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An Address To Young Lawyers
By HON. EMMETT N. PARKER, Justice of the Washington Supreme Court.*

Ladies and Gentlemen: We congratulate you upon your admission to the bar of this state. You are justly entitled to a feeling of pride and satisfaction in coming to this fruition of your labors, the commencement of your professional careers. As you have for some years been striving for this goal, you will in the future, if you are to reap the full measure of life's just rewards, find yourselves ever striving for successive goals, each of which, when reached, if striven for with proper motives, will, like this one, contribute greatly to your happiness the true measure of which will be proportionate to the energy and sincerity of purpose with which you shall have labored.

I would speak to you at this time only words laden with hope and encouragement, though in doing so I remind you of the probability, yes almost certainty, of your professional pathway being seemingly obstructed from time to time by seeming failures and seeming insurmountable difficulties with reference to the particular task in hand. If, however, your professional efforts are put forth, attended with industry intelligently exercised, and sincere motives for the right as you shall see it, you will find your successes overbalancing your seeming failures; more, you will find such failures contributing to your successes. So viewed, can we not well say that the only failure that ultimately counts against us in this life is the failure to strive by the powers with which we are endowed, towards ends which our consciences justify as right?

You are entering into a field of endeavor which has to do with the realities rather than the idealities of life. The law deals with the world and human relationships therein as they actually exist and are made manifest to those senses which are shared in common by all persons of common understanding. The law does not concern itself with the regulation of human conduct or human relations which might exist in an ideal world and condition of society, though it is ever striving towards higher ideals with respect to methods of solving present-day problems looking to the betterment of human relations. Hazarding the giving of a little advice, may I suggest that in my opinion it will be in a very large measure conducive to your professional success as lawyers that you keep your feet on the earth where you will be able to see and fully appreciate the world with which the law by its very nature has to deal. Do not ascend into the sky where distance and clouds will obscure your vision and shut out from your view the realities of the world in which you live. If you hope to attain any considerable measure of success as lawyers, whether your endeavors be directed to the bringing to the support of your client's cause the law as it exists, or be directed towards the betterment of the law

*Address by Justice Parker, of the Washington Supreme Court, to the Law Admission Class on Jan. 30, 1925.
by means of some more direct constructive service, I suggest that you take care that you do not waste your energies in attempting radical changes in the law or our social structure, such as the world is not ready to assimilate and make practical in its application to the needs of the times.

On the other hand, I suggest that you take care that you do not waste your energies in resisting the coming of changes in the law and our social structure which may be suggested by changing social, commercial or industrial conditions. I am not here speaking of or advising touching duties you may conceive yourselves to be called upon to render as statesmen, politicians or reformers looking to the betterment of society; but I refer now only as to how you may give the most practical and efficient service to the world as lawyers.

My conception of the most efficient service our profession can give to the world is not to overly concern ourselves either with the bringing about or the resisting of the coming of changes in our laws or social structure. There are and ever will be plenty of people so concerning themselves. Let us as lawyers rather by research and study first acquaint ourselves as best we can with the law and our institutions as they exist, and make of them as material at hand, as far as possible, a living vital force for good; and second, to view with sympathetic minds the changes which actually do come, even though they may seem to us radical and in a measure a departure from our preconceived notions of fundamental principles; to the end that when such changes do come they may be merged into our social structure attended by order rather than disorder. The world seems well supplied, so far as numbers are concerned, with those who conceive their mission to be to bring into it new legal rules of human conduct and changes in our body politic. Let our profession supply that other, to my mind greater need, of giving life vitally and workable harmony of both the old and the new.

You have already learned that the common law, the heritage of the English speaking world, has through hundreds of years of evolutionary process been built upon experience touching the actual necessities of the times. In other words, it has discovered fundamental principles through its dealings with the realities of particular cases and conditions rather than dogmatically assuming fundamental principles from sources outside of the range of human experience. This evolutionary process of growth is, to my mind, the only safe way to real progress toward the betterment of law. To follow blindly where the unthinking radical would lead, would be to ignore, as a present help, the experience of the past and build, not upon known realities, but upon unknown idealities. To do this would be to discard the conserving force which supports our civilization and holds its course steady in its onward journey towards better things. Without this steadying influence we would lapse into discord and anarchy and have to await the coming of the cycle
when we would have to begin again at some lower rung of the ladder of progress. I am not preaching that we become so conservative that we shall not take notice of the new and adapt ourselves to the new, but that we shall not discard the benefit of the experiences of the past which will enable us to better use the new as well as the old.

You are coming into the profession at an auspicious time for the rendering of service. Never in the whole history of the law has the field of the lawyer's real work been so broad and comprehensive, presenting so many and varied problems for solution and problems of such involved nature, as today. Unlike the work of the early discoverers and expounders of general fundamental principles, our work is much more the application of those principles to new and involved conditions not experienced by those early discoverers and expounders. I am prone to think that the great legal lights who laid the foundation stones of common law and equity in England and in the United States were fortunately aided in their discovery and exposition of fundamental principles by the comparatively simple social, industrial and commercial conditions of their times. Their problems were thereby reduced to much simpler terms than are ours. They were not burdened with such a wilderness of individual instances to which we are now called upon to apply fundamental principles. I think it is quite readily understandable that were we compelled to look through the involved maze of present-day social, industrial and commercial relationships for the fundamental principles of the law, without the aid of the work of its early expounders, we would indeed have much greater difficulty than they had in discerning many of the fundamental principles they have handed down to us. In the absence of this heritage I fear that in our search for the foundation stones most of us would at this day become lost in a maze of details.

I have purposely turned away from advising you touching your duties to your client, to the courts and to the public, in so far as industry, loyalty, faithfulness to your trust and high motives are concerned. These, no doubt, you have already been amply reminded of, and, as I look into your faces, I feel that you intuitively fully appreciate these aids to true success. In any event, you are sufficiently reminded of these duties in the oath which the Chief Justice has administered to you. My purpose has been more to impress upon you, apart from those particular considerations, the line of thought and action on your part which will, as I view it, be most conducive to your success in your profession as lawyers, especially emphasizing the fact that I am not talking to you as prospective statesmen, politicians or reformers. By admission to the bar you have entered a profession where all who are in it have been honored by the fact of their admission to it. I conclude with the words of Daniel Webster, spoken in a toast given by him at a bar meeting some 80 years ago: “The law; it has honored us; may we honor it.”
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