Address of S. B. McCormick to the Centennial Class of Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania, June 21, 2915

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President Crawford, Members of the Graduating Class, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I wish for the University of Pittsburgh and for myself to extend congratulations to Allegheny College in reaching the one hundredth milestone of its history, and during this hundred years in performing a service to the cause of education and of the church whose value is beyond ability to estimate. One hundred years of such service and of such history reflects glory upon the College, the Commonwealth, and the nation.

In extending congratulations, I likewise extend good wishes for the next centennial period. Allegheny College has made history, and in the making of history has come to occupy a high place among the colleges of the nation. Since the College itself, the historic educational institution of America, is indispensable to culture and to character, to hold a worthy position among the colleges is to be highest and most distinguished. My congratulations and my good wishes, therefore, are given to Allegheny College today.

I wish also to extend congratulations to this class, occupying as it does the unique place of being the Centennial Class of the College. Perhaps the members of it are not entitled to much more credit for this than an individual is entitled to credit for the fact that he is born. Nevertheless, to be well born is to deserve congratulation. Likewise, to be a member of this class deserves congratulation. I extend it to you today,
and with it also good wishes that in the success you attain, in the characters you make, in the positions you occupy, in the service you render, you will reflect credit upon the institution which sent you out into the world on the one hundredth anniversary of its life.

On this occasion, I do not fail to remember also that in 1810 this college already existed as an academy, and rendered excellent service to the northwestern part of Pennsylvania. This academy sent to the then Pittsburgh Academy one of its ablest and most distinguished principals, Rev. Dr. Joseph Stockton, in whose administration, from 1810 to 1819, the academy grew to such proportions as to make it necessary to secure a new charter, under which, as the University of Pittsburgh, the Western University of Pennsylvania still operates. Dr. Stockton remained in connection with the University until his death in 1827, giving to it his loyal and devoted service.

Other events, practically contemporaneous with the founding of Allegheny College, are interesting and help to form the mental setting of the College in its beginning. In 1816 Pittsburgh, then a community of about six thousand people, was given a city charter. In 1819, four years after Allegheny College was born, the great pike connecting the two cities of Pennsylvania was begun. In 1816 the Pennsylvania Canal, completed in 1834, was undertaken. The war with England was just concluded when the doors of Allegheny College were opened. Madison's administration had not yet ended, and the Monroe Doctrine had not yet been promulgated. Even five years later the population of all America was but nine millions, the most homogeneous population, perhaps, on the face of the globe. Educationally, only some twenty-five or thirty colleges were in existence—from Harvard in 1636 to Hamilton and Colby, about 1812. No university in the present sense of the term was even known, the University of Pennsylvania in our own commonwealth,
through its schools of medicine and of law, perhaps coming nearest to the present-day university. While some colleges in 1815 were, as now, larger than others, they were all substantially alike in the number of teachers and students, in their buildings, equipment and endowment. Even as late as the middle of the century one could scarcely distinguish between a Harvard, a Princeton, and a Jefferson College.

The first faculty of Allegheny College, like the others of that period, doubtless consisted of ministers—for instance, the faculty of the Western University of Pennsylvania in 1822, then only a college in fact, consisted of five ministers of the gospel, four from the different Presbyterian bodies, and Father Maguire, founder of St. Paul's Cathedral. Doubtless the first faculty of Allegheny College was, except the good father, similarly formed. They were men who loved the classics and all good literature; who studied mathematics throughout their course; who dabbled a little in chemistry and in political economy and in philosophy; and yet who managed somehow to beget in the minds of young men a love of learning and a genuineness of culture perhaps not surpassed in the richer curricula and more through instruction of this present time.

If it is an honor to be a member of the centennial class of Allegheny College, it is equally a privilege to complete one's course and step out into the larger life before you at this period in the history of the world. We have said this so often that it sometimes seems stereotyped; and yet we never said it when it was so tremendously true as it is today. The world has reached a crisis in its history. Men feel sometimes as if civilization itself had come up to its testing time, had miserably failed, and was crumbling away to its everlasting ruin. War is devastating the lands of Europe and is
destroying by millions that which we have conceived to be the most priceless thing in all the world—Life, God's supreme gift to mankind. These nations are throwing to destruction billions of wealth, millions of lives, and are filling ten million souls with the desolation of despair. There are those who would say that America, too, must join in this carnival of destruction and thus proclaim to the world that she is made of the same material and must yield to the same impulses that are hurling from its high place European culture and civilization at this time. Whether or not will depend upon the people of America, upon the progress democracy has made, upon the degree in which our people have learned to think and reason and exercise the self-control of men whose feet are upon the ground and whose souls are linked by faith to God, so as to understand His law of justice and through it to work out His Kingdom of love and peace.

Young men, you have been making preparation during these years for no little but rather for a high and noble purpose. Here in this great land of ours, reserved throughout the ages for something, has been planted a democratic people. The experiment is made, not for the people of America only, but for the peoples of the nations of the world. If here democracy can prove its right to exist; if it can produce a people who are insistent, not upon their rights, but upon the fulfillment of their duties; if it can make men who care supremely, not for themselves only, nor for their nations only, but for people everywhere and in every nation; and if at the same time this people can learn so to control their judgments and their behavior as that they shall solve the problems—the problems economic, the problems political, the problems social, the problems educational—the problems that are still unsolved in America, then I have no question whatever of the final success
of this experiment in democracy, nor shall I have any doubt whatever of the final triumph of democracy everywhere under the sun.

What does it mean, that we are a democracy and that you are stepping out to be a part, and an influential part, of the body politic. It surely means that the people have a part in the determination of the great questions which affect their individual and their national destiny, and therefore have the opportunity so long denied them, of realizing the highest possibilities of their being. What soldier in the trenches in Europe today even knows why he is giving his service and his life for his country; was consulted as to whether he should do it; or in doing it is making an intelligent sacrifice of any worth in behalf of nation or of humanity! So shall it be with us if we, too, move forward without plan as to whither we go or what we are to become.

The foundations of America, considering it in the broad, were laid by true Americans. In 1820 not more than 350,000 of our population had come over in ships; in 1860 the population was still homogeneous; and by that time this land was settled in every part of it, from the Atlantic to the Pacific; its constitutions, national and state, had been formed; its political institutions had been largely brought toward full development. America was America, and the influx of the peoples since has not changed and will not change it if we who love the country and care for mankind are true to the principles which we have learned and which we are seeking to put into full operation.

By the very necessity of the case, the transformation of bare land, forest and prairie into farms and cities and commonwealths; binding them together with railroads; filling them with all the adjuncts of modern civilization; founding and perfecting institutions; establishing and nurturing churches, schools and colleges, has required as it has developed an individuality different from that in all the rest of the world, powerful through the indomitable exercise of will, opposing almost insurmountable obstacles, achieving
almost impossible victories. Today, young men, it is necessary that the men of America shall learn another lesson; namely, the social obligation of every human person; the fact that there is no place any more, anywhere, for the man who thinks simply for himself, cares for himself, walks the way by himself, and aims to seek success which shall be his own. Not so is manhood and womanhood now. Only as it conceives that its mission is something other than individualistic; that it must be social; that it must touch all in a community, all in a state or in a nation, and all the people of the world, is there a possibility on the part of any individual person of attaining unto that which is highest and best for himself.

Why is there war; war now or at any time; war in Europe or in any place; war as a method of settling differences among nations? Because there are men who believe in war. It is the business of America to learn its monumental stupidity. Because there are people who believe in hate and in emphasizing differences and in exaggerating causes of conflict. It is the business of America not only to cultivate friendship, but to come into an understanding of all peoples, so as to know them and to recognize the fact that they are brethren, born of the same Father and subject to the moral law of the same infinite Creator and Ruler. Because men have held that the attribute of sovereignty is power; if it has power it has the right to live; and if it does not have power, has no right to live, but only to become the prey of the stronger nation. Because of these things, war has been, is now, and unless America arise to forbid, will be again. It is the business of America, and yours, to help in this cause, to show the falsity of such doctrine and of such practice; and to exemplify the principles of sympathy, friendship and love in such way as to demonstrate to all the world that to power must be added goodness and kindness and justice, and that the nation which has it must use
it for the benefit and wellbeing of all mankind.

I believe that America has a peculiar mission among the nations, differentiating it from all the others, and that this mission is that of finding a way at once to the blessedness of peace and to the maintenance of unquestioned justice among men. If the task is a difficult one, it is none the less essential, and to it our people must give themselves. If they will continue to cultivate as they ought the ideal of character, so as to count it as the first thing, above all power and all possessions; if they will learn to appreciate what friendship means—the friendship between man and man; the friendship between section and section; between commonwealth and commonwealth; between nation and nation, and cultivate it everywhere and always; if in order to this the people of America shall come to understand and to enter into completeness of sympathy with other peoples, even though they may seem to be inferior to ourselves, seek to understand their history, their dispositions, their national and racial traits, so that the friendship between them shall be actual and real; and if in all this they shall come to know that it is just as true of a nation as it is true of a person that greatness is measured by willingness to render the highest service in its power; then, and not until then, America will have given the demonstration to the world which the world has been seeking in all the ages—a method whereby justice may be secured and peace, with all that belongs to it, may become the common blessing of mankind. I recognize the fact that as long as madmen can control in national affairs war is likely anywhere and that therefore America, like other nations, must have armies and navies, fortifications and munitions of war adequate to repel attack; but this is an incident only. America’s real business, to which it is her glorious privilege to devote her great national genius, is to find the way whereby all the good which war
has ever brought to any nation shall be secured by methods less costly and more humane than war.

Some years ago, two young men were filled with the thought that if the Southland and the countries adjacent could be rid of the scourge of yellow fever, a great boon would be conferred upon mankind. They undertook the problem. Lifting out of the bed a victim in the last stages of the disease, one of them took the vacant place, while the covering was still warm, to demonstrate whether or not the disease could be communicated by contact. No result followed. Suspecting another origin of the malady, they took a mosquito, permitted it to be filled with the diseased blood of the fever victim, and then applied the mosquito to one of themselves. Immediately it was obvious that they had found the secret of the dread disease and its method of communication. But the discoverer died—died as a martyr to science, as a servant of humanity; and he did well to die, not for himself nor for his reputation nor for his soul's sake, but for the benefit of men in every part of the world in which the ravages of this disease had decimated communities.

So must America learn the lesson of her destiny among the nations of the world. No matter what it cost, in the cultivating of the highest ideals of character and of friendship and of service; in the exercise of self-denial and in the unswerving pursuit of justice, in the patient struggle to work out a triumphant democracy; no matter what it costs, if only the nations of the earth come to understand that America exists only to bless, and that the patriotism of America is a patriotism which makes its citizens the servants of the peoples of the world.
Young men, it is at this time in the world's history that you are going out to take your place in it. It is yours to help solve the problems of democracy and to throw yourselves into the making of the real America. This is the reason, whether you have fully sensed it or not, that for four years you have been laying foundations of moral and intellectual power in this College. It is for this reason you are to be congratulated; not simply that you are a member of this class, coming from this historic College; but that you go out into the world now, at a time when these things are happening; at a time when destinies are being made; at a time when civilization is passing through the testing crucible; at a time when America is in process and when the people of this land are to demonstrate for themselves and for all peoples that democracy can rise out of littleness and selfishness into greatness and service; that the experiment of a self-governing people can be made gloriously successful; and that, in this splendid triumph of a moral and intelligent people, America will rise to her great opportunity and lead the nations of the world out of the night of medievalism into the radiant glory of service and love and enduring and universal peace.