

Commencement Address
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WHAT IS A DIPLOMA?

In a few moments you will receive your diploma. What is a diploma? Outwardly it is a piece of paper stating a few facts. Actually it is more than that. A diploma confers certain privileges upon you. It may make you a member of an alumni association. It makes it unnecessary for you to come to classes in this school. It entitles you to enter certain schools - if there is any room ! It may open the door for a job.

But your diploma is more than this. Really it is a sort of receipt which indicates that you are in possession of certain tools which you may use to achieve an education. This may startle you because you may have the notion that you are now an educated person. You have not been educated, you have been furnished with these tools. President Elliot of Harvard was once asked how his university had gained its prestige as the greatest storehouse of knowledge. He replied that it was probably due to the fact that Freshmen brought in so much knowledge and the Seniors took so little away.

The other day when you took that last Regents examination you walked out of the room and gave a whoop of joy and probably shouted, "Now my exams are over." This diploma says that you have been able to reproduce on paper certain things which you have learned. But your examinations are not over. Your real tests are just beginning. Can you take these tools which your diploma says you possess and use them to make yourself a more effective - a happier person? Life will test you every day that you live. Your employer, your customers, your patients, your clients, your neighbors and your family will ^{mark} ~~you~~ you passed or failed although they may never hand you a pretty piece of paper.

Furthermore your diploma imposes some obligations upon you. To furnish you with the tools about which I have been talking has cost a tremendous amount both in effort and in dollars and cents. Very few of us could pay the actual cost of our school course. The community has paid that bill because it considers that knowledge and skills are needed by the people who are to live in that community. This ^{means} ~~means~~ that you must, first of all, choose your vocation in the light of the needs of your community

and your world. You were not given this opportunity for the sake of yourself alone. You were given it in order that you might be a more effective citizen. There is more to be considered than just the monetary cost of your education. We must remember the personal effort and sacrifice which has been made by scores upon scores of teachers and educators through the years to make our present schools possible. We must remember those people who have given of themselves in library and laboratory to make available for us the knowledge we have. We must remember those people of high vision who have battled in the war against ignorance. You are under obligation to use what you have as a sacred trust for the good of the world, not for your own selfish gain. Your guidance counselors have told you something about the particular abilities which you possess. They have shown you some of the possible vocations which you may follow. You, yourself, have likes and dislikes. All of this must be considered, but there is the other factor which must never be forgotten. When you choose what you are going to do remember your obligation to help meet the needs of your world. This diploma should remind you constantly that you have been given a sacred trust.

In the second place your diploma imposes upon you the obligation of assuming the duties of citizenship. If our democracy is to be preserved we must have trained citizens. It is for this reason that we have our free schools. Your bill for your school course will never be paid until you have assumed the responsibilities of active citizenship. As a graduate of this school you have no right to say, "I am not interested in politics." At the very least you must become well enough informed about the affairs of your community and your country and your world so that you may be an intelligent voter. But even this is not enough. Your training fits you to become an active participant in all of the affairs of your community.

Finally, this diploma places upon you the responsibility to use what you have been given. For some of you this means further formal education. For some of you it means the development of talents and abilities with which you are endowed. For all it means that you are obligated to develop inner resources which give you poise;

to make a social adjustment which will help you live in peace with your fellows; to achieve discrimination which will enable you to see that which is of value and to cultivate a sense of responsibility which will make you humble before your God.