

U-8-8

Publication of The University of British Columbia



Power and People
SPRING CONGREGATION
ADDRESS
1952

delivered by
Doctor Roderick L. H. Haig-Brown

CONGREGATION SERIES No. 5

SPRING CONGREGATION
ADDRESS
1952

Power and People

*An address delivered on the second day of the
Spring Congregation of the University of
British Columbia, May 16th, 1952, by
Doctor Roderick L. H. Haig-Brown*

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

CITATION

I have the honour to present for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, RODERICK LANGMERE HAIG HAIG-BROWN, a Canadian author admired and loved by a wide range of readers at home and abroad.

To children, he is the delicate interpreter of nature and wild-life, and the weaver of tales of adventure in Starbuck Valley or on the deep waters of the Pacific.

To practitioners of the contemplative man's recreation, he is the complete angler of the new world, a worthy disciple of the kind and gentle Isaac Walton.

To admirers of the familiar essay, he is the author of *The Measure of the Year*, a work written with the sensitivity of a poet, the mind of a philosopher, the vision of a naturalist, and the literary power of a Gilbert White of Selborne.

Through his shrewd observations of nature and man, he has developed for himself a way of life and a philosophy that makes use of the materials of history and tradition, to chart a course for our society now and in the future. Nature is to be lived with and enjoyed, not to be used merely for barter, or wantonly destroyed. Man can learn tolerance and increase his capacity for good from close observation of, and contact with, nature. To him "a country is not words, but feeling, not logic, but ideas—and much faith." In addition, through his own career as soldier, conservationist, and magistrate, he has allied the life of the writer to that of the man of action. Mr. Chancellor, it is an honour to present one who has contributed, and is contributing, so much to the realization of a truly Canadian way of life—Roderick Langmere Haig Haig-Brown.

Power and People

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, distinguished guests, fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen:

My first duty, and keen pleasure, is to express on behalf of Mrs. Annie Sarah Hodges, Professor Harry Ashton, and myself, our very deep appreciation of the honors conferred upon us this afternoon. I need hardly emphasize to you my comparative unfitness for this task. Her very title, "*Madame Speaker*," expresses at once the superior qualification of the lady we all know best as Nancy Hodges, who has so gracefully and skillfully guided the recent sessions of our provincial legislature. The academic attainments and matured wisdom of my valued friend—once, almost my fishing companion,—Professor Ashton, are almost as outstanding as my own rustic awkwardness. But unworthiness need not affect sincerity; and it is with sincerity, from the depths of three hearts, that I thank you.

It is often said that Canadians are provincially minded. And of all Canadians we people of the Pacific slope, shut between the Rockies and the Ocean, are supposed to be the most provincial. I should like, for the moment, to confirm and emphasize this opinion by saying that I have always felt an intensely provincial pride in British Columbia's University. Until today it has been the pride of a loyal fan, a devout follower of the team's fortunes, who could never expect to play a more active part. Today I suddenly find myself assigned to coach at first base. I can assure you that my provincial pride is stretched beyond all reasonable bounds.

A sense of local pride is a pleasant and natural thing. One should not deny it or slight it. But at the same time, it is true that few things are less local than a good university. A university's very function is to bring together, from the ends of the earth if need be, the best in thought and knowledge and understanding; to foster and multiply this wealth; and to spread it abroad

again in the lives of its graduates. A great university is not merely the affair of a province or a nation; it is an asset to mankind, and a bold expression of humanity. The true test of your University's success is not in whether it has made you good British Columbians, or even good Canadians, but in whether you are people who will be good for the world.

I think three things of you: you are young, you are Canadian and you are, or you should be, the best that western civilization can produce. I wonder three things about you: What will you do for yourselves? What will you do for Canada? What will you do for the world?

These things are by no means independent of each other. The only truly important unit of civilization is the individual human being; and the only valid purpose any social organization can possibly have, is to promote the fullest flowering of every individual it serves. The mechanics of happiness and fulfilment are all yours. You go from here, citizens of the strongest and most advanced young country in the world, in what are undoubtedly the early years of her richest growth. You are inheriting a fabulously high living standard and a measure of social, economic and political security known scarcely anywhere else in the world. You have been taught how to take a part in this wonderful civilization, how to serve it, perhaps even how to add to its comforts and complexities.

If this were all, or even if it were a true statement in itself, I should feel very sorry for you. Fortunately, it is neither true, nor complete. There is, for instance, the additional fact that you are men and women; and this alone is enough to ensure that you will know the many discontents, divine and otherwise, without which happiness can have no meaning. And it is true that there is no such thing as security, whether social, economic or political. These things are ideas, not static conditions, and they exist, if at all, only through constant renewal and growth and change—through the active thought of many people, caring very much.

You have been trained, in your school and university years, and especially in your university years, to this kind of thought. You have had opened to you the way into the great thinking of the past. You have learned that you must reach deeply into yourselves, and beyond yourselves, for any real fulfilment. But in spite of all that and in spite of the protective freedoms that surround your thought, you will not find this an easy time to

think freely, as men and women should and must if they are to remain free. You will find that every complexity of the civilization which produces so much material wealth, is a limit on your life and on your power of thought. You will find that you are a more specialized individual, in a more specialized job, than your father was. You will find far more efficient means of standardizing your thought brought to bear upon you than ever were upon him. You will find governments far more cynically and securely entrenched than he ever found them.

Yet I think you are equipped to deal with this kind of world, and make it behave as you want it to behave. I believe you can control it and broaden it and purify it, and raise children in it to be even stronger and freer than you are yourselves. If so, you will know great happiness, and the rich fulfilment of all your preparation.

One thing that will face you all your lives and test your integrity and stretch your intelligence, is the speed of Canada's growth. There may be lapses and slackenings in it, but it will last out your time; Canada will still be growing, and growing fast, when you die. The question is: what will you make of it? Can you control it, keep it honorable, make it solid and lasting? Or will you use it and let it use you without any serious thought of its meaning? You can do that, of course; you are equipped, most of you, to go out and make a quick clean-up, buy all the trappings of wealth and die with all the lights burning in a palace on a hilltop. The next day they will weep over your grave, and bury more than your share of Canada with you.

I think that is a dead fashion, and few of you will be tempted by it. I am sure you know that you do not own Canada, that you only have a lease on her. But it is not enough simply to know this; you have to live the knowledge and act on it constantly in everything you do. You have to be convinced that you want your children and their children to grow up into the same rich future that you have. You will find much against you in this. No government will ever help you, unless you force it to—for governments are affairs of a day and the future is forever. Many of your fellow citizens will be against you, because they have not had your opportunities to understand. But you will be able to do much, some of it in your jobs, even more on your own, by thinking clearly, and understanding what is going on about you. It is a duty as important as any that can be put upon you, because it means the difference between a real and lasting Canada, or a false and temporary one.

If I could have one wish for Canada today, it would be: that she shall never become a great power. It seems to be in the history of all great nations that their strength begins to fade almost in the moment of its realization. The very fact of power forces them on to exhaustion, so that the early strength dies in them even as they reach for the last iota of power that would make them all-powerful. For power breeds a hatred in others that makes more power always necessary to defend power.

No wish of mine, nor even of yours, is going to keep Canada from becoming a great power. But I wonder if, by taking thought now, before the fact of power is upon us, we can vary the dreary pattern of history. To do so, we shall have to develop a new concept of power, a new philosophy of its purpose and use and meaning. I do not think that this should be too difficult for us. We are a young people, not yet rigidly bound by old habits of thought. We have never been forced into an intense and narrow nationalism; and we have been learning to think internationally almost from the start of our own nationhood.

We know already some of the pitfalls of power, some of the factors that make it destructive and self-destroying. Surely we can be wise enough to use our own country within the limits of its resources, so that we shall never be forced to reach beyond its borders for the means of power? Surely we can learn to trade honestly and fairly, without artificial restrictions, so that the peoples of other nations besides our own may have a chance to live fully and well? Surely we can learn to broaden our sympathy and understanding until they include other ways besides our own? Surely we can teach ourselves to use power, not merely for ourselves, not in bitter competition with others, but for human welfare.

Because I believe that some such achievement as this is in Canada's future, I am convinced it is important as never before to maintain our own identity, to maintain and build on our own special ways of thought, our own integrity, our own faiths. No achievement or service of this sort will come as a matter of plan or deliberate policy; it can only grow from an attitude of mind, a new way of thinking about old things, a new way of living among new and formidable things.

You are people learned in philosophy and the humanities, learned in law, learned in the sciences. You are also men and women, trained to think clearly and honestly. Canada is you and you are Canada; you cannot separate yourselves from her destiny, no matter if you would, and I am sure you would not.

She is what you make her—not you collectively, working at your future jobs, but you individually, as men and women, raising children, feeling, thinking, trying to understand. You have the guidance of a dozen great civilizations behind you, and the vigor of a new nation and a new continent in your blood. You will influence the future of Canada, and probably that of many people beyond her borders. The value of your influence will depend on three things: the integrity of your own lives, the honesty of your private thinking, and the spiritual depth of your sympathy for mankind.

Beyond this I have one other word for you, one other solemn duty to put upon you: when you go out from here, live every moment of your lives to capacity. Neither stint yourselves, nor spare yourselves. There is only so much you can do and enjoy in the time you have, but it will take all your time and all your energy, every day, to do and enjoy that much. And, as you go about this duty of spending your vitality, do not look for massive triumphs. When a man's face, or a woman's face, lights up for you or smiles for you, count that your gain and your achievement. It is the total of these that will be your life's measure.



No. 1	AND WE ARE HERE	October, 1948 — <i>Ira Dilworth</i>
No. 2	ON LOOKING BACKWARD	May, 1949 — <i>F. M. Clement</i>
No. 3	SPRING CONGREGATION ADDRESSES, 1950	— <i>C. D. Howe</i> — <i>H. R. MacMillan</i>
No. 4	SPRING CONGREGATION ADDRESSES, 1951	— <i>W. B. Hutchison</i> — <i>R. J. Bunche</i>
No. 5	POWER AND PEOPLE	May, 1952 — <i>R. L. H. Haig-Brown</i>