

A Charge to American Youth

By Dr. Edward O. Sisson, of Reed College

IN AN ADDRESS to a class of Portland high school graduates, Doctor Edward O. Sisson of Reed College on January 23rd delivered a masterful charge, a timely admonition to young America of today, standing upon the threshold of life ready to embark upon unknown seas where only those who follow the chart closely will reach the harbor of ambition's goal.

To young men and young women, older folks and youth alike, Dr. Sisson's candid discussion of life's problems holds much of value. Almost every phase of life has been touched upon in such a way as only the scholar, the student of life, the mature man and thinker could possibly present them to view.

The greater number of The Western American readers are thinking men and women, who hold a serious view of life, who are builders of purposeful citizenship. To them Dr. Sisson's address will be of vital interest. For their perusal The Western American has deemed it deserving of the space it requires in its entirety as herewith presented:

Every progressive state now plans to get all its children through the eighth grade; most of them go willingly, with their parents' earnest support; some have to be dragged more or less against their will and even against the will of the parents. Some lag hopelessly behind and finally drop out of school before passing or even reaching the end of the elementary course. Someone recently declared that we are a nation of fifth graders, and there is too much truth in this for comfort. But it still remains that the state has set its minimum goal at the completion of the elementary school, and is pushing nearer to the goal every year.

Attendance at high school is mainly voluntary; it is up to the pupil and his parents; the state will usually not compel. It is true that more children go to high school in the United States than in any other country; still only a small per cent go even here, and naturally a still smaller per cent graduate. Consequently high school graduates are a select class, the few among the many; and higher education begins not in the college, but in the high school. Every student who even enters high school shares in the privileges of higher education, and what is equally important in its responsibilities and obligations.

The aims of education may be stated

very simply, and any man or woman can check up to see if he is educated. To be educated is to think clear and straight, to be decisive and resolute in action, and to love one's fellow men. You will see at once that this is not identical with graduating from high school or college. Abraham Lincoln had only five months of school in his whole life, yet he was the best educated man of his time; on the complex and baffling question of slavery he thought more clearly and scientifically than the most learned men of his day; his unflinching resolution held his country to the bitter task of war until end was won; and his great heart reached out to all human souls, black and white, northern and southern. If you really want to know about your own education, try these tests, of thinking, will, and altruistic love.

Assuming that graduates can think clearly, and possess will-power to act, and have escaped from the narrowing limits of selfishness into the rich abundance of generous love, it is fit and proper to discuss with them the world in which they live and the conditions they may expect to meet. What you need from others is mainly facts. You must absolutely know things as they are, in order that you may do your share in making things better. Just what you are to do, now and later in life, no one else can tell you; your own keen intelligence, guided by your heart and conscience, must do that; and your own will must drive you on in action, as the throbbing engines propel the ship thru the seas.

So it is my privilege, on this great occasion in your lives, to point your eyes to some striking facts in the present state of your country; to invite you to look about you, to look back somewhat into history, and to look forward into the misty portents of the future.

First, America is in a critical mood. The great mass of quiet common people, who make no speeches and write no articles, but who work hard every day, live modestly, love their families, their neighbors and their country—this great body of every-day American citizens are deeply disturbed and trying hard to think themselves out. The mere fact

that they still go to movies and get wildly excited over baseball is nothing to the contrary. The utter failure of the world war to bring peace has sunk deep into our hearts; our faith is shaken and our minds are perplexed. We are trying to penetrate into the meaning of the mysterious handwriting on the wall.

There are two groups against whom I must warn you; they are the opposite extremes of the long range of thinking on our national condition. First there are the people who insist that everything is all right, or at least nearly so; that any proposal for change is dangerous, even disloyal; that all we need is to get back to some imaginary golden age of the fathers; when we really get back to the real fathers we find that they on the contrary insisted on looking forward, to a still better world than was to be. Notice that the very people who harp on this string rarely mention any particular "father," like Patrick Henry, or George Washington, or Jefferson or Lincoln; and still more rarely do they even allude to anything that these fathers did or said. Even so recent a "father" as Theodore Roosevelt, who is still occasionally mentioned, and still a real personal figure, is mostly just a

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