ADDRESS OF EVERETT CASE

Upon the occasion of his inauguration as the ninth president
of Colgate University, Hamilton, N. Y.
Sept. 24, 1942

At midnight on December 31, 1899, the bells rang out with a signal
note of exuberance. Heralds not of the new year only, they gave to
the new century a reception that echoed the buoyant expectations of a
confident western world. For much of Europe, for the British Empire,
and especially for these re-United States, a veritable blaze of glory
illumined the achievements of the nineteenth century. Yet this blaze
was but a candle to the incandescence of the future. Ring out the old,
ing in the new.

If toasts to the twentieth century were freely proposed on that
New Year's Eve, the western world was already intoxicated with the
heady gospel of progress. It had some reason to be. With the close
of the war between the States and the incredibly brief Franco-Prussian
war, swords had been beaten into plow shares--and into far more in-
genious contraptions--with great gusto and rapidity.

The Spanish and Boer wars, like the populist revolt and the silver
crusade, seemed little more than strange interludes in the thrilling
and accelerated march of commerce, invention, and the thousand arts
of peace. If the endless multiplication of machines had bred suffering
and bitterness, it was only here and there and for the moment. Given
a little time, these problems would adjust themselves. Given a little
time, there was no limit to what we could do, especially in America.
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Those of us who, like the speaker, were children of the century are hardly competent to say how far experienced men-of-affairs actually shared these sanguine convictions. Certainly we gained the impression that they did. To some extent at home, more definitely at school, we learned to assume that ours was indeed the golden age which untold centuries of trial and error had labored to bring forth. Certain Homeric rumors, it is true, told us of other golden ages, one of which had made forever famous the shores of the Aegean.

Glamorous as their exploits were, however, our admiration for the ancient Greeks was not untinged with pity. They had had to fight their battles without gun powder and report them without the aid of the telegraph or the Morse code. They did not know the steam engine; indeed, their science had been intuitive and rudimentary. And obviously the Wright Brothers could have shown Icarus a thing or two.

We flattered ourselves, moreover, that the Greeks and even the Romans would have been staggered by the speed with which our American fathers and grandfathers had conquered this vast continent. We were proud of the new and protean machines at our disposal. Like Paul Bunyan, we had taken gigantic strides and could recite gigantic sums. If Congress voted billion-dollar budgets, if Mr. Morgan gave us billion-dollar corporations, we were, after all, a billion-dollar country. We were rich, powerful, and young, and nothing could stop us.

We knew, of course, that material progress was not everything, but we had a firm grasp of those enlightened principles on which our brave new world was being reared. Of these principles, four were basic: national independence, democratic government, world peace, and social justice. Toward the first three the Victorian age had already taken us far.
Social justice—a kind of derivative from earlier bills of
human rights—was a new and intoxicating concept of which we were
very proud; we congratulated ourselves equally on our hatred of sham
and our willingness to face disagreeable facts. If there were prob-
lems which we side-stepped, it was not because we denied their
existence, but only because we were otherwise engaged. Certainly we
were not afraid of them. As soon as we could get around to them,
they would be solved. Our new mastery of science and technology
would enormously speed the process.

This picture, as we ourselves soon discovered, was greatly over-
simplified. Growing somewhat older, we learned that there was much
in the world to distort or obscure its outlines. Germany and Russia
were certainly not democracies, and the Balkans were notoriously back-
ward and chaotic. The Austro-Hungarian empire was scarcely to be
reconciled with the principle of national independence—nor, as the
Irish kept reminding us, was the British.

Asia was still a smouldering and little-known continent, and even
at home we had our troubles. There were lynchings, strikes, and
riots. There were the startling revelations of the muckrakers. There
were the mordant commentaries of the disenchanted, who like Brooks
and Henry Adams, angrily rejected the popular dogma of automatic
progress and even had some doubts about human perfectibility.

In America, however, it was hard to take these gloomy forebod-
ings seriously. We believed in ourselves because our democracy had
met the pragmatic test. We believed in miracles because we were
accustomed to them. In good time we would produce a Homer and a
Sophocles, an Aristotle and a Praxiteles of our own. Meantime, if
there was anything seriously amiss in our industrial and political
arrangements, Theodore Roosevelt with his Square Deal, or Woodrow
Wilson, with his New Freedom would soon set it right.
In the larger theatre, too, history was plainly working on our side. Germany and Italy had at last emerged as independent states, and Italy, at least, had adopted a liberal constitution. Gradually, the British Empire was becoming liberalized; soon Russia and Germany would have to follow suit.

Even from the staggering shock of war in 1914 our faith quickly rallied. It was a rude and shocking blow, for we had believed our civilization too enlightened for such barbarity. Soon, however, we were telling ourselves that it was what we might expect of autocratic governments.

Embattled democracy rose to the challenge, and with the dubious and somewhat embarrassing aid of the Russian Czar vowed death and destruction to the Kaiser. All that was needed, we told ourselves, was to free the oppressed peoples of eastern Europe and of Germany itself. A world of democratic states would make the world automatically safe for democracy.

The triumph of Allied arms in 1918 vindicated and reinforced our confidence. Albeit at fearful cost, the war had evidently accelerated the trend toward democracy which we knew to be inevitable. Like the German and Austrian Kaisers, the Czar of Russia himself had disappeared, and doubtless a Russian democracy would soon emerge from the horrors of the Bolshevik terror. Germany and the Austrian successor states, we noted complacently, had already adopted democratic constitutions. The old world looked like new.

 Everywhere, it seemed, the power and prestige of America were acknowledged, nor were they diminished by our fabulous prosperity during the 1920's. In words which shortly thereafter gained more than a local currency we were "sitting pretty on top of the world."
To the present generation of college students, this excursion into the immediate past must assume the outlines and character of a fabulous journey. Born in the headlong '20s, brought up in the bitter '30s, they must regard with astonishment the facile and buoyant optimism of a day they never knew. I have no intention of rehearsing here the catastrophic sequence which finally confronted a shaken America with the most savage and ruthless challenge this nation has ever had to face.

All too obviously we are confronted today with a condition, not a theory, and the immediate challenge to all of us—the colleges included—is to tighten our belts, buckle down to the job, and demonstrate to the enemy that rumors of American impotence and democratic decadence have been grossly and for them disastrously exaggerated.

In our hearts, we know that this is true. Little as we relish the orgy of destruction which must precede the victory of our arms, we are impatient to get on with the job. The shreds of easy optimism are fast disappearing, and in their place we are weaving a fabric of grim but quietly confident determination.

In our own expressive idiom we mean to "show them," and the colleges including Colgate can be counted on to do their full share. The end of the summer, for example, found three-fourths of the men who were graduated here last spring already serving with the armed forces. The casualty lists show that already seven Colgate men have laid down their lives for their country. Whatever else is demanded of us we are prepared to do.

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It is facts like these, of course, which confront America—and especially American education—with a sharp and continuing challenge which reaches far beyond the tumult and the shouting. After the last war we did not meet that challenge squarely. I bring in no specific bills of indictment; there is blame enough to go around.

But the fact of war spells failure: Of human hopes, of human efforts, of the means of peaceful settlement which are the only alternative to conflict vi et armis. To deny, in view of the power and prestige attached to our position, that this failure was America's failure would be childish and unrealistic. To deny that American education must share responsibility for that failure is to deny its potency and its high calling.

During the past two decades we spent fabulous sums on education. Who shall say that they produced the results we sought? It is time that we searched our practices and procedures, and above all our minds and our hearts, in a supreme endeavor to discover the root causes of our inadequacy.

This is no mere academic exercise. The victory we now seek and are determined to gain offers us a second chance to succeed, no more, no less. Opportunity, we are told, seldom knocks more than once, and if by our present united effort and the valor of our youth we gain our second chance, we dare not fail.

For let us not forget that if war is the disastrous conclusion of one chapter of human activity it is also the dynamic beginning of another. Repudiating past settlements and denying the efficacy of peaceful negotiation, war nevertheless has for its objective—as Dr. Wriston has so eloquently pointed out—the forging of a new settlement; or, more accurately, a new basis for one. Nothing could be more fatal, then, than to regard it as a mere interlude.
In countless ways, many of them little understood or even suspected, the forces war unleashes are now shaping the world of the future. If man is to master these forces, if democracy is to adjust itself successfully to the cumulative and almost feverish change in our human environment, we would better begin now to study the problem and its implications. For the pressures of war vastly accelerate the already bewildering pace of change, and if education is not to abdicate, there is no time to lose. It is always, perhaps, later than we think.

III

We are, of course, too close to the long and uneasy Armistice which separated World War I and World War II for any definitive appraisal of our sins of commission or omission. I wish this morning to make only one or two modest suggestions which may be illuminating as we face the all important problems of the future. Our recent failure to convert a hard-won armistice into the stuff of peace is not to be ascribed to ill-will or perversity, nor even I think to want of effort. It was, I venture to suggest, primarily a failure of understanding. What was it that we did not understand?

First, we did not begin to grasp the meaning of the power and responsibilities which attached to our newly acquired position of primacy. The rest of the world, we said, could shift for itself; as for us, we would mind our own business. If only we had! For disaster overtook us, not because we were minding our business, but because in large part we fatally neglected it. Failing to perceive that the scope of our business had become world-wide, we unwittingly left to foreigners the determination of questions in which America had a vital stake. This must not happen again.

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Our astigmatism may be accounted for in part by the bewildering nature of the changes that beset us on every hand. In one respect, certainly the high hopes we entertained when the twentieth century was young did not betray us. Science and technology, one of the great imaginative adventures of our time, continued to produce marvels after their kind at a rate and on a scale which knew no parallel. Indeed the war itself had greatly accelerated the process.

In the sense that we were soon taking them very much for granted, we adjusted ourselves readily enough to the motor car and the airplane; the radio and the talking picture, the X-ray and the electric kitchen. We quickly embraced the new comforts, conveniences and excitements which our highly-organized research and technology were providing in such abundance. Nevertheless, we found ourselves in increasing numbers a prey to restlessness, disenchantment and a sense of futility. Preoccupied with what we could see and hear and touch, we failed to perceive the deeper impact of science either upon the world without or upon the sensitive world within.

We knew, of course, that the radio and the turbine and the airplane were violently compressing space and time. That was a fact the implications of which we had neither the time nor the taste to pursue. We knew, too, that our new technology had introduced sweeping changes in the economic and social structure, moving men by the millions from the farms and women by the millions from the home, destroying in countless little ways age-old habits and customs and sanctions. Insofar as these changes meant release from old drudgeries and old fears, it was natural enough for us to welcome them, but we were too busy to pursue their deeper and more sobering implications.

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How had our brave new world become for so many of us the Waste Land? Why was Spengler read by the intelligentsia of the twenties with such bitter relish? For how many did T. S. Eliot not chant a personal lament in The Hollow Men

"...Leaving together
Head piece filled with straw. Alas!

... . . .
Those who have crossed to death's other Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men..."

Had we, perhaps, been leaving it all to science—and pseudo-science—and discovering the weariness of sophistical indifference? Had we so accustomed ourselves to reaping where others had sown that when our economic arrangements, for example, suddenly went awry, we could only cry out for a scapegoat?

Had the teachings of Darwin, once glibly hailed as confirming the popular dogma of progress, become no more than a warrant for behavior too frankly reminiscent of man's origin? Did we, in short, forget how easily man can lose his bearings when his charts and steering directions are confused?

Above all, did we pay too little attention, as individuals and as a nation, to those basic obligations without which there can be in the long run neither peaceful intercourse nor civilized society? Was the depression of the '30s only financial and economic or did we suffer from a spiritual deflation too?

These questions are not merely rhetorical. Men may differ about the answers, but the questions would better be faced if we intend, as we must, to deal masterfully with the future.
And how are we to do that? What, specifically, can the college do about it? I shall not speak of the economic and financial hazards which confront us. From colonial days our colleges have met and mastered one financial crisis after another and so long as they do their job, I have no doubt whatever of their survival. On the other hand, unless we meet the desperate urgency of today's and tomorrow's challenge, not even prosperity will save us.

The problem differs from that which confronted us twenty-five years ago less in kind than in degree. Now as then we shall face a disorderly world in which weary and disenchanted men will return by the millions—with significant gaps in their ranks—seeking rest, forgetfulness, and finally jobs. Is this a problem for industry? Is it a problem for government? Is it of no concern to education?

Again the pressure of war has been accelerating scientific change in a sense which few men dream of. Many a revolutionary development and process is a secret of war and must remain so for the duration. Responsible scientists suggest, however, that thanks to synthetic chemistry the world's great investment in the production and processing of rubber may already be obsolete. They speak also of new alloys, plastics and synthetic light metals, which have already revolutionized structural design in airplanes and motors, and promise to do the same to housing after the war.

Improvement in fuels has proceeded so rapidly that to the petroleum engineer, autos built to consume the fuels of yesterday are already out of date. The electric turbine, hitherto a custom-job par excellence, is now manufactured on the production line, and new applications of electric power have multiplied many times the efficiency of steel production.

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The sulfa drugs are being tested constantly under war conditions for new and more effective uses and incidentally for their limitations. In food as well as drugs synthetic processes promise new and startling developments. As Dr. Stine, DuPont's advisor on research and development, told the American Chemical Society only a fortnight ago, "Already our world of 1940...is so distant in the past that it has become an antiquity as seen through scientific eyes. The inconceivables of two years ago are today's realities."

What are we to do with the new machines, the new tools, the new processes, the new gadgets of the post-war world? How are we to use the still unpredictable energy which may be released by the giant cyclotron or "atom-smasher"? Will we use these new devices, for example, to clear away our slums, those still unconquered areas which mock our boasted conquest of the continent?

Is this only an engineering problem or has it something to do, too, with economics and even human beings? Again, we are told that synthetic chemistry may make America self-sufficient in a sense that our pre-war isolationists scarcely dreamed of. Will we thereupon embark on a new and stubborn venture of isolationism, or will we this time perceive and mind our business, wherever it may lead us?

Certainly the close of the war will confront industry and government alike with a series of staggering problems. To administer the vast organizations, economic and political, which we have built up to deal with these problems will call for men of no ordinary wisdom and courage. Is this a concern of the colleges or not?

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Above all if democracy is to function in this new and altered world, there will be the problem of effective communication between our leaders and the masses of our people. The great American experiment in democracy rests upon a belief in the informed judgment of the people.

Dicey and Lowell taught us years ago to distinguish between public opinion and public sentiment, and to be suspicious of government by sentiment alone. Yet if we are to have a genuine public opinion brought to bear on the great issues which will face us, the general diffusion of knowledge, relevant and irrelevant, is not enough. Neither are isolated facts, true enough on their face, but misleading in relation to the whole.

On the face of it, for example, it was true in the 1920's that any reduction in the world debts of the European powers would only add to the burden of the American taxpayer. On the face of it, it was true that any reduction in our tariffs might threaten the jobs and the living standards of our industrial workers. Thus the U. S. Government insisted on full payment and high tariffs and public sentiment supported it.

What was our horror to discover a few years later that there were no more debt payments and very few jobs! Our policies were still intact but public sentiment was outraged. Government had failed to point out the contradictory nature of the two issues and had never informed the public of their total effect on American workers and taxpayers. It was a failure, not of public opinion, but of leadership.

Our leaders will face the problem, peculiarly difficult in these times, of reporting the facts to the people in their true relationship to each other. Dare we as a democracy entrust such responsibilities to men of little or inadequate education?

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Dare we as a democracy exclude from our colleges and universities men who have demonstrated their capacity for higher education but lack the means to finance themselves? Labor will emerge from the war, for example, as a power to be reckoned with. Have the colleges no responsibility for the education of Labor's leaders?

I do not wish to be misunderstood. Organized and formal education is no panacea; Lincoln stands as a lasting reminder of the truth that there is no substitute for self-education. In that process, however, schools and colleges can provide expert help and an atmosphere peculiarly congenial to the pursuit of truth. In reducing the chaos of the modern world to order—or, as a first step, to disorder—the college has an increasingly important role to play.

In selecting the student body, the sifting process should be assiduously pursued at every stage. Three or four years and several thousand dollars invested in behalf of a boy who has no vital interest in the intellectual life of the college is individual and social waste. Failure to make this investment wherever possible in behalf of the boy of limited means but unlimited capacity is for society the crime against the Holy Ghost.

What then is Colgate's job? May I say at the outset that I take office with no blue print for sudden and sweeping change. Frankly, I do not know how to draw a blue print for change. Of one thing, however, I am certain. If our emphasis is to be on quality in our research, in our thinking and in our teaching, we must constantly re-appraise what we are doing. We might ask ourselves, too, why we do the things we do and whether we do them in the most effective possible way. I predict that this question honestly pursued, might discover some startling answers in every school and department.
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Let us consider for a moment the so-called natural sciences. Technical and engineering training we do not pretend to offer; what then should the liberal arts student expect to gain here? Not knowing the answers, I take refuge in questions.

Are we successfully introducing him to the discipline and method which have made possible the achievements of science? Does he understand the consequences, in scientific research and in its applications, of even a slight miscalculation? Does he get an exciting glimpse of the continuing nature of the scientific process and of its implications to him and to his world? Does he acquire at least the elementary skills and techniques which a mechanized world is more and more demanding in peace as in war? Should we attempt to do more or less than this, and if so why? Does any lesser challenge confront those related fields of biology and psychology which seek to explain men to himself?

Let us now turn for a moment to the so-called social sciences. We are told on excellent authority that one basic cause of human mal-adjustment is our failure to keep pace with the advance of the physical sciences. What does this mean? Has our approach been truly realistic?

I have sometimes permitted myself to wonder what Dr. Bryce, fresh from his famous commentary on the Holy Roman Empire, might have found to say today of our so-called social sciences. How far they may be social remains to be seen; our scientific pretensions, I suspect, are valid only within certain limitations.

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Nevertheless, this is the field of study to which young men turn for some understanding of human history, of human behavior in the production and exchange of goods and services, of group behavior, of domestic and foreign institutions, of labor problems—understanding, in short, of the political, social and economic issues which this democracy must decide today and tomorrow.

Do we succeed in making our students grasp the urgency and the relevance of the problems we try to help them understand? Do we create in them a vivid sense of personal responsibility, or do we encourage in them a kind of skeptical indifference? How shall we develop here that healthy skepticism which enables the educated man to distinguish the true from the specious and at the same time nourish that faith without which mountainous problems will not be moved?

I come now to the humanities, justly proud as they are of that appellation. Is there nothing to be done in the field of aesthetics more vital to modern life than mere courses in the appreciation of art? Of course, there is.

Elevation of the public taste is one of the traditional obligations of learned societies, and heaven knows there is abundant room for it today. I suspect, however, that it will have to be improved not didactically but creatively; and if that be true, then functional design perhaps has an important role to play. Fortunately, except among producers of certain mass consumption items—where one may search in vain for the dignity of simple honest lines—we are moving away from the notion that art is mere decoration, and decoration necessarily art.

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The great artist, we are told, works only because he must; the effect of his work is to give others a fresh and memorable experience of life. Often it simply focuses attention on some significant object or relationship which the layman is too blind or too busy to perceive. Are we doing all we can or ought to make the fine arts real to our students? Are we doing all we can in the learned and modern languages?

Aside from the satisfactions which come from the gift of tongues and acquaintance with great literature, one may pause here to ponder on certain practical aspects of our situation. Evidently, we must live with the other peoples of the world far more intimately than we have in the past. Do we or do we not mean to work with them this time to create a peaceful world? Shall we or shall we not need skilled diplomats in the fields both of government and business?

If we are to work effectively with these millions of human beings whose backgrounds and ways of living are so different from ours, how long shall we be able to dispense with that knowledge of the language and customs of others which will enable us to understand and be understood by them? Do students leave our colleges adequately equipped in this respect? And may I ask, still in this eminently practical mood, whether the perseverance of a handful in the mysteries of Greek and Latin syntax constitutes a sufficient tribute to the intellectual and literary glories of ancient Greece and the not inconsiderable grandeur of Rome?

And what shall one say of philosophy and religion? Again one might ask questions directly related to our changing world. We have devoutly thanked heaven more than once that India was Britain's problem, not ours; now suddenly our government and military chieftains are gravely concerned over the course of events in India.
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Who is to tell us of this strange people, or congeries of people, of which the Mohammedan minority alone equals the population of these United States? Who is to tell us of the Hindus, or explain the curious phenomenon of Gandhi? Our missionaries and diplomats and business men could tell us much, but they are few and scattered. I have not even mentioned China, Japan or the Indies. How much do we know of our friends and our enemies in that great Pacific theatre where our destiny is now so vividly engaged?

Perhaps we cannot look to philosophy and religion alone to widen our horizons there. Doubtless the economic geographer and the sociologist and the teacher of language and the historian must all help, but whether one looks abroad or at home, at others, or at oneself, one cannot deny the prodigious current challenge to philosophy and religion.

Here perhaps is the primary "lag" which in its secondary manifestations we call the lag of the social sciences. What kind of adjustments does it call for?

Has Socrates, like yesterday's motor car, been rendered obsolete by high octane gas? Have Kant and Spinoza no message for the members of the CIO, or for the class of 1945 at Colgate University? Have the life and teachings of Jesus no meaning for our young men who must seek ways to make the world indeed safe for democracy and democracy of greatest usefulness to man? Does spiritual truth languish for want of fresh interpretation and application?

In the last analysis, of course, the problem of the college will not be departmentalized. Certainly Colgate will not have done its job except as it introduces some valid thread of unity into the educational process as a whole. There is something about human nature which resists education and distrusts as "purely academic" knowledge which seems to have little or no relevance to life.

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Some part of what we are now teaching may on examination prove to be irrelevant; that is one reason why I distrust diffusion or the mere multiplication of courses and departments as an answer to the critics of the curriculum. I suspect that these things constitute no answer, but an evasion. We can and must find ways of selecting and integrating what is basic in our instruction if our graduates are to meet the demands of the future.

This, I take it, is the objective of current experimentation at Chicago, Antioch and St. John's at Annapolis. We may applaud the objective while reserving judgment on their methods. Harvard's adaptation, under Wallace Donham, of the so-called case system to the teaching of business administration at the graduate level is a daring and promising adventure in compelling the student to integrate knowledge and judgment in responsible decisions. Its possible application to undergraduate teaching and instruction deserves more critical attention than it has received.

For the student, after all, the educational process is nothing if not the widening and deepening and enriching of his experience of life. Most of us have known the thrill which comes from meeting a really first rate person. Education offers that opportunity without regard to limitations of time or space.

The educated man can select his company among the great minds and spirits of all countries and all ages, and a lively and exciting company it is. This alone should help to inform the student's sense of values and excite some leanings toward the good life. And if leanings of this sort were desirable always, they have become imperative today.

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I know of no association, voluntary or otherwise, with quite the traditions which our colleges possess for awakening young men to the meaning and importance of the good life. Thanks to the war and the years that preceded it, the job that will confront us is staggering, and the stakes are correspondingly enormous.

To fail is unthinkable; indeed, we dare not fail.

Success will open for our youth, who now pay the price of past failures, unparalleled opportunities in the field of human relations for creative, venturesome, and responsible action; to the end that man may again achieve that mastery of himself which will balance and preserve his new and astonishing mastery over nature. In the words of one poet who understood both the tragedy and the genuine promise of this twentieth century:

"Our stability is but balance, and wisdom lies
In masterful administration of the unforeseen."