

DATE: MARCH 16, 1969
SUBJECT: DOWN THE OLD OX ROAD

My favorite Broadway of recent year is "Camelot". It always thrills me when this great musical comes to a conclusion. When Author is moving out into battle which he knows will be the end of Camelot, that it exists no longer. And the night before the battle is to begin he's out pacing back and forth in the darkness. Suddenly he is approached by a young lad. The young lad comes up and with an eager voice says, "I've come to join Camelot." And with weary resignation Author turns to the little lad, deploring the fact that he has come out on this fruitless errand and he says, "Camelot is no more." "You have wasted your effort in coming here." And then he said to the little boy, "Why did you come?" And his face brightened and he said, "Because I've heard so much of the tales of the Knights of the Round Table; battling to preserve virtue and honesty. All of the good things of life." And Author said, "You've heard all of that." And the little lad answered, "Yes." And with that he said, "Get down on your knees." And with that the little boy knelt and with his sword, Author knighted him. When he rose to his feet, Author said, "Now go back from the place you came, and every day that you live, go about and tell people about Camelot. Remind them that for one brief, shining moment, there was a place called Camelot."

This experience brought into Author's mind the fact that perhaps it isn't dying. If it can be kept alive then perhaps someone, sometime will be able to do what I was unable to do, to have a permanent Camelot. The word Camelot has come to mean to us a time of the past by which we can measure the excellence of the moment. And in whatever region our thoughts might carry us, we can think of no greater experience coming to us than the recapturing of that which is known as Camelot.

Today the world, society, you and I are on a seesaw balanced between two extremes; waiting to see which way the weight will carry. To a dying or to a beginning. Authrows Chaunacy expressed it so vividly in an oath. We are the music makers. We are the dreamers of dreams, wandering by lone sea breakers and sitting by desolate streams; world losers and world forsakers on whom the pale moon gleams. Yet we are movers and shakers of the world forever it seems. The wonderful deathless ditties, we build up the world's great cities and out of a fabulous story we fashion an empire's glory. One man with a dream, that pleasure shall go forth and conquer a crowd. And three with a new song measure can trample an empire down. For each age is a dream that is dying or one that is coming burn.

How appropoe for this moment in history. For on the seesaw that's moving back and forth, not yet having planted its feet, dropped its reins. We have the knowledge that in the one direction a dream is dying, while in the other a dream is being born. And the great fact of this for us is that we have the alternative, by which to choose. The choice belongs to you and to no one else. A dream is dying when we refuse to turn loose of the past.

There were two old mountain men who bought themselves a house boat and put it on one of the newly build lakes in the mountains. And never having been on a house boat before this was quite an experience for them. They came down, brought all their provisions, climbed aboard the house boat, went to bed that night and dreamed peacefully. During the night the house boat lost its mousing and began to float down dstream. So early the next morning one of these mountain men jumped out of bed and raced out on to the deck, suddenly he saw that everything was unfami- liar; it wasn't the place that he thought he was. And so he rushed back into the house boat and shaking his friend by the shoulders he said, "Wake up, Ziek, wake up." "We're not here anymore." How often we open our eyes to discover that we're not here anymore. Everything is the alien. Everything is different. We thought Rip Van Winkle had an experience sleeping the time that he did, to awaken to discover a new world. We can sleep 24 hours and discover a new world blosoming about us. Never has man been challenged with such change, such power, such movement as that which is impressed upon the society in which we are living today. And if we don't like it we're helpless to change it, cause its here. Only a decade ago we were trying to intergrate the races in America--to open up the school systems so that the blacks and the whites and the other minority groups might mingle together and learn together. And within a decade now we have the trend reversed, where the minority groups are saying, we want facilities of our own; equal to what the majority has but we have what is uniquely ours, which no one else can share. Who ddreamed that within a decade of pleading for intergration, that the militants on our college campuses would be crying out for segregation. A decade ago it was the students who were expelled from school; now it is the college presidents.

A decade ago we got excited because Russia sent up a sátelite. It was little more than an inflated ballon. We thought we had conquered outerrspace. But within a decade we were able to experience the drama of last week. When for 10 days, three men thrived within a capsule of mans making, moved from one vehicle to another in outer space, walked out in the weightlessness of space itself. Then came unerringly bak to the point to which it wanted to come, within a calulation of 10 seconds. So astronomical our minds cannot convey the truth of change that is coming about us every day. Who ddreamed a decade ago that possibly this summer men would actually be walking on the surface of the moon-- a fact our fathers thought could never come into reality. Wake up we're not here anymore. We're in a brand new world. And those who refuse to move into a bradn new world have no alternative but to watch his dream die.

Some of us just don't recognize the fact that change is here. I have lived so many experiences bycariously that my mother and my father experienced in their youth. My mother was reared on a farm in western North Carolina and how many times I've heard her tell of her school days, when she walked miles to the nearest school. Down what she called an old ox road. And hearing her tell those stories, I had such images in my mind of excitement that she experienced in that beautiful lane that wound through the woods to the school house.

It was while I was a child that I was permitted to go there and see that old ox road, only to discover that there was nothing beautiful about it, it was just grown-up, it didn't really lead anywhere. Because along side of it there was a major hard surfaced highway along which cars were speeding. It shall be always to her a dream, but nothing which she can convey to the generation that follows, because time imprisoned it in a moment of a person's life. We cannot stand still to see that on which we plant our feet, on which we sink our roots become obsolete by the movement of time itself.

Someone told about visiting a place in Chicago where as they passed a particular house, the host said I want you to notice ~~as~~ we pass this house the car sitting in the driveway. And as they went past he noticed a car that was a vintage of about 25 years prior and it looked like it had just come out of the shop, really. And so he asked, "Well what's the meaning back of this?" And his host answered, "There's a widow that lives in that house. And 25 years ago she and her husband were starting to go out for the evening when suddenly, he dropped dead." The car had been pulled out into the driveway, waiting for their departure and the car has never been touched since. The clothes are still lying on the bed, hanging in the closet, the way that they were left by him 25 years ago. And she has caused time to stand still, as she has aged but her dreams have died. You just can't live by that that becomes obsolete, in our own day. But here this is wealth. A dream dies when we sever our roots from the past.

My wife is always laughing me because I'm insistant upon starting a tradition. I love traditions. But she reminds me that traditions aren't started; they evolve. Many of us try to fabricate a new civilization starting with nothing; to restructure the society from no beginning, simply starting here. Without a foundation, we can't do that. There must be a strengthening of our hold to the past if the present and the future is to mean anything at all to us.

I was visiting in a hospital room this past week and the room was banked with beautiful cut flowers. I lay in a hospital room and watched beautiful cut flowers like that fade. A little day, a little browner, the next day a little browner; until they were gone. But then there was a potted plant in the room that had its roots and it stayed fresh and beautiful. The only way that we can survive in a changing society is to have our roots in the past. To discover that which is valid, that which is authentic and keep it nurtured. For only on foundations such as this can the present have any meaning at all and can there be any security in moving into the future. We can't begin from nothing and expect it to stand.

This is one of the things that Christ realized in his lifetime that would be one of his greatest impediments. The fact that on the one hand there were those who insisted ^{on the} the old ways of the law and the prophets and not willing to embrace this new revelation from God. While on the other hand there were those who said, destroy everything in the old church and lets start a new one. But he said, "I came not to destroy, but I came to fulfill." And he preserved that which was good and he built upon it. But he let all the other fall to the

wayside for it was an impediment, it was not a projectile of growth.

But for most of us its not a dream dying, its a dream beginning. Today is the birth of a dream. When we can discover new and better ways of reaching those heights, those goals that in the past have illuded us. We're reminded every day that in the realm of medicine that each day brings us closer to a time in which man is not plagued by illness. We are reminded every day that in the realm of science that we are progressing further and further in our understanding of the universe. And thur using that as knowledge by which we might develop our own concept of life and its meaning.

Every year a new model car comes out and its always superior to the year before. New and better ways of achieving the things that have not yet been achieved. But if that dream is to survive, it must have at least three objectives to which it remains faithful.

And the first of these is a clear-cut goal. What are you living for? Have you simply spread yourself so thin in so many directions that your life has no direction--no clear-cut meaning. George Morris wrote a book about the depression in Ireland. He told about how during the depths of the depression the government fell upon a way by which they could feed the hungry of their nation. They set-up the building of a road system and those who had no employment and could not feed themselves and their families were employed to work upon the roads. And so they began building the roads. He said every day as you walk by you could see these men working, they were singing the old Irish songs. They were enjoying themselves; they were producing; they were a part of something worthwhile. And as time went on and the roads went further and further along, suddenly they realized that it was headed toward a bog. It was leading nowhere. Investigating, they learned that there was no need for roads but that the government was just using them to build roads so that they could be given some employment, some way in which they might use their talents. And he said somehow the song left their lips. There was no spring in their steps. They didn't come to work anxious to be about the thing that had been given them to do. Because they realized to their disallusionment that all of their labor was leading them nowhere. Theres got to be a direction, a goal, if life is to have any fulfillment at all; if a dream is to live.

The Ruckerfellow foundation a few years ago made a study on college campuses as to what college students were really after. Their conclusion was this, that college students are not after comfort, they're not after security, they're not after luxury. But what they're really after is meaning in life. We don't need the Ruckerfellow foundation to allusidate that to us; we can see it so clear. Most of the protesting and much of the restlessness among our young people today is disallusionment with the society in which they are living. Disallusionment with their elders. And they do not desire to fit into the status quo of what I've been born into, but they want to make something better out of it. And many of the protest songs being sung today express that werje fealing. Let's make this a better world. Let's not keep on going in meaningless directions. We've got to have clear-cut goals if our lives are to have any meaning at all.

And we must be able to adapt. I think that's the hardest thing for most of us. Particularly to those of us over thirty--to adapt to new ways. There's such security in doing things the way they've been done and hearing things said the way they've always been said and avoiding the discomfort of having to adjust. But once all the world was ruled by great monsters of the swamps, dinosaurs of all sorts. Against which man had no weapon at all except his mind that enabled him to adapt. To build his house out of the reach of their long necks or back in the caves where they could not reach or a stone rolled to block the entrance. And while man was adapting himself against a hostile environment, great monsters of the earth ruling with a firm and sure hand, unable to adapt, began to disappear. Nature destroyed them because they were unable to adapt to a changing pattern of life. It's hard to adapt because the pressure is to conform. One of the weapons used against nonconformist today is slander. And we have extremeist in our society always ~~wanting to be~~ ready someone who is wanting to be unique and new and original, you know that as well as I. It's hard to stand up against the will of the masses who don't want change to come about. But if we do not adapt, then our dreams must surely die.

And then we must have an inspired vision. The writer of Proverbs said where there is no vision, the people perish. Can you remember that lump that surely came into your throat at the funeral of Robert Kennedy when his brother read the eulogy. And in that eulogy he repeated the words of his brother when he said, some people look at the plight of the world and they ask why; and I look at the world that might be, and I ask why not. We must not be forced into the acceptance of a disallusioned society and people. Within society about us, within the government structure, within the church, within our own individual relationships with one another and above all else, our relationship with God. We must not be disallusioned. For when we become sorrowful and see only the blackness that is hanging in crepe all about the world then we are defeated. But it's when we see the light shining through the crepe, it's when we can lift our eyes up unto the hills, it's when we can nurture a dream, that victory is within our grasp.

Somehow that seems to be the most illusive thing. That which we are groping for mentally, but are refusing to read the signs of the times. To gain our confidence and our trust. Our dreams cannot die, if we have an inspired vision and ask, "Why not?"

And now this. For today some have dreams, that are dying. For some it's a dream that is being born. Whether it is the one or the other it's contained in the wisdom of this ancient poem from the Sand Script: Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the varieties and realities of your existence. The bliss of growth, the splendor of beauty and the glory of action. For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is but a vision. But today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well therefore to this day. And an appendage: The dream of God materialized in the life of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is that one secure line that runs through

all of his truths, unchanging. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today
and forever.

Let us pray.