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RESEARCH IN THE SERVICE OF THE STATE¹

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EVERYTHING has a beginning—even commencement. This annual festival of American colleges which we celebrate to-day traces back centuries ago to the medieval universities, where in form it was quite different from the present-day commencement.

The antecedent of this occasion was known in medieval times as "inception," and marked the admission of the graduate to the career of teaching. Hence the custom was for those who received the bachelor's degree to be invested with the insignia of the new rank—often the cap and ring—be placed in the master's chair and "incept" or begin to teach. Our word *commencement* was borrowed from Cambridge University, where the earlier form had been modified, and the first commencement exercises in this country were held at Harvard in 1642. In course of time the day came to be not only of academic importance but one of great festivity, evidently leading to excesses at times, for we read that in 1722 sumptuary laws were passed in this state prohibiting "commencers" from providing refreshments or liquors in their chambers, with what success we need not inquire at this remote date.

The medieval formalities of "inception" later developed into the expounding of theses or the defense of dissertations by the graduates and still later into the delivery of orations. Latterly it has come to be a listening-in occasion for the graduating class and their friends alike, with an address by an outsider, an innovation which in my student days would have been a welcome relief. But the world continues to move, and still another change may be in store. Already we have courses of instruction given by radio which do away with the need of assembly; may not the radio commencement, therefore, be waiting just around the corner?

However, for the class of '25, this is your day and for all of you it marks an inception, if not into teaching into a new stage in the working out of a career. It is the close of a preparatory period which helps the student to find himself, to understand his relations to the world and inspires purpose within him. Higher education is still limited to the few, amounting to less than one per cent. of the entire population in this country, or only about two per cent. of those of adult age. Every twenty of you

¹ Commencement address delivered at the Massachusetts Agricultural College, June 15, 1925.

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