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A C C A L A U R E A T E A D D R E S S

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TO THE GRADUATING CLASS

OF

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BY

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YOUNG GENTLEMEN.

The days of your College Life have come to a close. The point which seemed so distant at the start, is at length reached; and not without some measure of surprise probably to your own feelings, you find yourselves called to exchange the quiet walks of the academy for the stern realities of public life. The world is right before you, with all its activity and conflict—its interests, its duties, its dangers; and you are now summoned to settle each one for himself his proper vocation, to make special preparation for its demands, and thus to throw yourselves, full harnessed for the task, into the wild tumultuating arena, where you must save yourselves by earnest manly action kept up to the last, or perish.

In such circumstances, the present occasion, by which we are brought together for the last time, in the relation now to be dissolved after years of pleasant fellowship, is necessarily clothed with peculiar interest and solemnity. *You* feel it to be so no doubt, as Pupils, in your inmost heart. As Teachers, we have the same feeling. With longer experience of life, and more knowledge of the world, our sense of the responsibilities and perils that lie before you is of course more actual also and full, and less tinged with the coloring of romance, than any you can be supposed to possess yourselves. How then should we not look forward with parental anxiety to that *Future*, on whose broad bosom you are now about to embark, and whose waves will soon bear you from our side!

Urged by such interest in your welfare, I embrace the opportunity here offered at the close of these exercises, to address you once more as a College Class, in the way of instruction and counsel. My theme shall be drawn from the character of

the occasion itself. You are about to quit this peaceful retreat, and go forth into the busy world, as men who have a part to act in the service of their generation. What is the special character of the period in which you are called to live? And what are the principles and maxims that should govern your activity, to make it what the period requires? To an earnest mind, in your circumstances, no inquiries can be more natural than these, and none more important. Allow me then to make them the basis of my parting discourse at this time.

Life is always full of trial and peril. To the young man, in any age and in any condition of society, it is an experiment of terrific interest, before which the stoutest heart might well be allowed to quail. Not without toil and conflict, may the vast problem of human existence be satisfied in the case of any, even under the most favorable circumstances. The world is always a wild tempestuous sea, where the mariner is in danger of being wrecked or engulfed from the commencement of his voyage to its close. Few, under any circumstances, are enabled to make the voyage well. To thousands it is continually bringing only disaster and death. The probation is always precarious, as its issues are unutterably momentous and solemn. It is a great thing in any age, to understand the opportunities and wants of life, or to be true to its responsibilities.

But all periods are not alike in this respect. There are times when the stream of history moves forward with a comparatively smooth and quiet flow; and each new age is allowed to repeat, with only partial modification, the life and experience of that which went before. And then there are times again, when the whole order of life, as it has stood perhaps for centuries, is itself to be metamorphosed into a new form, by a process involving more or less confusion and violence. The world is carried forward in its appointed course, not in the way of regularly continuous development in the same direction and under the same form; but by a succession.

of eras rather and critical epochs. Every era is characterized by a measure of stability and uniformity in its constitution ; though never in fact absolutely fixed, but always ripening by its own action for the change, by which in the end it is to pass away and make room for another. When this change comes, it is in this respect the revelation only of a process, which had been secretly advancing towards such birth, in the womb of the previous period, for generations before. The birth itself however involves the introduction of a new order of existence, at the cost of the old, and with the dissolution sooner or later of its power. It forms in this way an epoch or crisis through which the life of one era is carried over into the life of another, and that must be attended always, from its very nature, with the throes and tumults of a new creation.

Such a period, in which old things are required in a certain sense to pass away in order that all things may become new, must be allowed of course to bring with it *special* responsibilities and *special* perils. If it be always something solemn, and indeed awful, to be put upon the probation of human existence in the circumstances of such a world as ours, it is so most eminently of course, when the probation is made to include the difficulties, that every crisis of this sort must be expected to create. More in such a case is comprehended in the great experiment of life, than at other times. More is to be accomplished by its proper use ; and more is to be lost, if it prove a failure. While at the same time, more wisdom is needed to understand what is right, and more resolution to obey its authority ; so that altogether the danger of failure is greatly increased beyond its ordinary measure. All this deserves to be well considered and laid to heart by those who are called to enter upon life in the midst of such a period.

Now it is a widely prevalent feeling, that the history of the world has come to such a grand crisis in our own time ; and the prevalence of the feeling is itself an argument, that the judgment embraced in it is correct. No serious mind indeed, earnestly reflecting on the Past and Present, can easily resist

the impression that a great moral revolution is at hand, by which an entirely new order of life is to be revealed in the Church and in the world. We may not be prepared to say in what this revolution shall consist. We may not be able to calculate at all either its course or its time. But the whole state of life must be held to affirm its necessity, and foretold its approach. To a great extent, the old, under its existing form, has palpably run its course and fulfilled its mission; and if it is to be saved at all, must be saved by passing over into a new and higher life. The world as it now stands is fast hurrying by inward contradiction and conflict, towards its own dissolution. The signs of a new era were not more striking or urgent just before the Reformation itself, than they are at the present time. The period in which you are called to live is invested, in this view, with the highest solemnity that can attach to life. It brings with it high opportunities and privileges; but imposes also heavy duties and vast responsibilities. It has much to offer to your hopes; but appeals at the same time, if rightly understood, more largely still perhaps to your fears.

This will be at once apparent, if we allow ourselves to reflect for a moment, on the leading characteristics of such a period, as they belong in the nature of the case to its constitution, and as they reveal themselves to the eye of an attentive observer, at this time, in the actual condition of the world.

It belongs to the presence of such a crisis in history, in the first place, that the *old*, as it has existed for generations, perhaps for centuries, is found to be shorn of its original vitality and force. Old forms, old institutions, old opinions, still continue to stand; but the spirit by which they were once animated is in a great measure gone, and seems always more and more ready to expire altogether. Respect for the existing order of life has come to be more traditional and mechanical than hearty and free. There is a want of confidence, both in its perfection and in its stability; an uneasy sense of much that is wrong, where formerly all was felt to be right. It is

not necessary that this feeling should be openly expressed. It is not necessary even that it should be clear in general, to the consciousness of those with whom it prevails. Enough that the old has lost the power it once had, to fill the soul and stir the life ; that it is no longer related to the soul as its true and necessary body ; that it is held for the most part in an outward way only, and not by the force of an inward living bond. No wonder that in these circumstances, its authority should begin to be regarded by many as unreasonable and oppressive.

Hence, in the second place, as characteristic of the same state of the world, a powerful tendency to overthrow the old, in a violent, merely negational way. As the original spirit of existing institutions and systems of thought has to a great extent exhausted itself, and false tendencies included in them have been carried out in the mean time to their natural, necessary result, all is made to appear under a character more or less onesided and extreme ; and the consequence is in many minds an angry reaction, that seeks to set the world right, by carrying all forcibly again in the opposite direction. This movement however is connected with little or no insight into the true character of the evil, upon which it is thus led to make war, and has no sense of course of what is needed in the way of positive remedy for its power. It assails all as a merely outward system, created by tyrannical ignorance or fraud, that needs only to be demolished as it stands, in order that the world may be made free. Hence its own action becomes also outward only, and slavish, and blind ; and instead of bringing any redemption for the wants of the time, serves but to render them more helpless and severe.

Hence, in the third place, a blind conflict of contrary extremes, by which the truth is wronged, and false tendencies confirmed and pushed to their last results, on both sides. Though shorn in a large degree of its original life, the system which is thus rudely assaulted by coarse radical zeal, in the way now mentioned, has still force enough to call forth a

strong excitement in its own favor. Hence an active movement for the support of what is at hand, in opposition to the activity by which it is sought to remove it out of the way. In the circumstances of the case however, this movement is as little free and intelligent as the other. It is zeal for the letter and the form, rather than for the truth which these were intended originally, to enshrine. It partakes more or less accordingly, of the same negative, indiscriminating, radical character. All is involved in controversy, where darkness prevails over light, and passion and blind self-will are more active than reason or the love of truth.

Out of this grows naturally, in the fourth place, widely extended scepticism and doubt, carried at last in the case of many to an absolute despair of truth. Where controversy has come to hold between mere extremes, actuated on both sides by the spirit of blind contradiction rather than by the positive life of truth, it can only serve in the end to reveal more or less clearly to the consciousness of the age, the nakedness and falsehood of its thinking in each form, and thus gradually to undermine its confidence in all that has been seemingly honored as the object of its faith. With minds of a frivolous order, this scepticism will partake of the same character. To the earnest and deep, it will be like a dark pall cast over all that is otherwise green and fresh in life.

Connected with all this, in the last place, there may be expected to prevail much confusion in the moral world, and a spirit of wild reckless adventure, in which thought shall appear to be bound by no law, and to be true to no principle or aim. A period of revolution must ever be spiritually chaotic. The old landmarks are no longer clearly in sight. The foundations of the earth seem to be unsettled. Men lose confidence in themselves and in one another; and yet for this very reason show themselves blindly rash in rushing forward in almost any direction, in which they may be called to move. In such a season it is emphatically, that false Messiahs spring up on every side, tempting men into the desert or secret cham-

ber, and find multitudes to follow them in their madness, wherever they may choose to lead.

Such in a general way are the characteristics of a period, by which the world is carried forward in the way of critical revolution from one great era in the history of thought to another. And into the midst of such a crisis, I think it sufficiently plain that we are fast coming at the present time. The signs and tokens of a vast revolution, by which the whole state of the world and the Church will be changed into a new type, present themselves to our view on every side. Existing tendencies seem almost to have run their course. The struggle of opposing principles is carried to its last tension. The order of life as it now stands, cannot endure much longer. Old things show themselves ready to pass away. Scepticism, confusion, contradiction, abound already, and are likely to abound more and more. It is the birth period of a new moral creation. Life, always solemn, is now invested with a weight which it is not easy to measure or express.

In what spirit then, beloved Pupils, should you commit yourselves to the waves of this wild, storm-tost sea? What principles should regulate your perilous course, to make it honorable and safe? With what counsels shall we send you forth upon your probation, and bid you God speed, in the hope that you may be true to yourselves and true to your generation, and thus at the same time true to your God?

1. *Have faith in History.* By this I mean a great deal more than the first sound of the words may perhaps suggest. History is the way of God in the world. It proceeds not blindly nor by chance; but is a process, by which the purpose or plan of the Divine Mind is continually carried forward, among men, towards its glorious end. In this view, at the same time, it is not simply a mechanical arrangement, over which God may be supposed to preside in an outward way, as a man conducting a game of chess, or a general directing the movements of his army. But the process is itself the divine purpose, moving forward by necessary self-explication at

every point, to the full resolution of the end involved in it from the beginning. God is not simply *over* History, but *in* it; as he is also in the actual constitution of the world. History then is infinitely rational. It is not made up of loose fragments confusedly thrown together; but forms, in all its parts, a great organic whole, that developes itself continually according to a law involved in its own nature. It never proceeds at random. It never goes backwards. It is never without meaning or value. In this view, it includes an objective force, which is wholly beyond and independent of all individual will; and that carries forward the counsels of the Almighty, from generation to generation, without regard to the consciousness or purpose of any particular generation separately taken. To confide in History then is to confide in God. It is to bear with us the connection habitually, that the world is not abandoned to itself, to take its course according to accident or human caprice; but is steadily working out its own problem, in obedience to the divine will, with an inward necessity which can never be turned from its course. It is our great privilege accordingly, as it is our duty also, to fall back upon this power more general than ourselves; and to seek refuge in it from the sense of our own weakness, as well as from the disorders and contradictions with which we are surrounded in the world. Especially is this important, in such a period as we have found that to be, in which you are called to enter upon the experiment of life. Endeavor then to embrace the true idea of History, and cultivate the habit of leaning calmly and firmly upon it, as a power that bears the world upon its bosom. Seek not to carry it by your own particular strength, but rather to be carried by it yourselves in its onward appointed course. Have faith in it, as an objective, self-sustaining, self-moving process — the will of God, always advancing with infinite wisdom and love towards its own end. This assurance will serve you as a beacon light, when all is like a dark wild sea around you, and there may seem to be no way of escape besides from spiritual shipwreck. It will

save you from scepticism and despair. It will give you stability, patience and courage. It will set you at peace with the Past, and inspire you with hope for the Future. It may be regarded indeed as the indispensable condition, to every one of you, of all free and vigorous activity, in the service of your generation. Have faith in History. For without it, you can have no faith in the world, no faith in yourselves, no faith in God.

II. *Commit yourselves, in the great conflict of life, to no false, superficial issue.* Every great change in the world, is accomplished through the collision and strife of opposing principles, included in the movement itself, and equally necessary in the end to its result. The truth has become separated in the case from itself, and is now formed into antagonistic poles, that can never rest at the same time till they are brought together by a true reconciliation. For a time however, the tendency, in these circumstances, is to fly always more and more asunder. It seems necessary indeed, that the opposition in this form should be carried out to its full extreme, only that the right which belongs to each tendency, along with its error, may be brought home fully to the consciousness of the age. Still the issue itself, as thus constituted, is never altogether true or fair, in the very nature of the case ; and it must ever be counted unfortunate for any man, when he is led to commit himself blindly and violently to it, on either side. It is in this way precisely, that the world is thrown so commonly into sects and parties, in all political or moral movements. Hence party zeal is *never* pure ; and the party has never yet existed, in Church or State, that has not been freighted more or less heavily with error and falsehood, along with its measure of truth. It is of the very nature of a party, that it is devoted to a *part* of the truth, and not to the truth as a whole. But this implies always an unfree position, in the case of those who are thus circumstanced. No party man ever has been or ever can be, as such, a truly great man. Bear this well in mind, in whatever sphere you may be called hereafter to take part

in public life. And remember too, that it belongs especially to the character of such a period as the present, to multiply occasions for party strife, and to clothe it with its very worst form. Now especially it is difficult to fathom the true wants of the time ; and the temptation is great in proportion, to fall in with some false statement of the problem, and thus to be carried away with superficial, onesided zeal, against the truth as well as for it, in the service of a cause that must sooner or later perish. The force of this danger you will be called to encounter, on a small and large scale, at every point of your probation.

III. *Cherish a sacred veneration for the authority of the Past.* This you cannot fail to do, if you have any right sense of the nature of History, as already described. If this be such an organic process as we have seen, it is plain that no age or period can be possessed of any truth, except as it is bound by an inward, living union, to the life of the world as it has stood before. To be cut off by abrupt separation from this life, is to be at once like a branch severed from its parent trunk. The Present can never be true to itself, except as it is true to the Past at the same time, embracing the whole power of this in its own constitution. This must be felt by every earnest and profound mind, in proportion precisely as it is made the subject of reflection. The world under any other view is involved in helpless contradiction, without light and without hope ; and history is turned into a moral chaos, wholly unworthy of God. No change then can be valid and legitimate in the course of life, that does not carry along with it the inmost spirit and substance of the state it leaves behind. Where this relation to the past is not preserved, the change is negational simply, radical, revolutionary ; and as such stands entitled to no confidence or respect. Here is the true test of a great mind, in such circumstances, as compared with one of inferior character and power. Reverence for authority, a disposition to bow before the majesty of that which is greater and broader than ourselves, is indeed the indispensable condi-

tion of all true freedom and power, in any direction. It shows a want of strength and want of culture at the same time, to cast off respect for any objective force, by which in the nature of the case the individual subject *should* be ruled and bound. The *radical* is always ignoble and weak. It is the mark of a reprobate spirit, to have no regard for public opinion. It shows a shallow, narrow mind, to speak disrespectfully of the Past, or to trample under foot contemptuously the authority of History. Have no sympathy with such a temper. Let it be a maxim firmly settled in your souls, not to sunder yourselves, under any temptation, from the living, organic constitution of society, as you find yourselves carried in its bosom. Never dream of improving the world, by violence and storm; as though its existing form should be demolished utterly, to make room for its reconstruction on some new plan of your own. You cannot carry History, but History must carry you. If your activity is ever to be of any true, solid, lasting account to your generation, it must be rooted, remember, in the sense of authority, and a deep, earnest veneration for the Past.

IV. *Honor the principle of PROGRESS, and be ready always to go along with it in its true form.* There is a bondage to the power of the Past, by which it is as little honored, as it is by the revolutionary zeal that tramples its authority under foot. A bondage, by which it is in fact arrayed against itself, and forced to become the grave of its own life. This appears, wherever a disposition is shown to cleave to a given standpoint, as the absolute and ultimate perfection of life, and to withstand every tendency or effort by which it is attempted to advance to a new position. All change in such case is regarded as in its nature revolutionary, and the new is supposed to involve, as far as it prevails, the full sacrifice of the old. Hence fidelity to the old is made to consist, in a fixed immobility of spirit, by which, as much as possible, all thought and all life is held to the same traditional form. But the spirit cannot exist without motion, and shorn of freedom in this

way it is shorn of life at the same time. Spiritual immobility is spiritual death. History too, is a process. It never stands still. The life which it includes, like all life, preserves itself by passing continually from one stage over into another. To honor it at all, we must honor it in this form ; not by clinging superstitiously to the outward hull from which its proper soul has passed, but by following this rather in its onward course, and yielding it free homage and service in the new position from which it has come to challenge our regard. There is no contradiction then whatever between the counsel now offered and that presented before. On the contrary, the two are closely bound together, and are necessary each to complete the other. True veneration for the spirit of the Past, as distinguished from its letter, form, carcase, includes a disposition to go along with it in its onward, living course. And so on the other hand, as we have already seen, all true reformatory action, all genuine historical progress, is conditioned by a firm, deep, inward respect for the order of the world as handed down from other times. There is no contradiction here in the least. For the progress we are called to honor and serve, is not such as we have contrived of ourselves, in opposition to the actual state of life ; but it is properly speaking the self-evolution of History itself, which we are simply required to go along with and help forward in its course. The duty requires us to be passive, and yet active at the same time. Passive, in surrendering ourselves quietly to the course of the vast historical stream by which the life of the world is carried forward. Active, in lending our strength freely and vigorously to the service of the movement, with which we are thus borne along. Here again there is no contradiction, as to superficial thinking might appear ; but only reciprocal supplement and support. Freedom holds, as it ever *must* hold to be either genuine or complete, in the element of authority. Our part is not to *make* history—not to stand over it or beyond it as something that may be expected to bend to our own will ; but rather, to stand in it, and to give ourselves up with as much consciousness as possible to its power, that this may

flow through us as free, intelligent instruments, and reveal itself by our activity. Such a posture has no tendency whatever to beget an indolent, supine habit in the spirit ; on the contrary, it furnishes the very best guaranty for energetic and persevering action. It is this feeling of being comprehended in an organic, objective force, broader and deeper than ourselves, general and necessary and true as the will of God itself, which more than any influence besides, is adapted to inspire, just the most large hearted resolution and enthusiastic zeal, that can ever be infused into the individual will. Abhor then and avoid the spirit of revolutionary, unhistorical fanaticism ; but abhor and reject at the same time, the principle of an equally unhistorical spiritual stagnation, that will admit of no progress whatever. Let your homage to the Past be, not servile, but free.

V. Finally, look always to *Jesus Christ*. This is my last counsel, the most comprehensive, most important of all. By this too however I mean much more, than the common sense of the direction may be said to include. His doctrine is all perfect ; and yet it is not enough that you should embrace it and rest upon it as the truth of God. His work is all glorious ; and yet it is not enough that you should make it, by faith, the ground of your life and hope. You need to find in Him more than all this. He is the Personal *Truth* and the Personal *Life*. In Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily ; and the inmost depths of life are comprehended in his person. He is the ground and centre, the alpha and omega, of all nature and all history ; the key that unlocks the mystery of Humanity, and lays open thus the significance and sense, otherwise unfathomable, of the whole universe at the same time. He is the beginning of all light and all strength in the human spirit ; the fountain of all that is green, and fresh, and enduringly satisfying, in human consciousness. "I am the Light of the world," is his own magnificent proclamation, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." All

flesh, the whole world under any other view, is grass ; but "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to day, and forever !" And the whole world, as taken up into the new creation that springs from his person, is redeemed from its vanity, and becomes immortal in like manner. We may see then how much is comprehended, in the counsel now enforced upon your attention. At all times, but especially in every great critical epoch like that throughout which the world is now called to pass, it is of the most necessary account that the eye of the soul should be turned full upon the person of Christ. No darkness so deep, that it may not be illuminated, no disorder so wild that it may not be hushed to harmony and peace, by the thought of his presence. When all other foundations fail, the pillars of the world are still borne up by his hand. He is the truth on which all other truths rest ; more sure and certain than any or all, as seen apart from his person. Nature is less sure, our own existence even is less sure, to our consciousness, than the truth exhibited in Christ's person. He stands in himself the great argument and pledge of all truth, in nature or spirit ; the last, all sufficient refuge of the soul from scepticism and despair. He is the principle of order, and light, and power. Cultivate then, above all things, the habit of looking to Christ. Let him be the star you follow through life ; the sun, in the firmament of your existence. When far out upon the deep, surrounded with midnight and tost by winds and waves, remember him upon the sea of Galilee. When the world is found to fade and wither, and life seems turning to an arid sand-waste, think of him as he stood by the grave of Lazarus, or showed himself to Mary on the morning of his own resurrection. When confusion and contradiction make themselves felt on every side, and all that has been counted solid seems ready to give way ; when the counsel of the wise and prudent fails, and the hands of the mighty become weak ; when reason is confounded, and science falls into inextricable, helpless embarrassment ; when clouds and darkness cover the heavens with a thick pall, and the soul recoils

aghast from the yawning abyss of its own nature ; when every other confidence breaks, and truth itself in every other form is converted into blank despair ; then turn towards HIM, with Peter, and say, prostrate at his feet, "Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life ; and we believe and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God !"

With these counsels, we bid you an affectionate farewell. We know not of course, as you cannot yourselves know, through what scenes of prosperity or adversity your life path is destined to run ; nor in what form, nor at what point, it shall come to its close. But this much we do know. It is a great and difficult thing, to live well ; more so than any of you can fully comprehend at present. Life is a race, where many run, but few obtain the prize. At the same time, issues of immeasurable moment hang upon it, in the case of every one of you. A whole world of spiritual interests is staked upon your truth and fidelity. For no man liveth to himself ; and no man can perish for himself alone. And yet there is no reason that you should cast away confidence, or resign yourselves to despair. The conflict of life is constituted in itself for victory, and not for defeat. To the true in heart, however terrible it may be for a time, it can never prove disastrous in the end. All good angels are on their side. The inmost order of the world works in their favor. God smiles upon them propitiously from heaven. Jesus leads the way before them, as the Captain of Salvation ; and crowns of glory, in full view, invite them triumphantly to the skies. "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Go forth then in His name, and all shall be well. To his all powerful, fatherly grace we commend you. May the God who appeared to Jacob, in the visions of the night, on his way to Padan-aram—the God of the patriarchs and prophets—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Fountain of all wisdom and truth and life, go with you, keep you and bless you, in all your earthly pilgrimage ; that you may be true and faithful to your high call-

ing while you live, and so have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly at last into the everlasting kingdom of His Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.