

VE Day 8th May 1945

Victory in Europe brought celebrations across the continent and in the College. A Service of Thanksgiving to mark the cessation of the hostilities was led by the College chaplain and the Principal's address provided a succinct and heartfelt summary of the impact that the war had had; balancing the joy that the threat to civilization had been overcome, with the sorrow of the sacrifices that had been made.

"Youth, when needed, will always nobly pay the price without counting the cost and the heroic record of our predecessors in the war will be your inspiration in peace."

The following extract, however, illustrates the transcendent sense of optimism and hope for the future. The sentiment of the message is as appropriate and uplifting in our current circumstances as it was in 1945.

"It is a time fraught with destiny and fruitful hope. Its full significance no one can seize, but in lives rising towards the future it behoves mind and heart to think and feel its importance in the roots of the soul."

S Naismith

Principal

The Principal's Address at the College Service of Thanksgiving on the Cessation of Hostilities in Europe

The victory in Europe is a stupendous fact of history. The heart of mankind has been lightened but few thinking minds will be light hearted. Victory has been more breathless, more complete and more overwhelming than any military triumph in history. The rejoicing will be universal and profound but most will judge the momentous issues weighing upon the western world too grave for even a respite of gaiety. Our rejoicings are the rejoicings of thanksgiving and if we have not forgotten the solemn, terrifying spectacle of the last five years our thanksgivings must be in a deep mood of sober thankfulness. The armies of the United Nations stormed the strongholds of Nazism as armies of liberation but the liberation was always a vital portion of something even more significant and to mankind the struggle has been a war of deliverance in which the spirit of man was the stake and the prize.

Through centuries of earnest toil mankind had welded noble thought and high purpose into the fabric of Western Civilization and its deepest tradition was in the direction of individual freedom and the common good. Material progress fostered scientific advances and technical resources which unloosed new forces of incalculable might. A few daring, resolute and ruthless minds perceived in such new forces their opportunity for selfish power and unscrupulous ambition. Their daring dazzled the world. To them freedom and the common good were the open enemy and Europe was slow to know them for the evil they were. In a year or two they harnessed the resources of commerce and industry to their new chariot. The inevitable hurricane broke with bewildering speed and a few swift strokes laid Europe seemingly at their feet. To-day they have met their end unpitied and unmourned, the inevitable end of the dictator in shootings and squalor.

Once more the march of events has decreed (beyond contradiction) that to violate men's birth right and to encourage general humility is a sin of history because it is evil. Hitler, in the phrase of Franklin Roosevelt, forgot the staying power of freedom. After Dunkirk disaster and defeat brought Britain face to face on the beaches with her unconquerable will and she kept alive the hope of the world in

its darkest hour. The will was unconquerable because it drew or its ultimate strength upon the deepest forces of life and spirit. America roused to realise the British Fleet as the bulwark of her heritageaced up to the ultimate reality and made herself the arsenal of democracy. The Nazi invasion of Russia foundered against the hard core of indomitable spirit and tipped the balance of manpower against the Axis. Forces of the spirit, agencies of good had now harnessed themselves to material might and the resources of the world in the United Nations, and Victory was assured if there was to be any meaning in life. There were moments when the fate of the world seemed to hang by a thread – The Battle of Britain – never have so few saved so many – El Alamein – Stalingrad. But the wheels of time moved true to the irrecoverable collapse in the shambles of Berlin. It has fallen to Russia to fight the greatest battles, to America to forge the weapons of victory, to Britain to maintain the hope of the world in its darkest hour, and everywhere it has been the common man, the “partisan” that has kept courage and faith alive. The Japanese now know the spirit and might massed and mobilising against them and history will again repeat itself.

One phase only of the momentous drama has unrolled itself, and we now stand at one of the supreme crucial moments of history. It is a time fraught with destiny and fruitful hope. Its full significance no one can seize, but in lives rising towards the future it behoves mind and heart to think and feel its importance in the roots of the soul.

Youth, when needed, will always nobly pay the price without counting the cost and the heroic record of our predecessors in the war will be your inspiration in peace. In these days of deliverance, it is our privilege and honour to remember in our hearts with thanksgiving and praise that great band from the College who took the road of “blood sweat and tears.” 735 are known to have deserved our tribute of honour and hearts are heavy to think of victory and those 81 of ours who will not know the peace for which they sacrificed all. 54 died serving in the R.A.F. and 3 in the Fleet Air Arm. 16 gave their lives in the Army and the R.A.M.C. 4 were lost at sea with the Royal Navy, and 4 perished with the Merchant Navy. There are 3 others missing. The average age of the dead was 25 years. In the silence of individual hearts we shall take their memory into our being as we stand in reverence and honour to their memory.

Mr John Falconer

Principal of Methodist College (1943-1948)