to us it is all a very real reliving of a rich past -- a past that becomes increasingly treasured as time speeds by.

The occasion is of special significance to those who have traveled the longest distances and made the greatest sacrifices to get here. For all of us it is a holiday -- a time when we can renew old friendships, revive old memories, dream old dreams, and recapture the adventurous spirit of our youth.

Perhaps some of us have a curiosity in coming back because there is a certain sense of satisfaction in seeing how much older our contemporaries have become than we. A glimpse of the undergraduates, however, is positively depressing because they get younger and younger with each successive reunion. My class undoubtedly must have seemed very young to the alumni when they gathered here in 1915 in the old amphitheater with its memorable wooden stage and benches to see us graduate. Ours was the largest class in the history of Swarthmore up to that time. William Howard Taft was our Commencement speaker, and I recall the hectic time Dr. Alleman had in finding a chair in the vicinity of Philadelphia large enough to accommodate Mr. Taft's huge

frame. It was a frightfully warm day and the perspiration ran down the ex-President's face in rivulets.

The subject of his address was "The Church, Civilization, and War." He made a magnificent appeal for the creation of a league of nations. He met the next day in Independence Hall with a group to consider the plans for such a league. Taft was a realist, but probably even he did not appreciate the obstacles that would have to be overcome in the long hard road that we and other nations would have to travel to attain the goal.

It was on this stage also that I played the part of Bottom and wore the ass's head in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" -- our class play. That ass's head has haunted me ever since. I hope that some of my fiendish classmates are not going to crown me with it again today! Perhaps the helicopter ride was sufficient to satisfy their sadistic inclinations.

In the most exciting part of the play, I lay prone on this stage, supposedly asleep, on the very spot where I am now standing. Now you will all agree that the girls in our class were beautiful, and that evening, dressed in shimmering costumes, they danced and fluttered around me, covering me with flowers. My classmates will recall that at that point I almost broke up the show. Try as I might, I couldn't pretend to be asleep, but shook all over with uncontrollable laughter. Right now, in the nostalgic mood of reunion, I would like to play that part again, particularly if those same beautiful girls would come up here and skip lightly through their dance.

I recall also another incident on this stage when, as an undergraduate, I was asked to speak to a group of visitors invited here by the Society of Friends. That speech was delivered with all the sincerity and enthusiasm of youth but some of my finest phrases came home to mock me a couple of years later when we entered the war. The decade prior to 1915 was a stirring era in which youth, especially Swarthmore's youth, was in the midst of an idealistic ferment which left few of us untouched. The most callous student could scarcely get through college, and certainly not through Swarthmore, without being moved by basic religious influences and the insistent demands for social, political, and economic reforms.

Who of us can ever forget the stirring words of Woodrow Wilson, spoken here in my senior year, when he said, "I cannot admit that a man establishes his right to call himself a college graduate by showing me his diploma. The only way he can prove it is by showing that his eyes are lifted to some horizon which other men less instructed than he have not been privileged to see. Unless he carries freight of the spirit he has not been bred where spirits are bred ..."

Mitchell Palmer, Governor Sproul and other leaders were frequent visitors to the campus. I will never forget Mitchell Palmer's admonition to make our dreams come true or the fiery words of the great evangelist, Billy Sunday, when he spoke to us in Collection in February 1915.

When I hear alumni refer glowingly to the conservative faculties of the good old days in contrast to the radicals on university faculties today, my mind goes back to the Swarthmore faculty of my time — to such

controversial figures as Scott Nearing, Dr. Brooks, or Ducky Holmes. They incurred indignation of parents and alumni far more actively than anything we hear today.

Our youth coincided with the development of the progressive movement in politics. The influence of Teddy Roosevelt as President and his Bull Moose party in the election of 1912 was everywhere. Woodrow Wilson became President while we were in college. The women's suffrage movement was then in full sway and classes in political science throughout the land were studying the many burning questions of the day, including the Initiative and Referendum, the direct election of Senators, the new Federal Reserve Act, the Income Tax Law which was enacted in 1913, and public control of national resources.

All of these proposals had been designed to redress the balance between what was termed the rights of the people on the one hand, and the power of concentrated wealth on the other. Not only were these questions debated actively in the classes of Dr. Brooks, Dr. Robinson, and others, as well as in intercollegiate debates, but more importantly they were the subject of intense discussion all over the campus.

In those formative years, we also saw the birth of dynamic ideas in the business world -- the concepts of scientific management and mass production which promised to make feasible the twin goals of high wages to the worker and low prices to the consumer. No one then dreamed the extent to which the material standard of living has been raised and human drudgery eliminated by mechanization. Technological advances have afforded us almost unlimited opportunities similar to those afforded earlier generations by westward expansion.

Our interests were focused primarily on domestic problems. That preoccupation was shattered by the outbreak of World War I while we were in college. None of us could foresee how this event would affect our lives and the destiny of our nation.

You are all familiar with the much quoted remark of Lord Morley's that the most important thing to know about a man is the year of his birth. I think it could be paraphrased to read that the most revealing fact to know about a man is the period of his education.

In retrospect, the Swarthmore of 1911-15 was a friendly, kindly place in which the family spirit permeated the relationships of students, faculty, and everyone connected with the college. The scholarship requirements seemed adequate then. I admit now they were not too exacting. We had ample time for social and athletic pursuits as well as other extracurricular activities. We made good use of that spare time! Our social and recreational activities were confined largely to the campus, and there were few outside diversions. There were no convenient movie theaters, and transportation was limited to the railroad or the short line, except in the rare instances of an automobile.

All sorts of extracurricular activities flourished. They included such robust diversions as the Monks and Devils, the annual Keg Rush, Sophomore-Freshmen fights, hazing activities, and the water fights in Wharton. On the more cultural side, there were the Dean's teas, sorority parties, Maypole dances, and Greek plays.

We were in the beginning of a transition stage in athletics. When I entered college, many of our football players were receiving alumni assistance or given college aid under some guise. That did not

seem to bother the consciences of colleges generally in those days, except in a minority of instances, because winning football teams were considered necessary to the public relations program of colleges and to the preservation of student morale. I mention the athletic side because it constituted the woof if not the warp of college life at that time.

I think it can be said without emotional bias that during our period, Swarthmore was a charming, delightfully social and friendly place to spend four years. The moral standards of personal conduct, due to the religious influence of the Friends, were exceptionally high. The college romances that blossomed into marriages, then as now, hold an unusual record for happiness. Probably no other characteristic of Swarthmore is more significant.

There was a close and excellent relationship between the students and faculty, and to us the faculty heads were giants of intellectual power and standing. Perhaps I am prejudiced in saying that men like Miller, Trotter, Alleman, Goddard, Blessing, Brooks, Hoadley, Hull, Robinson, Dennison, Marriot, and women like Miss Bronk and many others, could not, as a team, be surpassed in any other small college of our time. I will never forget the friendliness and inspiration of these people. They are my unsung heroes and they, rather than any other single remembrance of Swarthmore, epitomize my love and devotion to this great institution.

Since being graduated from Swarthmore, I have made my home near the college and I have had the rare privilege of close association with the Board of Managers, the faculty, and the students. I have observed at first hand the changes which have taken place in the student body, in

the curriculum, in the faculty, and in the physical environment. I have seen the pendulum swing from one extreme of leadership to another -- from the leadership of Joseph Swain to that of Frank Aydelotte. Quite naturally, the contrast between these two types of leadership created controversies. I have always been a prejudiced supporter of the Swain regime, because it touched me in the most formative years of my life. Upon Dr. Swain's retirement, the Board of Managers after exhaustive search selected Dr. Aydelotte as the most outstanding man in the country to lead Swarthmore along a new road in the field of education. With the coming of Dr. Aydelotte, almost overnight Swarthmore became a pioneer in modern methods of education. In amazingly few years it rose to the top rank, academically, among the colleges in this country.

The transition from a small cloistered, parochial, and easy-going college to a modern center of study and culture was so swift that it left many of the alumni bewildered and gasping for breath. In short order this little Quaker institution was headlined and dramatized as one of the most interesting educational institutions in the land. Other colleges began earnestly to study its experimental ventures. Credit must be given to the Quaker overseers for supporting this departure which they could not immediately evaluate or explain. They believed in Frank Aydelotte and gave him practically a free hand to inaugurate and carry out his program.

It was not until almost ten years, or about to the midpoint of the Aydelotte regime, that the friends and alumni of the college really understood the program. The succeeding years I like to think of as the beginning of an era of goodwill, a period characterized by increasing

alumni appreciation and support. When Dr. Aydelotte resigned after twenty years of vigorous leadership, he took with him the appreciative gratitude of the Board of Managers and of the college for his outstanding contributions.

The present administration, under the wise leadership of John Nason, has preserved the best of the Aydelotte regime and at the same time has allowed the pendulum to swing a little more toward center by a renewed emphasis on some of the best traditions from the Swain regime. Dr. Nason has added many new and desirable innovations which have been received with acclaim by the friends and supporters of the college. Many elements enter into the present well-balanced program. There is emphasis on a strong faculty, on an admissions program that has for its objective a well selected student body, on cultivation of student-faculty and alumni-college relationships, and on adequate provision for vocational guidance -- all looking toward a well-rounded, liberal education and spiritual development amid the beautiful surroundings we see all about us.

Under the present regime there has also been particular stress on the opportunities and responsibilities for public service. Many members of the present faculty have distinguished themselves in Government. I was never more proud of Swarthmore than in the early days of the war when this Quaker institution, in spite of its traditional stand against war, offered all of its facilities voluntarily to our Government in time of need. John Nason's announcement of this decision electrified the alumni at our annual dinner in Philadelphia. It was so dramatic and thrilling that he was applauded and cheered for several minutes.

As of today, Swarthmore's educational program is stronger than ever. The college is in the vanguard of our country's progressive educational institutions. Our alumni support, as evidenced by the annual gifts program, is gratifyingly strong. The size and quality of our faculty compares favorably with any institution of its size. I can testify from many personal contacts in my home with present members of the student body that it is one of the best in the history of the college. The beauty of this campus is acclaimed not only by the students, faculty, and alumni, but by the ever-increasing number of visitors who make pilgrimages here to see the arboretum and other places of interest. As alumni coming back today to this spot so close to our hearts, we have every reason to be confident that Swarthmore can meet the challenge of the emerging future.

In this crucial period of the world, neither delightful conformity to a set pattern nor distinguished intellectualism for its own sake can save us from the catastrophe which threatens us. The weakness of such conformity is that it is a static thing which neither pioneers nor achieves new heights. The danger of strict intellectualism is that it may breed a form of social isolation from a world filled with the very practical problems of millions of ordinary human beings. These problems in their broad aspects are economic, social, political and emotional with intensely human implications. In a deeper sense than most of us realize, or are willing to acknowledge, there are moral problems. Now, morality must not be confused with sanctimony. Rather, it is a code of conduct which should guide all human affairs.

Swarthmore is richly endowed with these physical, social, intellectual and moral attributes which may serve to make it the most dynamic institution of higher learning in America. A college does not become dynamic through sheer force of numbers. Rather, it becomes dynamic because of the philosophy of those who guide it. We must prepare our young people to go forth into this confusing world with humbleness of spirit, openness of mind, and an intense desire to make the world a better place than they found it.

You will forgive me if the following quotation has the earmarks of preaching. But I give you these words because I believe them with all my heart: "Said the cynic, 'I could have made a better world than this.' To which the sage replied, 'That is why God put you here. Go do it.'"

If, as I suggested earlier, one of the most revealing facts to know about a man is the period in which he received his formative training, then surely those who have been in Swarthmore during the past few years have a unique background of training and experience. Consider that the vast majority of our recent men students have had from one to three years of military life before coming here -- a life full of responsibilities which took many of them to the corners of the world and through a series of maturing and broadening experiences. We all have had contact with these young people. Their knowledge and perception of world affairs and world problems is astounding. They combine idealism with impatience for soft thinking. Their educational experience at Swarthmore has been added to their other qualifications. Do not underestimate for a moment their potential. It is impossible to predict the extent of the contribution they will make by the time they have reached the average age of our group here today.

They will revitalize for us, I am confident, one of the essential traditions of the American heritage, namely, a love of adventure and opportunity and a willingness to incur risk in the pursuit of great aims. Part of the worldwide trend toward dependence on government instead of individual initiative has its roots in a philosophy of security. Our young people today know from their own experience that overemphasis on security is a false goal. There is no safe haven, no bomb shelter, that can protect the individual from the major hazards that are sweeping the world today. The only path to survival lies in facing our difficulties and dealing with them. This was the path our forefathers took when they carved out of the wilderness a civilization dedicated to freedom and liberty. This is the path our youth have followed to preserve and defend those freedoms. We need have little fear that they will try to escape their responsibilities by seeking security through isolationism.

It is our problem to preserve for tomorrow's students as much as we can of this flavor of world-consciousness that they have contributed to campus life. The great unsolved problem of our country is its role in world affairs. The faculty and administration will bear the brunt of this task, but we of the alumni will have to make it possible to secure and hold a faculty of the requisite quality.

I have lived for the greater part of the past ten years in the midst of the Washington scene where it is alleged that sound travels faster than light. I have watched hundreds of men of all types come and go in the supreme effort to solve the problems of the moment. During the war period miracles were performed by bringing together the best brains

and ability of the country in a united effort to attain victory. Brains and ability are just as vitally needed today to achieve and consolidate the peace. Almost overnight we have been thrust into the position of world leadership. We are still handicapped by lack of experience and by the long tradition of isolationism bred into us for generations. The fear of European involvements was expressed in Washington's Farewell Message, in the Monroe Doctrine, and in our failure to join the League of Nations. With such a heritage, we now face the most complex problems -- world problems with which men of bigotry and little minds are totally unable to cope. Domestically we must maintain an economy strong enough to meet our new obligations and to withstand the global trend toward totalitarianism and socialism. This trend, if allowed to become rooted here, would destroy our liberties, suppress free enterprise, and strike at the heart of our American way of life. Just as we met the challenge of the war by commandeering the best of our brains and ability, we must again utilize our best in a united effort to meet the truly momentous problems which face us at home and abroad. We must not allow the worn out shibboleths of petty politicians to color our decisions. The times demand courageous leadership and statesmanship of the highest quality in government, in business, as well as in education.

After the war, the departments of Government were depleted by the rapid exodus of scores of our ablest men returning to their normal pursuits. No one then envisioned the reality of a cold war, the huge volume of expenditures required on our part to restore the ravaged economies of Western Europe, or the resultant dangers of inflation at home.

We have faced a series of major crises which we have been ill-equipped to meet. In spite of urgent calls to men of training and experience to take up again positions of responsibility in Government, all too few have been willing to respond.

If I read the times aright, this era of emergency will not soon end. If Swarthmore is to fulfill its role it must give positive encouragement to its graduates to participate warmly, actively, and intelligently in the Nation's service.

This is not a new aspiration. It is one to which we have long been dedicated. We have only to look at the inscription on Clothier. How truly prophetic was Woodrow Wilson, and how felicitous the choice of the message to keep ever before our eyes:

"You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand."