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WE DECLARE WE WILL NEVER RETIRE, UNTIL WE LOSE OUR PEP AND FIRE*

By SIDNEY M. EHRMAN

The only justification I can find for selecting me to speak at this 75th anniversary celebration lies in the fact that for 58 of those 75 years I have been more or less closely linked with Hastings College of the Law. First in 1895, as a student at the old school, then located at Montgomery and Jackson Streets. What nostalgic memories that conjures up. Three years later, by grace of my professors, I was translated into an alumnus with all rights and privileges thereunto appertaining. For the past 30-odd years I have had the honor of serving as a member of the board of directors. I might say we constitute a group of busy but well-intentioned lawyers, occasionally galvanized into action by a dynamic dean.

This anniversary celebration is one that will surely go down in the annals of the College, mainly because after years of wandering, and after being shuttled from one spot to another, we have finally reached what we devoutly hope is "journey's end." I am almost sure when the building is formally opened tomorrow some part of this Odyssey will be told. I am likewise sure that on your tour of inspection you will share the pleasure and satisfaction I derived, not only because it is beautiful but because it is so completely serviceable for the use of professors and students alike. I can imagine no surroundings more conducive for the creation of an ideal atmosphere for the study of the law.

Some of you may recall our golden anniversary dinner of 25 years ago. The main theme at that dinner was "how can we get our own home." Committees were appointed and went to work, but neither the Legislature nor the alumni could see their way clear to furnish the funds that were required, although these were less than one-fifth of the amount that an understanding and generous Legislature provided for us two years ago.

I want to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of all of us, our deep appreciation to the Governor and Legislature of the state and to couple with it our firm resolve that Hastings College of the Law will in the future, as we hope it has in the past, train men able to worthily fulfill on behalf of state and nation the high service to which they will be called.

Let us try to carry on the main idea which I believe actuated our founder, Judge Serranus Hastings, when he endowed our College, to educate the young men and women who come to us to become good citizens as well as good practitioners of the law, so that when they leave us, that fundamental morality that has found expression in the Declaration of Independence and in

*Address delivered during a luncheon meeting honoring the Hastings "65 Club" on Wednesday, March 25, 1953.

the Constitution of the United States will become a part of them and be reflected in all of their professional undertakings. Our profession, more today than ever before, has the obligation of defending the fundamental concepts upon which our country rests, not only from enemies without but even more important, from enemies within—those who seek to implant in our youth, sophisticated doctrines that will weaken and perhaps may destroy us. I hope all of our law schools have assumed the obligation of so training their students that they will defend and preserve that body of the law from which we have derived the liberties we cherish so deeply.

Hastings should also strive, so far as that is possible, to preserve its tradition of affording to young men and women ambitious to become lawyers, but who must partly earn a living while pursuing their studies, an opportunity of attaining their goal. With the ever higher standards required for admission to the bar, this has become increasingly more difficult. I cannot emphasize too strongly how much can be accomplished in this direction by seeking endowed scholarships for worthy students who have not the means to carry on without some assistance of this kind. The school now has far too few to be of much help in this field.

Let me say that Hastings is peculiarly well equipped to accomplish the objectives which I have touched upon because it has a Dean and a group of teachers with great skill and long experience. Dean Snodgrass is devoted to Hastings College. Perhaps I might even say on occasions he has, like Othello, loved her not wisely but too well. We all know he will fight for her if that becomes necessary and when he fights he is a very skillful ring tactician.

But I want to talk now about what I consider one of his most important constructive achievements—the formation of a highly competent faculty, eager to teach and able to impart their learning to their students. The creation of the so-called “Sixty-five Club” in 1946 was, so to speak, the crown that he has placed upon the structure he was building.

Dean Snodgrass propounded what was at that time almost a revolutionary idea in academic circles—that a good teacher’s usefulness did not automatically expire when he reached the age of 65 years. On the contrary, he believed that if a good teacher was still mentally and physically sound, he had at that age reached the peak of his powers, because of the wealth of experience that lay behind him and because his views on the law, in its many and ever changing aspects, and on the ways to instill it in young and fresh minds, had reached a full maturity.

The name “Sixty-five Club” might be likened to what we lawyers speak of when a group of persons are engaged in business under a fictitious name. Having a soul as well as bodies, the “Sixty-five Club” cannot qualify as a corporation. It shares no profits and makes no losses, so it can hardly be called

a partnership, except for its unity of purpose and its spiritual enterprise. I would not dare to call it an unincorporated association. For all I know its members don't even associate together—something that those of us who have practiced in the divorce division of our courts, know can frequently happen to people living under the same roof. So I will not attempt any further definition of this hybrid which, in a somewhat different sense than I may have indicated, combines characteristics of all of these legal entities.

If I ever have occasion to present to the Sixty-five Club a regimental standard, these words will be emblazoned on it:

“We declare we will never retire,
Until we lose our pep and fire.”

And so we salute you all, the Faculty of Hastings College of the Law, be you a youthful Achilles or a bearded Nestor. We salute you because, while some of you have lived long in the past, all of you have your gaze directed to the future. We salute you because those of you who are still young can have no pride greater than those of you who have “warmed both hands against the fire of life.” Old or young, we salute you, because we know you are united in your allegiance to our College and share our hope that, as the years roll on, the star of Hastings will shine ever brighter in the legal firmament. May each one of you add years to your life and life to your years.