COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS DELIVERED AT ST. ANDREW'S SCHOOL, MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE, SATURDAY, JUNE FIRST, 1946, BY WILLIAM HOLLINGSWORTH WHYTE, JR. '35

Bishop McKinstry, the Founder, Trustees, the Headmaster, members and friends of St. Andrew's School:

(I must confess my first reaction to speaking at this Commencement is to pinch myself to see if it's true. Mr. Pell was more than kind in his introduction—I'm afraid he omitted a great deal. We had many chats in his study in the past, and I can tell you that the subject was most certainly not the theme of the 1946 commencement address. I'm sure also that the masters must be muttering to themselves that this proves anything can happen!)

Traditionally, commencement speakers are men who have achieved success in some field, rich in experience, of mature judgement, eminently fitted to counsel young men about to leave school. You can see, then, that it poses somewhat of a problem when a person in my circumstances is called upon to make such an address.

There are many like us, who, thought they have graduated some time ago, are still struggling, still groping, and not too sure of just what the future holds.

But we would have been blind, if by now we had not obtained a certain perspective of the years behind us, re-evaluated their meaning. I know that one thing that has struck most of us is that we never realized, until time gave us a clearer backsight, the tremendous effect that our school years had upon our characters and our future behavior.

Why should their events, the material effect of which is so insignificant, be of such ultimate importance? The answer is obvious—your years here have been your formative ones.

You came here almost as children, and now you leave as young men. They talk of boarding schools as sequestered retreats safe from the storms of civil life—ivory towers. How wrong they are! You came here into an environment where you were immediately faced with problems, personal problems, that others don't meet until years later. In your studies, in athletics, you were guided, but in the great problem, living with your fellows, you were on your own.

In a sense every problem that you'll meet in the future has had its counterpart in your years here. In retrospect you'll be aware that however petty the problem may have been, the anguish, the moral tug-of-war that it caused within you was as great as any you may ever have. These problems, your solution of them, are not a preview of your future, but you'll be surprised how much sustenance they can give you.

If your years here then, have been your formative ones, let's examine the benefits.

Schooling, obviously, is your prime reason for being here. You've had the groundwork for a first-rate liberal education. That of a more material nature—turning a lathe, a course in salesmanship or merchandising—such as are the vogue in many schools today, have a much more immediate appeal; the dollar sign is practically tacked on them. At times you've probably wondered to what eventual use you could put your knowledge of Latin declensions, of French grammar. The actual accumulation of knowledge you may never use, but these tools have sharpened your intellect, trained you to concentrate—and that's what counts.

Perhaps, looking at your marks, you wonder if it was worth it all. Certainly nothing in the world that I can remember, can produce such a feeling of absolute futility as the reading of a returned English essay, and noting the unique marginal commentary of Mr. Cameron. If at times in your dreams you've vicariously pelted him with a chalk-throwing machine gun, or subjected the Messrs. Schmolze and Baum to the most gruesome tortures, you'll find—as all of us did when we started college—with puzzled

surprise, that they didn't do half so bad a job as you had thought. Indeed, you may even remember them with kindliness!

The benefits of school athletics are even more obvious, and there's little use in repeating the numerous bromides about the value of body building, the spirit of competition, and so on.

But a good education and a sound athletic program are not peculiar to boarding school life. What is its distinctive characteristic is its highly centralized communal life, that close-knit society in which, for better or for worse, you rub elbows with your fellows morning, noon, and night.

It marks an abrupt change from home life, and its effects are pronounced and rapid.

Let's take Jack Smith—mythical perhaps, but not atypical. At home Jack was a holy terror. At day school he was thoroughly detested. He would play with the others boys on his own terms or not at all. So insufferable was he that they picked on him whenever they got the chance. It wasn't often, since every day at 3:30 sanctuary was available—his mother would be waiting for him outside in her car. Whatever he wanted from her he got by the simple expedient of raising cain. He was a spoiled brat.

Jack arrives at St. Andrew's. He's a little scared at first—as well he should be, for month after month he's worked on by the other boys. The masters won't give in to his tantrums; every time he runs away he gets no farther than Silver Lake. You all know the rest; the first fight, the first freedom from bullying, and at last Jack's one of the group and, eventually, a pretty decent fellow.

I'm not trying to prove that the Second Form is composed of maladjusted prima donnas, and I hope you mothers don't obtain the impression that I'm holding up St. Andrew's as a refuge from motherhood. But the fact remains that this group life—and at times it almost approaches the law of the jungle—makes necessary a quick development of a boy's character.

It quickly teaches him the necessity for the subordination of self-interest —or at least to keep it reasonably under wraps. He finds that a certain behavior is expected of him, and if he doesn't match it quick punishment follows. Not the formal punishment of bad marks or demerits, but the jeers of his fellows, than which there is nothing more effective.

And it's a strange fact that underformers, better than any group older and more experienced in the world, can so readily recognize sham, spot defects in character, "size up a 'phony' ". We seem to lose it a bit when we grow older.

So much has been said of this, the team spirit, the character building features of group life, that were I to enlarge on it you might say my grasp of the obvious amounts to a stranglehold.

But there's a further point that's not often brought out. If the advantages of this communal life are many, it is also true that there is much that can be wrong with it.

You learn that to go against the group means instant reprisal, and so you adjust yourself to work *for* and *with* others, but you also learn the dangers of "sticking your neck out". The compulsion not to is strong. You instinctively wish to identify yourself with the group, and you hesitate to do anything, however right you might think it, that could set you apart from it.

Now this adherence to custom, this bowing to normality, is good in many respects. Manners are part of it. Without them this community could not exist. William James held that we are wrong when we think that the outward manifestations, a smile, a frown, are solely the products of our inward feelings. He showed that the feeling of happiness can be produced by the smile. So, when you run up against Charley Goon at the end of your vacation, you say, "Hello, Charley, good to see you again. Have a good time?" and so on. Actually you detest Charley! he detests you, and you're both aware of each other's feelings. But what could have been an unpleasant incident passes easily because of custom. Were you to say what you think,

"You back again, you sorry so and so", he would reply in kind, and "honour" would make a fight mandatory. St. Andrew's, without the equilibrium of manners that custom dictates, would be a veritable cockpit. You don't need as much in a more open society, but it is an absolute necessity in such a tight community.

Under this compulsion to get along "or else", you learn this truth early, and quickly develop a facility for mixing. Instinctively you become a creature of habit, far more than you realize. You don't snuff out a cigarette on the carpet, however convenient. Do you do this because of solicitude for the carpet or the hostess? To a degree, yes, but chiefly because "it just isn't done", and you will be frowned on if you do.

Man, then, fears nothing so much as censure from his fellows. We have seen that the discipline it invokes is often to the good, but that it can likewise breed the easy cynicism of the man who takes refuge in custom and tradition—who laughs at those who, to repeat the phrase, "stick their necks out".

Well, why pick on boarding school? Isn't this just human nature, common to any group of men? Certainly, but because of the complexion of boarding school life it's accentuated, and at the most malleable time of our lives. The masters can encourage initiative, yes. You know that as you progress up through the forms you're given increasing responsibilities. As a sixth former you are entrusted with the broadest possible share in the governing of the student body. But however much the faculty tries to incubate your powers of initiative and responsibility, they realize that the most powerful influence on your development is the attitude of the others in your form.

There was a striking example of this my fifth form year. For some unaccountable reason a paralysis of initiative reached epidemic proportions. It found outward manifestation in the word "Wugi". "Wugi", I might explain, was a specially coined epithet delivered in a low and highly disagreeable nasal whine on any occasion when someone ventured to do anything not absolutely necessary, such as sleeping or eating. In class, he who volunteered to answer a question was greeted with a low rustle of "Wugis" from the rear seats. If his answer revealed he had apparently studied his lesson, the chorus became deafening. Thus the poor chap who dared to continue studying, to keep his demerit record moderately decent, was considered a "toadie" and an objectionable character of the lowest type. The group influence became overriding. Since it was unfashionable to show initiative, we didn't.

That same spirit may be now quiescent, but it's always present everywhere to some degree. You'll find it, in a more refined form, your freshman year at college. In this new environment the pull is strong to seek security in the mold that appears to be the current fashion. The right clothes, the right people, marks that are good perhaps but not so high as to classify you as a "grind"—in all, a treading softly. Fortunately it's usually true that the longer one is in college the more catholic become his tastes, the less importance he attaches to the outward symbols of conformity, the more eager is he to join activities that he previously shunned because of the high proportion of "meatballs" in them. But it's also true that many get little out of their four years save for some good looking sports coats. Their primary objective was to be "one of the boys".

This wanting to be a "good fellow", this tremendous power inherent in the customs of our particular social orbit, permeates all walks and ages of life. As an example, let me read this clipping from the March 23d. ***Philadelphia Inquirer:***

> Lancaster, Pa., March 22d: Abner K. Zook, the Amish farmer of Gap, Pa., who early this morning suffered amnesia for two days and vanished from his home because his church shunned him when he bought a tractor today explained, repentantly, how he had come to make his "mistake".
>
> He is back in the fold of House Amish upon his promise to sell

the tractor, and he is re-growing the beard he shaved off in violation of the church rules.

But he is still worried about where the starving peoples of Europe are going to get enough food. Here is how he explained his "error". As spring was approaching, he said, he found himself, with his wife and baby, alone on their 100 acre farm with 20 head of cattle. The labor situation was tighter than last year . . . so he overlooked the rule of the House Amish, one of the strictest of Lancaster County's "plain" sects, that tractors must not be used—presumably because they are not mentioned in the Bible. "I decided the only thing to do was to buy a tractor", he continued, . . . "so I bought one. But the church didn't like it. The church threatened to shun me if I used it." Worry over that predicament, he said, caused a kind of nervous breakdown. Where he went when he left home he doesn't know. But he believes "he just wandered about the country. Suddenly it came to me what I must do. I said to myself, 'I will go home and get rid of the tractor.'" So, he was welcomed back on his promise to re-grow the beard and get rid of the tractor.

Fear of censure, then, has a tremendous impact upon our behavior. But the strange thing is that we almost always overestimate this censure, this disapproval; magnify it to absurd proportions in our minds.

Not to embark on a course for fear of ridicule is sheer stupidity. It takes courage, certainly, to initiate a project, but it also takes intelligence—intelligence enough to realize that the surface mockery of the group is more habit than anything else—that it is often quite contrary to their real feelings.

Let us say Joe Doakes is very enthusiastic about starting a weekly Current Affairs Forum. In no time at all the class wits will have coined a pithy title for it, Joe will be featured in several cartoons, and there will be plenty of sharp joshing. Yet most of the others might secretly think the Forum a fairly good idea; but for them to react with "Gosh, Joe, that's a swell idea" would be unthinkable.

It would be unthinkable, unnatural, because it's our temperament, of Anglo-Saxon origin, to cloak our emotions, and, more than that, to joke casually about many things we're actually quite concerned about. Recall an occasion when the emergence of a tear caused you acute embarrassment, and you know what I mean.

Thus collective scoffing may cover a very real appreciation of something. But the fool never realizes this, and, taking the sarcasm literally, remains forever paralyzed with fear that he might incur the disapproval of the group. He rigidly patterns his behavior so that he'll never stray far from dead center. If the community to which he moves is predominantly Republican, whatever his previous beliefs he'll soon be voting straight GOP; he'll read only what the Book of the Month Club sends him—unless he's already read the condensed version in the Readers' Digest; he will think and talk in prefabricated phrases—the clichés in fashion. As a product of a schooling for leadership, he'll be a complete flop.

At the other extreme are those who make a fetish of unorthodoxy; who sneer at anything popular on the grounds that the very popularity is prima facie proof of mediocrity; who profess themselves iconoclasts, disbelieving everything held worthy by others. But their intellectual snobbery disqualifies them from leadership. The great leaders of history have not been "normal" men, but in effecting the changes they did they stayed generally within the framework of the customs and traditions of their times. No great general ever got too far ahead of his troops.

Most of us want to be liked, to be a "good fellow", one of the group—whether it's the Third Form, a Kiwanis outing, or a college fraternity. The intelligent man is no less gregarious than the fool, no less desirous of the comradeship of his fellows. But because he is perceptive he recognizes the scoffing of those about him for what it is, and isn't greatly disturbed by it.

He knows that if he is to lead he must retain the respect of others, not go beyond a certain line lest he alienate them and hence achieve nothing.

He is quite prepared, though, to be on the receiving end of a great deal of sarcasm. If his project succeeds, everyone will say they've been for it all the time; even if it fails, the chances are that his willingness to "stick his neck out" will be respected, although his fellows would be caught dead before admitting it openly.

I suppose there's never been a class at St. Andrew's that hasn't had at least one member who took his duties with extreme conscientiousness, invariably got good marks, was always on the White List, prominent in all activities—in short, what the others usually refer to with some sarcasm as a "sterling character".

I'd like to tell you a true story of someone like this, a story I think is a very clear-cut example of the relationship between the group and the man who "sticks his neck out".

We had just graduated from Officers Training School, a green bunch of 2d. Lieutenants, 90 day wonders. We were on out way to New River, the training camp of the 1st Marine Division—and we were all scared to death.

We knew we were to be given platoons, platoons composed to a great degree of old-timers, men who had fought in Nicaragua and Haiti. You can understand that we, civilians only a few months before, were rather apprehensive of the reception that awaited us. That is, all except Taylor.

Taylor was a model of the type I've just described. He'd had a fine record, athletically and scholastically at both school and colege, but the period of his life of which he was proudest was his days as a Boy Scout. This naturally provoked derision from us, and I can't begin to tell you all the nicknames we coined on the strength of his idealization of the Boy Scouts of America. Worse than this, he lectured us incessantly on our somewhat lackadaisical attitude towards the military profession. While we played bridge he studied, and often as we were going to sleep we could hear the click of his rifle as he practiced the manual of arms in the shower room. We liked him, but he was always good for a laugh.

That first day we took over our new platoons, we suffered. The old gunnery sergeants didn't conceal their amusement; the men smiled knowingly as we marched them into ditches. We forgot all the commands we'd been taught, and generally made fools of ourselves. After those terrible first days we grew more confident, more able, but we still hesitated to exert our authority. We wanted to be liked, and so we pretended not to notice when the men didn't salute us; we dismissed them as early as we could in the afternoon. We couldn't have been more ingratiating.

But not Taylor. His men marched and trained from dawn to dusk and frequently half the night; anyone who failed to salute him got extra duty. And while he took care that his men were properly fed and their equipment as good as other platoons', he also took care that they had little opportunity to waste time in the honky-tonks around the camp.

We were amused at this, for we were sure that this spit and polish, this strict discipline, were obsolete. Our policy was to talk things over with the men and not worry if their close order drill was a little sloppy. We were going to have one great, big, happy family! This was nothing more of course than rationalization of our fear of disapproval, of our fear that men would laugh at us behind our backs. We were afraid to exercise leadership.

But with smug self-satisfaction we agreed that Taylor's men would turn against him at the first opportunity, that their hatred of him would take active form if we ever got to battle. We nodded our heads sadly at the thought that he might well be found dead, with the bullet hole in his back!

Before we knew it we were on Guadalcanal. And throughout three months of intermittent fighting Taylor's platoon not only turned in the best performance in the battalion but notably abstained from taking pot shots at him. But we didn't learn our lesson until late in the campaign.

Our battalion was holding an outpost line along the Matanikau River. To

the west, on the other side, was the Japanese 17th Army. And though they made no advance on us they kept our life miserable, for in the ridges above the river they had several artillery pieces which kept a continual harassing fire on our supply routes, our observation posts, and our headquarters. Try as we might we couldn't locate the guns. Artillery spotters, high-powered telescopes, observation planes—all proved futile.

One day Taylor came up to the battalion commander to say he had a foolproof way of locating the guns. How? By simply crossing the river and examining the most likely spots for the Jap gun positions. The battalion commander told him he was crazy—what were the 4,000 odd Japs in the front lines going to be doing all this time? Well, Taylor said, he had a plan; he'd been examining aerial photographs of the area and he had figured out a concealed route by which he could penetrate the Jap lines. "Give me twenty-four hours to rehearse the operation with my men", he said, "and I can do it". The colonel, who disliked the shelling as intensely as anyone else, finally told him he could try it, if he could get any volunteers.

Taylor asked for five men. His entire platoon of forty-two volunteered. But what was more, and a shock to us, many of our own men, who usually exhibited a profound disinclination to go with us on patrols, volunteered, too.

Just before dawn one morning Taylor and his five men paddled across the river in a rubber boat. They hid it in the bushes and then started along a narrow gully toward the first spot he had picked as logical for a gun position. It was only three hundred yards away but it took them two hours to reach it for they had to weave their way through several Jap bivouac areas. The Japanese, fortunately, never suspected anyone would be fool enough to try and penetrate their positions and thus spent their time sleeping. Taylor had guessed right about the first location; there, underneath a camouflage netting of straw, was a shiny .75. The gun crew had apparently knocked off for breakfast so the patrol went to work demolishing the gun. While they did, Taylor went alone to the second spot he had picked, found a gun there, and started to go to work on it. Some Japs sitting in front of a native hut several hundred yards away stared at him with interest. Taylor waved to them amiably, shrank his six-foot frame as much as he could, and delicately removed the breech mechanism with a screwdriver. Finished, he waved again at the Japs, who by this time had gotten into a heated discussion as to his identity. Taylor, understandably a bit worried now, got back to his men as quickly as he could, and they started off for home. But the Japs in the first bivouac area were waiting for them. As the patrol threaded its way along the last ridge between it and the river the Japs attacked. There was no chance of getting back to the rubber boat unless the Japs could be held up for a few minutes. Taylor turned to his men and told them to run for the river—he would hold off the Japs. They refused. He ordered them to leave. Reluctantly they left him and headed back for the lines. From the sound of the heavy firing it was apparent Taylor was buffaloing the Japs from following. About the time they reached our lines the firing stopped. Taylor was dead.

Only then, as the news spread through the battalion that he had been killed, did it dawn on us that he had been, in the mens' eyes, by far the best officer in the battalion. It was not the sort of thing they would admit while he was alive, for men like to affect a great amusement for the "strictly GI leader" and the trappings of discipline. But now the men of his platoon were crying like babies, more than other men did for officers who had courted popularity.

Taylor had the complete courage of his convictions; he had known that group disapproval was more apparent than real; that where men collectively scoffed they might as individuals be filled with unexpressed respect.

Taylor knew it; the twenty-four St. Andreans who died in battle must have known it. We may not be able to match their courage, but whenever we're tempted to abandon a course for fear of petty jeers we can draw inspiration from them—and stick out our necks as far as they'll go!