

Chapel, February 24, 1927
President Wright

I want to talk to you this morning on some of the dangers in our democracy. It seems to me that it is perfectly proper that we should bring to you from time to time some of those things that you do not find in your text books and that you do not get in the classroom (you may get some of what I am going to say to you in the classroom) especially when they are things that the schools in a large measure are either responsible for, or will have to correct.

A republic or democracy is a government in which the citizenship has political freedom. Now, you perhaps do not know the significance of what we mean when we say political freedom. There was a time in the history of this world, and it is still true in some countries in which the citizenship has almost if not quite as much freedom as we have in this country, but the individuals have no say in the government. They have no voice in the making of the laws that control them. That was true in an absolute monarchy. The people had freedom, to be sure, but they had no voice in the making of the laws that controlled them. Now a democracy is a government in which the citizenship at a given age, usually 21, has a voice in the government, has a say-so, has a chance to express themselves. That means that they have what is known as political freedom. We cannot have a democracy without political freedom. It is one of the foundation stones of a republic, that the citizens of the republic shall have political freedom, - a participation in the government, a voice in the government. And that means, of course, that the citizenship in a republic has a right to criticize any public act, or any official. There was a time in the history of the world in certain nations when it was almost the equivalent of sacrificing your life to criticize your government. The people in a republic have a right to say what they please about the public acts of an official. To be sure, if they slander an official, they may be indicted for that. In other words, if they carry it so far as to make it absolutely false to carry a point, then the official has the right to bring such a person in the courts and try him for slander, and if he

is guilty to punish him. What I am talking about right now is usually termed freedom of speech, and that means that you have a right to print or to say what you please in the way of criticism of your government. That is one of the things that the world had to fight for for centuries. The man who is in a public position and cannot stand criticism is in a bad fix. Why, they are going to say something about you if you occupy a public position, and it isn't all going to be pleasant to you either. The person who occupies a public position and does something worth while is going to be criticized for it, and it is the part of wisdom for him to accept the criticism, and the part of discretion to say very little about it. Let the people have their opinion. It is a good thing in a government like ours, because after all, it is worth something for people to think enough to talk and to write. It isn't a bad thing. It may not be pleasant to certain individuals, but it is a fine thing for people in a republic to think.

I believe there is a tendency throughout this country to take away in a sense this individual freedom so far as expressing yourself is concerned. There is a tendency to make a man or a woman conform to his party, whether it is right or wrong. There was at one time a slogan, "My party, right or wrong". There were people who believed that and there are people of that kind today. We do not want to train up a citizenship in a government like ours who will take that position. We want a citizenship of independent thinkers. I am using that term in a modified form. We want a citizenship capable of studying the affairs of government and with character enough to say what they think. Unless our people take that position, the government is in a more or less precarious condition. There is a tendency to hand down to the people from the administrative end of government what the people are to accept, and there is a tendency on the part of a large number of our people to accept whatever is handed down. That is a dangerous position for us to be in in a republic. It may be that they are handing down the thing that ought to be. All right, if so, it is all right to accept it. But just to accept it because it is handed down is dangerous. We want to train this

generation of boys and girls to think and to know.

I believe a part of this tendency we have today is due to the way we have been teaching. We take a group of children and we whip them all into line, and we say, you do just this, just this way. And we train them day after day just to follow this thing, just this way, and then we wonder why they follow when somebody else hands it down to them as grown citizens. There was a teacher who had a class of children, and there was a little boy in that class who had a sense of art, and was interested in Nature. A peculiar angle of the sun threw a spot of light on the ceiling in the school room, and that spot of light, dancing, making different kinds of figures on the ceiling, caught the little boy's eye, and he was sitting there thinking about what it was, and no doubt his mind was reaching out into the infinite. The teacher saw him and she said, "Johnnie, what are you doing?" He shook with fear, and said, "I was just thinking." She said, "Stop thinking and get your lesson." How often do we make them stop thinking and get to grinding. Tennyson, I believe it was, who saw the little flower growing in the wall, and it took hold of his mind, and he went away and wrote that beautiful stanza:

"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower, but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all and all,
I should know what God and man is."

Just a little flower growing in the wall between the bricks and rocks set the mind to going and it reached out from that until it said, "But if I could understand what you are, root and all, and all and all, I should know what God and man is." It is worth more to lead a child to think, to stimulate him to think and to use the power that God has given him than it is to get the multiplication tables, important as they may be. In our teaching we want to stimulate the children to think for themselves, and if they will think and be honest in their thinking, God will see that they find the Truth as God intends that they shall get it. We do not get all of the truth. No man knows it all. The thought came to me not long ago that quite often people disagree about a question,

when in reality they have each seen only one side of it and they will contend almost world without end for the position they take, when in reality the person on the other side may be just as right as they are. Take for instance, a large building, white on one side, green on one side, and on another side yellow and another side red. I come up on one side and see the white, and you come on another side and see only the green side. I ask you if you saw that forty story building in lower New York, perfectly white? You say, "No, I didn't see that, but I saw a forty story building in the same place you say you saw that and it was all green, and we fuss about the color of that building. You saw the green side and I saw the white side, or the red side, and we fuss about the color. Jehovah, who sees all four sides, realizes that you and I have only a quarter of the truth, and that we have gone on through life, knowing only one side of the problem, and it may be more than four sides, but you saw only one side, and to you it was one definite color. I saw one side and to me it was an entirely different color. There are problems that come before us as teachers, and I see one phase and you see another. I want the time to come when I will be willing for you to see your phase of the problem, and you will be willing for me to see mine and we will still be friends. When that time comes, I will be willing to think and to let you think, and you and I can work together in harmony.