

Chapel, February 25, 1927
President Wright

RMW

Coming back now for a few minutes to the same topic I was talking to you about yesterday, Some of the Dangers in Our Democracy. I brought out to you rather clearly, I trust, that we ought to bring out in children independent, individual thinking, because it is essential to the safety of a democracy, and for that reason I hope you will not try to make each child think as you think, but that you will help him to think for himself. That means, of course, developing individuality.

Now, this morning, I want to show you that there is another side to this question. Sometimes a person develops individuality and independence of thinking to that extent that he is not willing to cooperate with his fellow man. He believes that he is above the law. I want you to realize that there is a difference between freedom and license. There is a great deal of difference between freedom and license. You read articles in the magazines and periodicals today, and sometimes you would be encouraged to believe that the right thing to do is to break away from all traditions and customs, and be absolutely independent. A person can get a great deal of freedom when he is willing to conform to the law. There is, in reality, no such thing as freedom independent of law. O, if you live in a desert somewhere, away from every other human being, and just dealing with animals and birds, you might do almost as you please, but even there, there are certain laws of God that you do not dare disobey. Where people are living close together in cities, or in thickly populated rural districts, or even in sparsely populated rural districts, there is no such thing as being able to do absolutely as you please. There is no such thing as freedom in the sense of being allowed to do anything you want to do, that is license, and that does not exist. The greatest amount of freedom that comes to an individual is when the individual is willing to conform to the law, and that means he must give up some of the things he wants to do for the common good. You have it right here in college, in your student government association. We have it everywhere that people are working together. One girl says, "O, I won't pay any attention to the Student Government

regulations, they do not affect me." And the first thing she knows she is restricted to the campus, and she has lost her freedom, and that is right. A person says, "The law is not intended for me. I am absolutely above the law." All right, and the first thing he knows he is wearing stripes. He has lost his freedom. Now, in the development of character with children, we want to encourage independent, intelligent thinking, but while we want to encourage them to think for themselves, we must also give them to understand that the greatest amount of freedom comes by obeying the law. You do not think this thing should be a law. All right, the time to oppose it is before it is enacted into law. After it has been enacted into law, if you are a good citizen, you will conform to it. That does not mean that you may not continue to advocate changing ~~them~~^{it}. The best way to get rid of a bad law is to enforce it and enforce it until the people realize that it isn't a good law, and that it ought to be repealed, then it will be repealed. It is the part of a good citizen to obey the law. We can get our greatest freedom under the law, not by going counter to it, but by conforming. And I think in the schools it would be a real good plan to take the children into your confidence about the rules and the regulations that are necessary to carry on classroom work. Now, don't say I am radical. I don't care if you do, but I am not. I am going to deny it before you have the chance to say it. You would be surprised, literally surprised to see the ideas that little tots have about government. You would be surprised at how they will fall in line. If you will take the regulations that you think ought to be put in, and go over them with the children and tell them why, let them see that the main thing that they are there for is to accomplish a certain amount of work, and to do that, it is necessary to have order in the school room. I don't mean that dead silence, that isn't order, that is death, I mean order, working order in school. And let the little fellows meet with you in working out certain regulations that are necessary for them to get the most out of their school work. You would be surprised to see how they will conform.

They will make regulations rigid enough. I daresay that you would soon find that you would have to reason with them to keep them from making regulations too rigid. The little fellow has a sense of order. The little fellow has a sense of organization. I won't say it is born in him, but from the first time he knows anything in the world, he begins to realize that there is some authority around him, and he is willing to conform to it. He has found out already that it pays to conform. O, they get it in all kinds of ways. Our first child didn't know what the word "hot" meant. We had an oil stove in the room to keep the room warm. She wanted to put her hand on that stove and she insisted on putting her hand on it. I told her it was hot, and she didn't know what that meant, she was just crawling. Day after day we had to watch her to keep her from putting her hand on that stove. One day I said to her mother, "I am going to let Pearl put her hand on that stove. I am going to let her find out what the word hot means. I am going to be there to see that she doesn't get injured." Her mother was horrified and left the room. She crawled up to the stove and started to put her hand on the stove. I said, "hot, the stove will burn you." She didn't know what that meant. I stayed with my hand right near her, and she put her hand on the stove, and she got burned. Then I took her hand and tried to put it on the stove, but she would pull it away. I tried several times, but every time, she would pull her hand away. We didn't have any more trouble with Pearl and the stove. Just as Pearl learned that when she was a crawling baby, just so children all through life have learned certain things, and they have made their lives fall in line with certain things. They can be trained in good citizenship. The place to begin is way down yonder in the first grade. It can be done. I am not talking about student government for the first, second and third graders, I don't mean that, but take them into your confidence and you and they working together, you can teach them early in life that they can get the greatest amount of freedom by conforming to the law. In that way, early in life, you can start to train them for the highest type of citizenship.

There may be some regulations that you will have difficulty in getting the children to understand why they are regulations, but I want to say to you that if you do, they will not operate. It is true with the child just as it is true with people who do not see any sense in the law, they will not conform if they get a chance to break the law. It is the same thing down in the second and third grades that we find out here in life when they have left the college or the university, people in a democracy must be treated as intelligent people. They must know why and sometimes it is difficult to explain some of the "whys" for some of the things you do, and instead of explaining, you will change and do something else.