

Traditions

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I must introduce myself to you as a psychiatrist and physician and tell you that my job is the treating of sick people. When I have made speeches it has always been to people who were interested in medical problems, at times on subject of disease itself and at others on the prevention of disease. Now it is the nature of my particular branch of medicine that it deals with the problems of human life—not essentially with the disease and abnormality of the various organs of the body, but with the way the individual as a whole or as a personality reacts to life and life situations. The study therefore of psychiatry forces the psychiatrist, or, at least the wise psychiatrist, to study people in their relations to society and to the group, as well as their relation to each other in smaller groups. It feels therefore that it is not totally unjustified for me to accept your invitation to speak—I should say read—even if my job and forte, if I have any in this talking field—is to talk about the psychiatric approach.

In thinking over what I might say to you, it occurred to me that some of the things I have been preaching about, in the training of children, and young adults might well be approached by one thing which this group of Virginians of Maryland stands for—i. e., *traditions*. If we use traditions in the real sense we mean that the group and the individuals who make up the group have established for themselves a philosophy of life which is based upon the wisdom of the people who have gone before them. Not only does it represent a philosophy but this philosophy has special kinds of virtues, i. e., being mature, and ripened, and consistent. We are at present in a very difficult period for the individual person—particularly the young person. By a difficult period I mean not primarily the effects of the financial depression—but more especially the post-war influences and the breaking down of standards of living. I can remember so clearly what happened to me at the beginning of the war and during its progress. All of my training had been directed to the conservation of interests and resources. Human life had tremendous value. How one lived in youth was important for what one could hope for in later life. Marriage was sacred and was to be thought about carefully before selecting a mate. One had to prepare for economic safety in marriage and life. We were even old-fashioned enough to be taught about right and wrong and the necessity of being prepared for Heaven and Hell. People cared what happened to their souls. Then came the war! We were incited to a white heat of excitement but our standards were destroyed. Human life became cheap. We were persuaded to look calmly even if stoically upon the death of millions of young people. Hatred raged—we hated the German people with a holy

The things that get done, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, and year after year, are the activities that we can *count* on. Talk and teaching and preaching are of no value unless carried into daily activity. Keeping alive traditions and living by them is the only stuff I can see today that offers any solution. They become ground into the very stuff of us. The traditions of the group, the family or a large group like the State, are selected from all the good and bad usage that has gone before. What is formulated as tradition represents only the good side of the past. That is what standards of life should represent. They should serve as beacons for us. We can always count on lesser motives and desires to come out of our less civilized sides. Traditions represent stability and a view of the long run of life. I am sure that you of Virginia have a better equipment to handle the turmoils of the present financial debacle because your traditions teach you how people stand up straight when poverty and destruction hit you. I am a Northerner and my sympathies have always been with Union, but the story of Lee and what he stood for in the traditions of Virginia thrills me in an almost religious fashion. We ought to reread and restudy the behavior of the post-Civil War folk—and realize that the Virginia tradition of fortitude represents the capacity of folk to look forward after adversity and not to sit down and cry. It's a fine tradition to be able to stand up and take our licking and begin life anew. The folk of Virginia saw life as having more values than mere money. They knew that other things were worth fighting for. In times like these we must rekindle the fire of that tradition.

I cry like all the rest of the folk about the financial depression; but I am not sure that it may not do us all a lot of good—that we may not be all a lot happier and more useful. Each of us I am sure has had to make big sacrifices and these sacrifices have not been made only for ourselves. We are again making new traditions of service for ourselves and we are fortunate if we have the past tradition of fair and just behavior, as a part of our youthful equipment. As I said before only those things which are habitual serve us as useful patterns of behavior. The influence of tradition is amazingly insidious and thorough working. I have been struck with its influence among the group to which I belong. Out of centuries of travail and persecution the Jew has established a tradition of charity. I suspect that no more heterogeneous group of people could be found than the Jews of Baltimore. They come from all the countries of Europe—they represent every class of social distinction as well as racial diversity but they have the tradition of charity in common. We do not all even speak the same tongue—we do not eat the same

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This seems to be to be terribly destructive. I feel that the philosophy of of satisfying immediate desire is bound to produce folk who will be burnt out and empty. We cannot trust youth or adulthood to choose wisely—if the only springs of action are personal choice. If you offer a stick of candy or the remote possibility of being President of the United States the child will nearly always take the candy.

Much as I regret the passing of the established religions, it seems to me that the church no longer represents the leadership of morality. Modern life seems to be cast in a different mold and the church does not seem to be pouring any flaming mass into the mold. I am not meaning to attack the church—I am only trying to find the ways in which we can influence life—especially for youth. I am trying to see in which direction we can find roads upon which we can persuade folk to travel. Roads which will be sufficiently clear to beckon the traveler and upon which there is some safety. Roads which have ends which are not blind alleys.

Now it seems to me that in traditions we have some such solution. Whatever harm comes from an over-indulgent spending period like the one which we have just been through and whatever harm comes from the growth of rank individualism, one good thing seems to emerge—good taste at least, taste in living comes to be valuable; increased money brings wider education, more interest in the various arts—the theatre, books, pictures, art museums, etc.; furniture, houses, even automobile designs, etc. Along with taste in things is apt to come taste in living. Traditions are an expression of the good taste of the past and furthermore carry a lot of standards of the past.

The more we study the development of the human individual the more we are convinced that the only thing that makes for character is habit formation.

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I would make all life to be lived so. I would not offer people a choice to go the wrong way. I would establish habit of right and useful living so thoroughly that choice would be available only in the several of the right ways. I would build traditions so thoroughly into life that young people would not have to make constant decisions of right and wrong. I would give them traditions which were so binding that they could not escape their force. Traditions can act in this fashion and do so act.

I belong to a medical group which has a tradition of honest, honorable medical practice. It's the tradition of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Medical School. One hears very little talk about it. I have only heard of one man that the Johns Hopkins Medical School is ashamed of. It is, however, bred into the very bone of our medical students. Nobody tells you as a student, that honor is demanded of Hopkins men—but everybody knows it. With the tradition of honor comes the absence of pettiness and petty jealousies. I have been graduated for fifteen years from the Johns Hopkins Medical School and I can honestly say that I have never seen a questionable act in one of my colleagues. When I hear other doctors talk of medical jealousies and questionable practices, I literally have no experience to match it. It simply isn't part of the Hopkins code—i. e., its traditions—The man who builded early in the Hopkins career established the honor tradition.

I praise therefore the gathering together of men like this. You may come together as friends but the real force behind such a group is the tradition of Virginia. Virginia with its respect and love of the fine memories of the past; Virginia with the tradition of honor; Virginia with its tradition of hospitality and friendliness; Virginia who loved freedom; Virginia who had the tradition of the gentleman; Virginia who took the blows of adversity without complaint and who behaved like men. I urge you to keep those traditions alive—renew them over and over and pass them on to your children and your children's children.

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