

Wilkes College Commencement address by
William W. Tomlinson, 'Three Keys to Destiny'. 1958 June 2nd

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THREE KEYS TO DESTINY

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THREE KEYS TO DESTINY

Times like these tempt every man to be a prophet.

While scientists in this country and abroad are engaged in exploding material bodies into the vast spaces which envelop this earthly abode of men, it is appropriate that we also seek to project our thinking beyond the hour which is the present and ephemeral setting of human existence.

Not so long ago I was prevailed upon to go on record as a diviner of the future. It was an audacious suggestion . . . and I now look back on my impetuous acquiescence with a kind of self-tolerant disbelief.

It came about in this way. When the Ohio community which claims me as a native son was preparing to observe the 150th anniversary of its founding, some of its citizens invited me to venture a written prediction of those events which would prove the most exciting developments of the next fifty years. That, incidentally, is your half century.

I fear I was too quick to predict the unpredictable. At any rate, I probed the depths of my knowledge, my reason, my imagination and the ideas of my scientific friends. The result of all this intellectual crystal gazing was a prophetic document which, just two years ago today, was buried in a time capsule to remain secluded from the eyes of men until the year 2006 A.D.

Now the odds are against my being present fifty years hence when the people of Salem gather together to read what may have happened to them and to their world over the preceding five decades. As the author of enlightened prophecy, however, I am not likely to be missed! For man's achievements over the past two years alone make it increasingly evident that when the capsule which now stirs the interest of men meets the sunlight of the early twenty-first century, its contents will be found more prosaic than exciting.

In this swiftly moving age, it is given to no man, be he seer or sage, to discern the bold outlines of a future which lies half a hundred years away. We know only that man's goals and ambitions will continue to drive him to achieve the improbable - and the impossible!

Our scientific purposes stagger the imagination. One prominent engineer tells us that our present rockets will permit us to send twenty pounds of equipment to Mars. Within three years we will be able to put a man into orbit and bring him back to earth - alive! And in ten years, says this same engineer, man will stand victorious on the moon. These are goals of man's ingenuity.

But what about the goals of human aspirations? As the mind of man continues to evolve new scientific miracles - and that is the resistless wave of the future - it becomes imperative that we identify and encourage those circumstances which, in the final summing up, will shape the richest destiny of mankind.

There is one profound aspiration, I submit, which has become the universal longing of all humanity. It is the yearning for security and survival in a world of ominous forebodings. In a word, it is the aspiration for peace.

Now there are those who would achieve peace merely by outlawing the means of prosecuting warfare. I wish man's ancient scourge might be so simply vanquished! The truth of the matter, we are coming to realize, is that the world is not yet ready for peace. Therein lies the challenge to us who are the present custodians of human destiny.

What are the attributes of peace? Many years ago, Dr. George Emerson Barnes, a brilliant theologian and scholar whose memory I shall always revere, defined peace in terms so vivid and so realistic as to set the standard for all human endeavor. "Peace," he said, "is the possession of adequate resources." I should like to consider this declaration with you as young citizens of a nation which, more than ever before, stands before the world as the land of hope and promise.

Adequate Material Resources

There is a great deal of vain piety in our approach to peace. It was Oliver Cromwell, you will remember, who called to his men as they were about to enter battle, "Put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry." That advice is as pertinent today as it was three centuries ago. For in a predatory world, the resources of defense may well prove the last bulwarks of freedom and security.

But it is the resources of circumstances to which I would direct your attention this evening. And the first of these are the material resources which form the basic requirements of human existence.

Around the globe there are millions of people who consider it as difficult for the average American to appreciate their primary material needs as it would be for the proverbial camel to pass through the eye of a needle. In our own way we have succeeded in convincing them that the "average American" is a pretty wealthy camel. I'm not sure that false reputation improves our rapport with the rest of the world, however.

A few years ago, with my family and some other American travelers, I arrived one evening at the Swedish port of Gothenberg. We had been island-hopping through Denmark all day and at the end of our journey across the Skaggerak the bloom of freshness had given way to the wither of exhaustion.

At the end of the gangplank which was our approach to one of the world's most delightful cities, a few of us were drawn aside by newsmen representing the "Goteborgs Posten." We were painstakingly photographed and politely questioned as to our impressions of those parts of Scandinavia through which we had already traveled. It was easy to enthuse over a section of the world so rich in charm and beauty, and we moved along to our hotel inwardly glowing over an interview which could have nothing but a warming influence on America's relationships abroad.

The two-column feature story which appeared next day was scarcely in keeping with our happy anticipations. Under a photograph of Gothenberg's

visitors from the West was spread a headline which read, U.S.A.
MILLIONAIRES TOURING NORTHERN WONDERLANDS.

There was no way in which our newspaper friends might have known whether the combined worth of the visitors they had interviewed was ten thousand or ten million dollars. In their minds that question was beside the point. We were Americans; therefore, we were immensely wealthy.

Relatively, of course, this general conclusion is unimpeachable. For, with seven per cent of the earth's population, the United States enjoys forty per cent of the world's income. In terms of goods, we possess an amazing proportion of the world's automobiles, telephones, television sets and similar conveniences.

We account for our wealth, not as the largesse of providence, but rather as the consequence of many factors, among which are natural resources, genius, and the encouragement of the whole environment in which we live. To the less developed nations of the world, however, we have become the symbol of an abundance which has helped give rise to what Dr. Forrest Murden has called "the Revolution of Rising Expectations."

Let us look behind this gathering revolution. The Committee for Economic Development estimates our American per capita income at \$2,000. India's comparable income is \$54. That of the countries of middle Africa is less than \$50. Mexican and most South American people receive average incomes which are less than one tenth our own.

These figures are not simply the sterile data which go to make up the statistical reports of world economists. Income means food, clothing, shelter and health. It means education and the growing capacity for self-improvement.

A short time ago, Mohamed Sallam, a Temple University student from Yemen, came to talk with me about his medical education. In his country of four and a half million people, he said, there is not one native doctor. The ambition of his life is to become a physician and go back to work among his people.

"What is the average span of life in Yemen?" I asked. "About thirty years," Mohamed replied. Then he told me both his parents died when he was a child. His sister was lost in childbirth because no professional attention was available for her. The per capita income in Yemen, incidentally, is \$40 a year.

When I read recently that Yemen had elected to join with Egypt and Syria to help form the United Arab Republic, I wondered what part primitive poverty might have played in that decision.

Do not misconstrue the meaning of these words of mine. I would not place the underdeveloped nations of the world on a continuing American dole. That would likely prove the surest way to discourage their initiative for all time. But I do insist that somehow this land of hope and promise must find the way to export the genius and the inspiration of abundance. For America to turn its back on the gathering revolution of human expectations is a precarious stance.

For peace depends, first of all, on adequate material resources.

The Resources of Freedom

Most of us, I am sure, would agree that human freedom has made a great and significant contribution to the progress and the abundance of America.

I use the word "freedom" with reservations because I've always regarded that term as a serious misnomer. Absolute freedom in any society would be utterly chaotic and would quickly result in the destruction of that society. What we have undertaken to do in the United States - and despite inevitable failures, our achievements have been conspicuous - is to pursue that system which grants to the individual the greatest possible latitude for self-fulfillment within the context of the general good. We have come to call this adaptation of the principle of freedom, democratic self-government.

Such a system, I would point out, transfers the political center of gravity from the state to its citizens. That is a profound shift. Historically and currently, in many quarters of the world, it remains a revolutionary idea.

You will recall Lord Macauley's famous letter to Mr. Randall, written over a century ago. Macauley, you will remember, was discussing the prospects for the survival of American democracy, then less than three quarters of a century old. "I have long been convinced," wrote Lord Macauley, "that institutions purely democratic must, sooner or later, destroy liberty or civilization or both." Then he proceeded to consider the social and political implications of a growing industrial population and he concluded his letter on this apprehensive note:

"Your constitution is all sail and no anchor . . . When society has entered on (its) downward progress either civilization or liberty must perish . . . Some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government . . . or your republic will be as fearfully plundered . . . by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth; with this difference, that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire came from without (while) your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions."

Lord Macauley made two basic miscalculations. First he underestimated our capacity to provide materially for a growing population. Secondly, he assumed that intellectually and morally Americans would be incapable of accepting the responsibilities that are the essence of successful self-government.

Not so long ago, on the occasion of a visit to the University of Hamburg, I found myself in a group discussion of some of the problems of European peace and security. Our numbers included Professor Bruno Snell, a former rector of the University and, like most of his colleagues, an ardent advocate of European unity. Many keen European minds see in an association of continental nations promising guarantees of peace, security and economic progress.

Our conversation covered the political waterfront and finally seemed to center on the plan for a European Defense Community which, several years ago, died aborning. No one lamented this misfortune more than Dr. Snell, and as we pursued our discussion of it a meditative shadow seemed to pass across his face. Then, as if to give emphasis to his words, he arose. "The European Defense Community," he began, "was not to be. We've missed that opportunity for unity and it may be a long time before it comes again."

Then a radiance shown upon his countenance. "But the peace and progress to which we all aspire," he continued, "are not bound inseparably to institutions or organizations, be they economic, political or military. The good future depends rather upon how fully we may realize the promises of a democratic society." In that simple statement Bruno Snell had voiced the hopes of all mankind.

The promises of a democratic society - the particular promise that man the individual may be free to pursue his own highest destiny and thus make his finest contribution to the world in which he lives! That promise, to be redeemed, demands intelligence, morality and a vigilance which is unending.

Peace is the possession of the resources of abundance . . . and of the freedom to develop them creatively.

Resources of Faith

Finally, we come to the most critical resources of all. They are the resources of faith.

In this age of multiplying might, man stands before the D-Day of human destiny. This is the issue to be determined: Is man in this climactic hour to remain the true master of his fate or, in self-negation, is he to yield world dominion to physical force and material power? It is the old familiar conflict of tyranny versus humanity.

It may sound strange to say that the outcome of this new challenge will be determined by how we feel about human beings. That fact, it seems to me, is inescapable. If we hold men cheap and base and contemptuous,

then we discard them as worthless in the struggle of these times.

Tyranny, we must recognize, has always scoffed at humanity. One day I stood mutely and with bowed head before a grim reminder of man's desecration of man, the memory of which, I fear, will never fade. There about me were the pistol ranges, the gas chambers and the ovens which were the instruments of destruction of unknown thousands. Unknown thousands who had been held no more sacred than the logs which turned their tortured bodies into ashes!

The case for humanity is simple and profound. It rests on the knowledge that man is the child of God, placed here to do God's work, and to have dominion over all that sails beneath the seas or flies in the air, and everything that moves on the surface of the earth. Therein lies man's responsibility . . . and his hope.

In the technological and scientific challenge of these times, I have high confidence that the inspired genius of the American mind will acquit itself with distinction. For I am clearly aware that one of the notable characteristics of the people of this nation is their capacity to rise to each new emergency to confront them.

You who, in a sense, are being formally initiated this evening into the aristocracy of learning will be the first to acknowledge that you have also fallen heir to a sacred trust. For education, in its many aspects, is one of those vigorous and continuing processes by which society seeks to elevate the nature and the capacities of its members.

In the final analysis the trust to which you have fallen heir is that of enlightened morality. For when our American nation ceases to be respected for its moral leadership, then our greatest strength will have passed from us, and what we have left to give the world will be but the cheap and tawdry trappings of outworn glory.

Some words of Woodrow Wilson come back to me tonight - words uttered as the President addressed an audience at Swarthmore College during my early days as a student there. Pointing his long, pedagogic index finger to the rows of young men and women seated before him, Mr. Wilson gave voice to this moving injunction which I now pass on to you:

"Do not forget as you walk these classic places . . . you are here to enrich the world and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand."

Peace and human progress depend upon the possession of adequate resources: The resources of a sustaining abundance. The resources of freedom. The resources of faith in the limitless potential of the mind and spirit of man. These, I submit, are in truth the keys to human destiny.

I bid you tonight to join in helping to forge these keys which open wide the portals to a more radiant tomorrow. Then this era of fear and apprehension may give way to an age in which man, the human being, comes into the fullness of his power. Then, at last, the poetic promise of these lines will become the brave reality of man's being:

"Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

"It matters not how straight the gate,
 How charged with punishment the scroll,
 I am the master of my fate:
 I am the captain of my soul."

