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An Address by Dr. Claude Bissell, President, University of Toronto  
at Graduation Exercises, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,  
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#### EDUCATION AND POWER

I am most grateful to the University -- to its President, its Board of Regents, its academic bodies -- for conferring upon me an honorary degree, and therefore admitting me by special fiat to your academic community. Honorary degrees resemble in one respect the earned degrees that you receive to-day: They derive much of their lustre from the institution that confers them. And as a newly admitted member of one of the great universities of the world, I shall wear Michigan's colours with particular pride.

Those of us who work in Canadian universities have long been familiar with the generosity of American universities towards our students and staff -- not so familiar, however, that we take it casually for granted. Each year you receive many Canadians into your graduate schools, and if some of them remain with you, we must accept this as the reward to which even disinterested benevolence is occasionally entitled. I should warn you, however, that Canadian expatriates are far more intensely patriotic than their contemporaries who remain on native soil, and that, in these days of fierce competition for staff, they comprise a dangerous fifth column enclave in your midst.

The relationship of the University of Toronto with the University of Michigan is chiefly through your graduate school. We could not hope to compete with you, for instance, in that form of non-nuclear warfare called football; in



hockey we are on sounder ground -- or, I should say, on thicker ice -- unless the Michigan team happens to be fortified by some of my hard-skating compatriots seeking a liberal education south of the border.

I have always thought of Michigan and Toronto as occupying similar positions in their respective countries. Both are models of the partnership between the state and higher education, and as such they have been influential in establishing national patterns. Both had their roots in the early part of the 19th century, and both, after the usual period of charters, revised constitutions, false starts and financial uncertainty, began formal instruction at almost the same time, Michigan in 1841, Toronto (known then as King's College) in 1842. (When I was a graduate student at Cornell I wondered why that university -- a late 19th century arrival on the academic scene -- should have gained admission to the Ivy League; surely Michigan had a stronger claim. I now know that any Michigan man would look upon such a classification as a mark of fading power.)

That last phrase has, inadvertently, provided the modulation into my theme. Power is a word that we use naturally these days in a great many contexts -- whether we are talking about motor cars, jet planes, football teams, international affairs, positive thinking, fashion models, or universities.

In the nineteenth century, most of the affectionate references to universities were gently romantic in character. Universities aroused in the beholder images that suggest the monastery, the secluded garden, or the cathedral close. But to-day, when one visits the large complex university on this continent -- of which the University of Michigan is a justly celebrated example -- we do not easily use such terms. The dreaming spires have become radio-active



with energy, and the university pulsates with power. This power manifests itself in many ways: in the multiplicity and the massiveness of the buildings, in the variety of the studies that are pursued, in the numbers both of the students and of those who teach them. These are the open and obvious signs of power. But there is a sense, too, of power not clearly visible, but omnipresent: in, for instance, the activities of research associates and fellows, who rarely impinge upon the ordinary life of the university; who seem to live a life of their own, even outside the unceasing consciousness of the administration.

The modern university is more and more a microcosm of our society. Surrounding the classroom, where the central work of instruction goes on -- indeed, sometimes obscuring and stifling it -- are the research laboratories, with their complex and intricate relationship with every major area of the economy; the publishing houses that feed the solid resources of scholarship into the body of knowledge; or skilfully process it so that it can be more swiftly absorbed; the museums that record the way in which man has shaped or has been shaped by his environment; the institutes that isolate, and then envelop, a specific problem. Often you will find within this university society many of the writers who a generation or so ago would have scorned the very thought of living in a university community. You will find the critic, not beside Walden Pond, but in a faculty flat, and the poet, not mingling with the crowds on Brooklyn Ferry, but occupying the next carrell in the university stacks.

Henry Adams in "The Education" tells how he haunted the Great Exposition of 1900 in search of the central source of power in twentieth century society. He found it eventually in the forty-foot dynamo. "The planet itself," he wrote, "seemed less impressive in its old-fashioned, deliberate annual or daily revolution than this huge wheel, revolving within arm's length at some



vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring -- scarcely humming an audible warning to stand a hair's-breadth further for respect of power -- while it would not wake the baby lying close against its frame. Before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force. Among the thousand symbols of ultimate energy, the dynamo was not so human as some, but it was the most expressive." If Henry Adams were alive to-day, I suspect that he would not haunt the Exposition, but rather a university campus, where he would find in the nuclear reactor or in the computation machine, those two most glittering badges of academic respectability and prestige, infinitely more potent descendants of the dynamo.

Given the nature of the modern university, it becomes not only a source of power in itself, but also a close ally of other sources of power in our society. I need not remind you of the paramount role played by the university, particularly the American university, in the development of atomic energy. It has always seemed to me a delicious irony that the first self-sustaining nuclear reaction should have been achieved in Stagg Stadium at the University of Chicago, and that the university should have used the abandoned temple of football power for this purpose. One is reminded of Tennyson's reflection that men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things.

Another external alliance of the modern university is with the large business corporation. In schools of business administration throughout the country, thousands of young men are told how to make prudent decisions, how to delegate responsibility without losing authority, how to utilize the susceptibilities, the desires and the credulities of their fellow-men for the greater glory of the corporation. But the greatest concentration of power in the modern state is to be found in the military establishment, and with this, too, the



modern university has tough and numerous ties. For in the military establishment you find the ultimate embodiment of the power that the university has helped to create: the power released by her scientists from nature, and the power generated by her social scientists from the study and ordering of human habits and instincts.

I shall call this kind of power, the power of compulsion. It is open, palpable, and measurable. It is the kind of power that is easily understood and that arouses men to action. It is the reason why university budgets, once modest and domestic, have become so large that they command the respectful attention of legislators.

The universities were not always so closely allied with these centres of power; on this continent, indeed, they often sprang out of religious conviction and faith, and if it were a question of declaring their allegiance either to Caesar or to God, they would have experienced little doubt in making a choice. With the growth in economic power in modern society, and the proliferation of religious sects, the major universities abandoned a formal church connection. But the original impulse was never lost, though secularized and given an undogmatic content. You see the impulse at an early date in the famous words from the ordinance of 1787 -- words that are familiar to all Michigan men: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." One hundred and fifty years later at the Centenary Celebrations of the University of Michigan, the climactic speaker, Glenn Frank, the former President of the University of Wisconsin, brought the celebrations elegantly to a close by affirming the spiritual function of the university: "Finally, the model university, however secular its origin or affiliation, will foster among its students the ideals of a religion of maturity, which it will define as a



religion that takes all of life for its field, a religion that makes for the unification of man's purposes, so that an identity of valuation runs through his political, social, and economic as well as more literally labeled religious practices, a religion that conserves the vital energies of men's lives by bringing them to focus under the sovereignty of a supreme objective."

If the university were not an ally of the church, helping to implement God's plan on earth, it was at the very least a means of constantly recalling man to a sense of his spiritual inheritance, and to the indestructible power of the human mind as it manifested itself clearly in the works of thought and imagination. In the creations of the great artists, philosophers and saints lay the ultimate source of power -- and the university became the principal means by which this power was transmitted from generation to generation.

I shall call this power the power of persuasion (if we can cleanse this word of its advertising aroma). It is hard to grasp and difficult to assess. Its virtues are not speed and decisiveness, but patience, humility, and disinterestedness. This power may not attract much contract research to the university, but it helps to make it a rallying point for conscience and reason.

Throughout history, the power of compulsion and the power of persuasion have been at any one time simultaneously present in a culture, with one or the other in the ascendant. They are not irrevocably opposed to each other, but they work in different ways. The power of compulsion fastens upon means to secure ends that are taken for granted. The end, in its simplest and crudest form, is to create more of what we already have -- to improve our standard of living, increase our national output, extend and consolidate our



interests throughout the world. The power of persuasion, on the other hand, is concerned about ends. It asks the simple, devastating questions. What are the real satisfactions of man? What is the goal to which we are so feverishly moving, or is there indeed a goal at all? The power of compulsion lives in an atmosphere of conflict, and knows no happiness save in victory. But to the power of persuasion, competition is irrelevant. We are in a world where beauty and truth manifest themselves in many forms, each commanding a unique perfection. De Quincey speaks of the great works of literature -- works that illustrate what he calls the literature of power -- as being "not militant but triumphant forever....They never can transmigrate into new incarnations....They differ not as better and worse, or simply by more and less; they differ by undecipherable and incommunicable differences that cannot be caught by mimicries, that cannot be reflected in the mirrors of copies, that cannot become ponderable in the scales of vulgar comparisons." Finally, the power of compulsion can brook no arresting questions, can countenance no doubts; it is at home only in the gymnasium where it can flex its muscles and release its animal energies. But the power of persuasion lives on questions and grows lean and supple on doubts.

The modern Western university, in its embodiment of these two kinds of power, reflects the dilemma of society, nowhere more clearly than in the United States. Given the nature of our world, the United States must be the chief custodian of the power of compulsion. This is, and always has been, an unpopular role. In the nineteenth century Great Britain played it on a dozen major stages, and took the brickbats along with the dividends. At the present time the United States is more conscious of the brickbats than of the dividends. To épater les Américains has now become a principal vocation of man. As Arnold Toynbee remarked in his recent lectures on "America and the World Revolution",



"twisting the lion's tail ceases to be rewarding if the lion shrinks to the size of a cat; but if a buzzard swells to the size of an eagle, it then becomes worthwhile to pull out the bird's tail-feathers".

The great problem confronting the West is to know when to use the power of compulsion and when to use the power of persuasion, and, given the character of each, to place restraints on the former and give wings to the latter. We must remember that the power of compulsion cannot overcome the most potent adversary: the fears and suspicions in the minds of men. Last spring I had the chance to visit mainland China. What I found most terrifying was not the starvation, of which I saw few signs, not the poverty, which is widespread but bearable, not the feeling of living under the unblinking eye of regimentation, for the Chinese wear their Marxism with a Confucian inscrutability -- not any of these things, but rather the deep, intense, and unswerving distrust of the United States. The tragic irony of the attitude comes home sharply as one recalls the comparative benevolence of American attitudes towards China in the 19th and early 20th centuries -- a benevolence in which this University, through the effective diplomacy of President Angell, played a distinguished role; it comes home even more sharply, as one strolls through a major university campus that had been the creation of American enterprise and generosity. Irrational and hysterical as Chinese anti-Americanism may in large part be, it exists and it grows daily in 700,000,000 minds. And the power of compulsion is powerless against it.

You will recall the story of King Lear, of how the aged King, in a moment of quixotic generosity, divided up his kingdom, only to be treated with black ingratitude by his children. But stripped of his pomp, homeless and driven half-mad, he discovered the power of human sympathy, and he came to



know the peace and wisdom that come from experiencing the grief and suffering of others. Our problem is how to find Lear's wisdom without embracing his folly. We must not divest ourselves of our kingdom only to be consumed by the Gonerils and Regans and left wandering on a desolate plain. If we learn the lesson that Lear had to be so brutally taught:

Take physic, pomp:  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel;  
That thou mayst shape the superflux to them,  
And shew the heavens more just

then we need never utter his stricken cry:

O, I have ta'en  
Too little care of this!

Most of you who graduate to-day will make your contributions, small or large, to the power of compulsion. I wish you well. But for those of you who elect to serve the power of persuasion, I pray that your strength may be as the strength of ten.