

FAILURE IN SUCCESS

An Oration

by
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From a speech with which the author won the Iowa State Collegiate Contest for Men, 1961.

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I'm sure that all of you are familiar with Frank Baum's story of "The Wizard of Oz." There are two things that I would like you to recall from that enchanting story. First, let us recall the plight of the cowardly lion; the poor cowardly lion who sought to find a wizard who could give him courage, courage that should be the trademark of the king of the beasts. Secondly, let us recall the incident of the poppy field. You remember that the odor of the poppies was very sweet and very enticing, and no traveler could pass by the poppy field without stopping to smell these wonderful flowers. Recall also that once in the poppy field, the aroma of the flowers was so oppressive that it soon put the poor travelers to sleep and eventually they died. My friends, we in America are in that poppy field. By our own choice we have journeyed into it and now we face the eventual possibility of dying because of it. The sweet enticing odor of security consciousness, sociability, belong, and the group effort, has drawn us away from the path of individualism and individuality that we were on, and now we face the plight of the poppy field....

DeTocqueville in his "Democracy in America" pointed out that "time, events, or the unaided action of the mind will sometimes undermine or destroy an opinion, without any outward sign of change." The majority of people no longer believe what they once believed, but they still affect to believe, and the force of this public opinion is strong enough to chill innovators and to keep them silent and at a respectful distance. Such is the case in America. The term "individualism" exists as a word, not as a practice. Men of the past who sacrificed everything that they might eventually realize an ultimate individual destiny have become men who parrot the words of individualism, but who fear to act except within the confines of a group effort. Individual action, once taken through individual initiative and responsibility, has become action only through the will of the group; the meeting of minds whose foremost thought is security, minds that are steeped in the fear of standing, believing, and acting alone, minds that have fallen to the poppy field by their own lack of conscious individual effort.

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