

★ RUTGERS UNIVERSITY *AND* ★
THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

★ *BY PHILIP VAN DOREN STERN* ★

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

and The American Way of Life

BY

PHILIP VAN DOREN STERN



NEW BRUNSWICK:

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS

1941

Copyright, 1941, by The Trustees of Rutgers College in New Jersey

Printed in the United States of America



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
and The American Way of Life

THERE is a magic in old buildings, a magic that comes not from sticks or stones or from anything physical, but from within ourselves as we people the ancient structures with the men and women who built or used them. In the corridors of Old Queen's the sense of the past becomes very real. There one stands on floors laid down by hands that were contributing their labor to the future—a future that is our present. From these walls men went

forth to do battle for us; in these rooms the issues of what is now history were once debated as contemporary problems. The chain linking generation to generation seems stronger here — father and son have welded its links into an indissoluble bond, a bond once defined by Joseph Conrad as “the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity — the dead to the living, and the living to the unborn.”

Humanity needs deep roots in familiar soil; time is the essence of development; progress is possible only with the slow accretion of the years. Even in periods of retrogression, the evil that comes in waves, like the waves of the ocean, must eventually recede, exhausted by its own

fury. Man returns to the storm-swept areas to rebuild; the dead are buried, but the living remain, and it is for them that we must provide.

Fortunately, we are not alone, nor are we only of the present. In each of us stir the memories and the longings of a million progenitors who tried in their own way to make a better world for themselves and their families. We are the sum and total of all our ancestors, rough-molded by their traits and smooth-finished by our environment into a pattern that repeats itself endlessly but is never quite the same.

An anniversary like this is a stopping place at which we pause to contemplate and compare the present with the past and are given an opportunity to prepare ourselves to face the future with a courage that can come only from the example of those who have faced it before us. From their fortitude we can gather new

strength; from their accumulated experience gain new wisdom.

But a great university, a place dedicated to learning and to the betterment of our way of living, has ties not only with the past; it is intimately connected with the present, and it must lay its plans so as to influence the future. Its research furthers industry and agriculture; its graduates produce goods for the world and take on the task of training a new generation to carry on in place of the old. In time of war it is concerned with defending the nation, and in time of peace with making the nation a home of free people who can benefit from their own resources and skills. A university's work is never done; completion is not within its scheme of things—it deals only in terms of continuity.

In an era like ours, when we face the problem of defending what we have, it would be a short-sighted program to let

ourselves be content with the gains this country has thus far made. It is not enough to emulate those who would give up butter to purchase guns. A country ringed around with cannon can starve behind its wall of steel, and it can starve with a hunger that goes far beyond the need for material food. To build an America that will be strong and brave and free requires more than cannon, or airplanes, or military equipment of any kind. It requires a people educated to make the best use of their continental territory, informed as to their nation's ideals, convinced of the value of their heritage.

It is regrettably necessary that so much of the world's wealth must at this time be poured into machinery that can manufacture only one product—death. A greater effort than ever is therefore needed to develop the things that stand for life. Every dollar spent for science, for culture, and

for education builds for a time when the guns shall at last be silent, and mankind can again live in peace.

We have much to defend, but still more to gain without having to go beyond our own borders for it. We do not have to forego butter to purchase guns; we can buy both and make ourselves impregnable. America's heritage is a rich one, but rich as it is, its greatest share is not a portion of the earth or the buildings erected on it, nor is it the great industrial equipment we have established through years of planning and toil. Our heritage lies not in things but in ideas—in ideas given expression long before we had spread across a continent or become a world power. In the document that first used the term "The United States of America," these ideals were set forth in language that has long become familiar: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created

equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Those words were met with disfavor in many parts of the world when they were written; they are being assailed again today. Our long-cherished rights cannot be preserved unless our people are taught to know their meaning and to understand the significance of our traditions. In times like these it is especially important that the process of education go on. It will avail us nothing to defend a land in which the people have forgotten their own heritage and lost the right to call themselves free.

Rutgers is one hundred and seventy-five years old—older than the United

States itself. During the long period of its existence it has sent men to all our wars and helped to build the nation in days of peace. Year by year its students have discussed each phase of the country's development as it took place. Our contemporary problems of war and defense will some day be studied in Rutgers' classrooms as history. It is what we do today that will determine what kind of history is to be taught; it may even be that ours is the generation that will have to decide whether there is to be any true education in the world at all.

For those of us who know Rutgers and the ideals for which it has stood since 1766, there is every reason to believe that education in the Rutgers sense is that true education which can, in God's good time, survive even the dark hours through which the world is passing today.

Through the generous gift of a friend of the University, the Rutgers University Press is enabled to publish for private distribution this statement by Philip Van Doren Stern. In this, the University's 175th anniversary year, his remarks constitute a statement of faith and of purpose. Dr. Stern is a graduate of Rutgers University in the Class of 1924, and has served as consultant to the Rutgers University Press since its establishment. This pamphlet, designed by Richard Ellis, is composed in Monotype Janson and printed from type by The Haddon Craftsmen, of Camden, New Jersey.