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INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY

Ida M. Tarbell '80

Personally I believe that this day is the fairest, most hopeful day the earth has ever seen. Why is our day as good as it is? Because in every past century from the days of Confucius and before down to Abraham Lincoln there has been some man or men who possessed the integrity of intellect to see and to understand the real meaning of the practices that they saw about them, because these men would not keep silent to the truth, but repeated it until the dull and inactive minds about them were awakened to action. They have regarded human life as more sacred than private property and they have preferred justice to the friendship of the party in power. In their time they have set the world by the ears. But it is to them that we owe today. If we are to do for tomorrow what they did for today we must bring to our task their integrity of intellect.

Our duty is the more imperative because we are a democratic country. It is the mind and will of the mass that finally prevails in this land. The mass is huge, unwieldy, slow-moving. The impulse it receives comes from the educator, the thinking class. The people themselves, the great silent body, has recognized this from the beginning, and as early as they provided roofs for their heads they provided schools. If we are to rule, they said, we must know, we must think right. To know and to think we must have schools, pulpits, newspapers. For these agencies men are instructive and uplift the mass, have sacrificed and still sacrifice many of their ordinary daily comforts if not necessities. There is a splendid idealism in the faith the American people have in a school, in a church, in a free press, in the teacher. But if the teacher proves false to his task, if when his place is assured he ceased to grow, fall back on imitation, consider his own advantage rather than the truth, sacrifice the integrity of his intellect, what then is to become of the people? The leaven to which they trusted blindly and implicitly, which they created to save their own souls, has lost its power. They must suffer the same loss, mental and vital energy and integrity. It is the logic of the democratic institution. Let the teaching class shirk its responsibility and abuses grow like weeds; greed and hypocrisy riot at will. Eternal watchfulness is the price of safety in a land governed like ours.

There is nothing for the honest man who loves his country to do but to expose when there is something to expose, protest when there is reason for it, fight if it is necessary. We can do these things because we are hopeful, because we have faith. If nothing comes from effort then we may well discourage exposure, protest, fighting. But if effort does avail, silence and inaction are the worst of pessimism and of cowardice.

-The conclusion of her Phi Beta Kappa Address
Ford Memorial Chapel, Allegheny College,
June 19, 1906.

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