



Inauguration of

James Alfred Perkins

Seventh President of Cornell University

October 4, 1963

Ithaca, New York

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INAUGURATION PROGRAM

October 4, 1963

Bailey Hall

PRELUDE

Rudolph J. Kremer
University Organist

PRESIDING

Mr. Arthur H. Dean
Chairman, Board of Trustees

INVOCATION

The Rev. L. Paul Jaquith
Director, Cornell United Religious Work

"Spirit of Wisdom"

Cornell University Glee Club
Professor Thomas A. Sokol, *Director*

"The Future of the University"

Dr. John W. Gardner
President, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Inauguration of Dr. James A. Perkins

INAUGURATION ADDRESS

Dr. James A. Perkins
President, Cornell University

ALMA MATER

Cornell University Glee Club
Professor Thomas A. Sokol, *Director*

BENEDICTION

The Rev. L. Paul Jaquith
Director, Cornell United Religious Work

The Future of the University

by

JOHN W. GARDNER

President, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Over the past 50 years the universities have risen to a position of extraordinary prominence in our society. The prophecy being circulated by forward looking leaders in higher education today is that we are moving into a period in which society will be organized around the universities. I don't know what the Establishment will think of that rumor. Perhaps they started it.

At any rate, it is an exhilarating notion—even, I should think, to those worthy professors who want as little as possible to do with the rest of society.

As for me, I am easily carried away by such glittering ideas, and I am quite willing to contemplate this one—provided that it be regarded as one of three possibilities. The first possibility, let us say, is that society will be organized around the universities. The second possibility is that it will not. The third possibility, and I ask you to consider this one carefully, is that as industry and government with their huge research and educational programs come to look more and more like the universities, and as the universities with their worldly interests come to look more and more like the rest of society we shall achieve a condition in which no one will be quite sure what is university and what is not-university and no one will have the faintest idea what is organized around what.

The general public stands in awe of the universities. And

the fact that it is also a bit suspicious of the universities doesn't diminish the awe. So it is likely that many will welcome the new prophecy.

But, all things considered, it would be better if the universities themselves took a more critical view. It would be well if they were to ask themselves whether they are quite prepared to have society organized around them. It might even be well for them to remind themselves that like every other social institution, universities are subject to disintegrative forces, are the scene of power politics, and are susceptible to the decay that so often sets in at precisely the hour of triumph. In short, I suggest that the universities, at this point in their history, would do well to look at themselves with a cold eye.

I suppose that every man or woman with the capacity to face reality—which eliminates most of us at once—recognizes that this is a time of decision for the universities. And the first item on the agenda is whether the university will have a voice in its own future.

We like to think that institutions are shaped according to the best vision of the best men in them, and sometimes they are. Let me put that more positively: history offers many persuasive examples of just that consequence—able and vigorous men sharing a vision of how they might shape their future and creating institutions to that end. But that is not the only way that institutions get shaped. Sometimes institutions are simply the sum of the historical accidents that have happened to them. Like the sand dunes in the desert, they are shaped by influences but not by purposes. Or to put the matter more accurately, like our sprawling and ugly metropolitan centers they are the unintended consequences of millions of fragmented purposes.

Now I believe—and will never cease to believe—that men can shape their institutions to suit their purposes—provided that they are clear as to what those purposes are; and provided that they are not too gravely afflicted with

the diseases of which institutions die—among them complacency, myopia, an unwillingness to choose, and an unwillingness on the part of individuals to lend themselves to any worthy common purpose.

Happily, I have no responsibility today to suggest what the worthy purposes of a university should be at this moment in history. I gladly leave that to clearer and wiser heads than mine. But I cannot forego one comment. I don't know whether the universities are in the grip of society or society is in the grip of the universities, but I like to think that no matter how much the university becomes entangled with the world on its outer fringes, the inner city of the university will be above the battle in some quite distinctive ways. I should like to believe that it will, to borrow some lines from Bernard Shaw, "stand for the future and the past, for the posterity that has no vote and the tradition that never had any...for the great abstractions, for the eternal against the expedient; for the evolutionary appetite against the day's gluttony; for intellectual integrity, for humanity, for the rescue of industry from commercialism and of science from professionalism..." I like to think that it will stand for things that are forgotten in the heat of battle, for values that get pushed aside in the rough and tumble of everyday living, for the goals we ought to be thinking about and never do, for the facts we don't like to face and the questions we lack the courage to ask.

Now, with your permission, I should like to conclude these brief remarks with a more personal reference to the event of the day. Everyone likes beginnings; and this occasion is a beginning in ways that we cannot now foresee. Whatever one may think of the influence of a university president upon a university—and Cornell has traditionally had mixed views on that score—a new president is very likely to initiate a new phase in the history of an institution. In short, though this inauguration was designed as

a family affair, it is a historic event in the life of a great institution, an event of national and even international significance. Cornell is one of a handful of great world centers of learning. It is one of a handful of American universities that today hold the key to our vitality as a nation.

As you might have guessed, I want very much to say a few words about the man who is to be inaugurated today. I know him well. We have been partners and friends. And I believe that he has the qualifications of a great president.

I am not going to recite all of the presidential qualities possessed by my friend, James Perkins, partly because it would make him acutely uncomfortable, and partly because such a listing of virtues has become somewhat ritualistic on these occasions.

Still I cannot resist saying a few simple things. I know few men who understand American higher education better than James Perkins. I know few men who have the extraordinary grasp of organization that he has. And I know few men to whom I would more readily trust a post that required the highest qualities of mind and character.

And let me add to that one or two more personal remarks. To most people in the Cornell community both on and off campus, President Perkins will be more a symbol than a human being, and as the years pass it will be increasingly difficult to discern the man behind the symbol. So I want to tell you, and I hope you will remember it at odd moments, that behind the symbol and behind the myth that will inevitably develop is an extraordinarily kind, warm, decent and charitable human being. I have chosen those words carefully, and as much as I love my fellow men, I do not think there are many of them who fit the description.

I wish him luck and I wish you luck. I shall watch with interest as he and you share the great collaborative task of appraising Cornell's present and its future and of moving toward purposes of your own choosing.