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EDUCATION, SCIENCE, and the NEW DEAL

An Address

by

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EDUCATION, SCIENCE, AND THE NEW DEAL

Mr. President, Members of the Faculty,
Students, and Friends:

In educational methods and aims Rollins College has departed from trodden paths. In this complex world it has individualized education; it has substituted learning for instruction; it has adopted for its students the criterion of accomplishment rather than the old conventions of marks and credit-hours; and it has set as the goal of education complete living. All of this sounds to me like a New Deal in education. I feel at home here. As one New Dealer to another, I greet you.

Our country, almost from the beginning, has been committed to the idea of education. There was, however, at the outset a note of dissent. Governor Berkeley of Virginia, responding to the question of English Commissioners of Foreign Plantations as to what course was being taken in the Colony for instruction of the people in the Christian faith, said: "The same that is taken in England, every man according to his ability instructing his children." But he added, "I thank God there are no free schools or printing presses, and I hope we shall not have them these one hundred years, for learning has brought disobedience and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them and libels against the best of governments. God keep us from both." This was an Old World idea. Widespread learning was feared. Ignorance upon the part of the subject was bliss for the monarch, and it was folly to make the masses wise.

In America the earliest impetus to education came from religion. Enacting, in 1647, what has been called "the mother of school laws,"

the General Court of Massachusetts said:

> "It being one of the chief projects of that old deluder Satan to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues . . .
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> "It is therefore resolved, That every Township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty householders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their Town to teach such children as shall resort to him, to write and read."

There was a hint of the secular and of the dissemination of learning in the next sentence:

> "It is further ordered, that when any Town shall increase to the number of one hundred householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth, so far as they may be fitted, for the university."

In any event, from this time on, the American idea of free schools grew rapidly. Colony after Colony, state after state, and even the Federal government itself, through Congressional school land grants to the states, contributed to the spreading of education. The free school, with its democratized education for the masses, with its "educational ladder", upon the steps of which the student might systematically climb from one stage of instruction to another, became a fully and permanently developed system.

The predicate of this idea was that literacy is essential to democracy. Committed to democracy, we are hence committed to education. So long as government rests ultimately upon the consent of the governed, so long as we seek to maintain a government of, for, and by the people, an informed electorate is a first essential. Both the one and the many profit by a trained intelligence in the individual. Our trust is firmly based upon the enlightening influence of education, thereby insuring intelligent co-

operation and wise leadership in the conduct and the development of our institutions.

I have mentioned that the first impetus to education in this country was religion; and the second was the ideal of literacy for Democracy. There has been a third - science - an impulse drawn from within. For, as the common school developed, as the native intelligence of men and women was trained to the love of learning and the pursuit of truth, there developed, as of course, the scholar of book and tool, of library and laboratory. It is the nature of man to break down frontiers. As the scouts of our early days passed with the conquest of prairie and mountain there arose, to follow and carry on, the scouts of science, clearing the path for their fellows through the frontier of knowledge. Great institutions of higher learning developed, first in the classics, then in pure science, finally in applied science and the various arts. Physics, chemistry, biology, economics, sociology, and, indeed, all the physical and social sciences were developed and applied to the myriad uses of man. As the Thirteenth Century was essentially an age of religion, so our age is largely one of science - of scientific accomplishment and of scientific method, of collection and classification of data, of formation and testing of hypotheses, of reaching conclusions and building thereon, of checking one discovery against another so that, ultimately, isolated findings become a part of the pattern of all, and great gains of tested knowledge inspire further quest and lead to still greater accomplishments.

How far these schools and this science have carried us! In transportation, from the canoe and the ox cart to the ocean liner, the trans-

continental train, the automobile and the aeroplane. In communication, from slow moving letters to the telephone, and the radio. In agriculture, from truck garden and small farm to acres by the million spilling crops toward all the seas. In manufacturing, from village shoemaker and smithy to the specialized factories of today, ravenous for the raw material of the whole earth. In medicine and surgery, from the kit of the country doctor to the great life-saving clinics and hospitals in every part of the land, ministering to health and prolonging the span of life. In sanitation, from successions of plagues, decimating the earth to relative freedom from contagious disease. In architecture, from hut to skyscraper. In business, from clumsy coins to bank credit, from the corner store to the corporate enterprise. Speed of travel, ease of communication, longevity, health, comfort, wealth and beauty; - these are the fruits of science!

And yet, a short twelve months ago our transportation facilities were largely idle; our abundant crops were rotting in the warehouses; our factories were closed or running upon pitifully short time; thirteen million people were idle and our elaborate and carefully constructed banking system entirely ceased to function. We were confronted with the puzzling paradox of starvation amidst plenty.

A learned jurist once said:

> "The law, so far as it depends on learning, is indeed as it has been called, the government of the living by the dead. To a very considerable extent, no doubt, it is inevitable that the living should be so governed. The past gives us our vocabulary and fixes the limits of our imagination; we cannot get away from it. There is, too, a peculiar, logical pleasure in making manifest the continuity between what we are doing and what has been done before. But the present has a right to

govern itself, so far as it can; and it ought always to be remembered that historic continuity with the past is not a duty, it is only a necessity.

"I hope that the time is coming when this thought will bear fruit. An ideal system of law should draw its postulates and its legislative justification from science. As it is now, we rely upon tradition, or vague sentiment, or the fact that we never thought of any other way of doing things, as our only warrant for rules which we enforce with as much confidence as if they embodied revealed wisdom . . .

"The Italians have begun to work upon the notion that the foundations of the law ought to be scientific, and, if our civilization does not collapse, I feel pretty sure that the regiment or division that follows us will carry that flag. Our own word seems the last always; yet the change of emphasis from an argument in Plowden to one in the time of Lord Ellenborough, or even from that to one in our own day, is as marked as the difference between Cowley's poetry and Shelley's. Other changes as great will happen. And so the eternal procession moves on, we in the front for the moment; and, stretching away against the unattainable sky, the black spearheads of the army that has been passing in unbroken line already for near a thousand years."

These are the impressive words of Mr. Justice Holmes, speaking at a dinner of the Harvard Law School, nearly forty years ago. And now we are "in the front for the moment."

Mr. Justice Holmes was entirely right. Literacy is essential to democracy, but not mere literacy. Education and science, if they are to be useful to government, must function within government as they have functioned outside of it. It is a sad commentary that we have used science least where we needed it most. To transportation, communication, agriculture, industry, medicine, sanitation, architecture, finance and business - we have applied science and the fruits thereof, but not to government. There has been learning, but it has gone unused. Economists, sociologists, historians, students of politics there have been; and, like their brothers

in the pursuit of truth, they have sought and they have found. In the books of the dead and the activities of the living they have traced the growth and science of government. In the great laboratory of life down the ages they have seen the trial and error of collective life. All this knowledge they have stored for the use of those of the "eternal procession" who are for the moment "in the front" - and we have not used it.

The genius of the New Deal lies in the application of science to government and contemplates the reapplication of the doctrines of co-operation. The Agricultural Adjustment Act is a planned attack upon unbalanced production, the National Recovery Act upon unbalanced employment, and both upon our diminished purchasing power. These Acts were carefully devised. Not only were individual enactments thought out in advance but their relationships to each other and to the whole result were recognized factors in the problem. The Agricultural Adjustment Act complements the National Recovery Act. The Public Works feature sustains both. Thus, production, consumption, and capital goods industries are being aided simultaneously. The Civilian Conservation Corps, the Civil Works Administration, and various other modern measures are component parts of a seriously thought out program. The banking structure is undergoing a necessary rehabilitation. Price adjustments and dollar stabilization are sought by the scientific method of trial and error and not by arbitrary fiat. A cleansing of the public service and a campaign against crime have been undertaken as matters essential to a healthy national life

In brief, the attack of the New Deal is economic rather than political. The very terminology of the present measures is that of finance, accounting, budgeting, crop production, labor distribution, costs of living, costs of

production, margins of profit, price levels, and the like. The measures thus operating seek to adjust the economic factors of our life so as to produce efficiency in that sense of the word which means the abolition of idleness and poverty in a land of plenty.

It will be said that the New Deal is experimental and that not all of its measures will succeed. But this is no sufficient challenge. The method of the New Deal is one of action, not of laissez-faire. It refuses to abandon in despair our economic life to the operations of chance. The New Deal is education and science in action.

> "And so the procession moves on, we in the front for the moment, and stretching away against the unattainable sky the black spearheads of the army that has been passing in unbroken line for near a thousand years."

And in a moment, my student friends, it will be you who are "in the front". Let me exhort you to remember, as educated men and women, as scholars, as scientists, as citizens, that literacy must be for, not merely in, democracy. It must function for government, and it must function through you. Only thus shall we have, in the words of Rollins College, "complete living," and only thus, in the words of our great President, "a more abundant life for all."

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