

Graduation of 2004 class of IB graduates at the Mahindra United World College of India

27 May 2004

It is a great pleasure to be back at Mahindra College. When I was last here more than four years ago the buildings were not yet finished but it was already apparent that they were going to match their spectacular surroundings. I am sure that in the years that lie ahead, those of you graduating today will never lose from your inward eye the sight of these buildings set in the heat of the surrounding Indian countryside.

In a moment I shall return to this theme but let me first tell you what I am not going to talk about. I promise not to mention in the next ten minutes those two letters IB. Let's agree that we have heard more than enough recently about the IB and decide to suspend all discussion until the examination results come out in July and then you can all blame me for everything!

Graduation ceremonies remind me of something my mother used to say – and she used to say it rather frequently – indeed, she used to say it at about eight o'clock every morning. We lived near a very busy, dangerous main road and as I left for school each morning she would say, "Mind how you cross the road". Those of you graduating today are about to cross a busy road in your lives, because whatever comes next will certainly be very different to what has come before. So, as one of the last people to address you before you take this perilous step, what last-minute advice can I give you?

I am going to offer you two quotations with the hope that they will help you in your future lives, as they have helped me. I have chosen two because it makes it twice as likely that you will remember one of them.

The first takes me back to school because it is a text that my headmaster frequently chose to introduce the morning assembly when the whole school gathered together. It goes like this:

*Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more*

It was written in 1821 and some of you may recognise the English poet, William Wordsworth, but what was he talking about? Well: presumably *Give all thou canst* is Wordsworth telling us to be generous, to give to the poor and support good causes.

Not a bit of it! It's all about a building, a very famous building that took over 100 years to build and cost a fortune: the chapel of King's College, Cambridge.

What Wordsworth is really saying is, "Forget the expense, forget that it was built for a handful of monks, forget it was the King who ordered it and celebrate its lasting beauty".

That beauty has now lasted 500 years and Wordsworth was using the poem to praise the architect:

*Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more
So deem'd the man who fashion'd for the sense
These lofty pillars, spread that branching roof
Self-poised, and scoop'd into ten thousand cells
Where light and shade repose, where music dwells...*

But he could be addressing **anyone** engaged in **any** worthwhile activity. Put everything you have into it; reject the lore of nicely-calculated less or more because you will be investing in the future. It may not be your future, but something that you do today will have an influence on the way things turn out for other people, so give it all you have.

But, you are saying to yourselves, **I** shall never be in a position of real influence in the world; **I** shall never be designing tomorrow's equivalent of King's College, Cambridge.

I disagree. For a start, statistically-speaking, many of you graduating today will achieve positions of considerable influence as politicians, civil servants, writers, scientists, architects, film-makers or whatever.

And **all** of you can remember my second quotation which emphasizes the importance of every single person's often hidden contribution. It comes from one of the most famous novels in the English language:

That all is not so ill with you and me as it might have been is largely due to those who have lived hidden lives and now rest in unvisited graves

the very last sentence of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* published exactly 50 years after Wordsworth's poem.

Those lines are a wonderful encouragement to us all to believe that we **can** make a difference. We do not need fame, we do not need a public platform and we do not need special resources. We need to be ourselves, we need to care about something and we need to give all we have, rejecting the nicely calculated less or more. Our lives may remain largely hidden, our graves may be unvisited but we shall have had some purpose in our lives.

True greatness in the world is not found set upon a hill for the vulgar crowd to see. On the contrary, my seventy years' experience (wrote the Mahatma Gandhi) has taught me that the truly great are often those of whom and of whose greatness the world knows nothing during their lifetime.

Let me congratulate you all on graduating today and wish you every success and happiness in your future lives.

George Walker
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