are met together voluntarily to ask God’s blessing upon the future, which stretches out temptingly before them. For I have the right to take it for granted that you are here solely to testify to yourselves, at any rate, that you recognize the value of God’s blessing upon the unknown future of your lives; and I have no right to interpret your presence here in more specific terms. You belong to widely differing ecclesiastical communions. Some of you disclaim allegiance to, or even sympathy with, any of the various ecclesiasticalisms which, together, make up the great total body of American Christianity. It must needs be, therefore, that our theme this afternoon shall be one in which each of us is capable of sympathetic interest; one which makes its appeal to us as members of the human family, irrespective of our particular denominational affiliations, or lack of them.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is reputed to stand in the front rank of our educational institutions in exacting from its students the maximum of obedience to its serious, lofty, exigent standards of intellectual discipline. Its reputation is deserved. It is not extravagant to assert that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for an idler or a trifler to pass through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Very likely it is this notable circumstance which has largely determined me to speak to you of the Joy of Living under Law.

The same is true of the unwritten statutes of society. More rigid, more merciless and irritating they seem at times to be than those of the State. Social custom is more imperious than a municipal ordinance. Its penalties for dishonor, untruthfulness, and treachery are very heavy, and with unpitying sternness are inflicted. Our whole social life is imperiously characterized and shaped by law. Restraint is everywhere. There is much which is petty and conventional about it all, but it is so inextricably bound up with what is everlastingly wholesome and necessary, that no wise man will break through social sanctions, or can safely defy them. Is it nothing to delight in that society demands loyalty and decency of us? Is it nothing to delight in that if we are to retain our social place we must be honorable, truthful, compassionate? Is it a trifle to be glad for that without these strenuous social sanctions there would be nothing to confide in, nothing to praise, nothing to appeal to when personal experiences, binding the walls of individuality, too, confines, craves sympathetic relations with the larger life of society? Yea, verily, we delight in every social statute which guarantees the perpetuity of associated life even while restraining the freedom of the individual.

And this delight is distinctly increased when one reflects upon the purpose of social commandment. Society is wiser than any one of its members. It has penetrated into the very heart of man’s social life, sought out the causes of disaster, disgrace, and danger, treasured the lesson drawn from a million separate careers, and then resolutely set itself to incorporate into rule the wisdom of the years. We may fault it for a thousand foolishnesses, none the less it is wise. But you and I are tempted to say: “Why should I permit myself to be shorn of my freedom to be myself by these exasperating rules? They were made for the bad, the cunning; not for me, honorable, pure, and strong.” Ah, but society is wiser than we. It knows with unerring certainty that what we would not do we may do. Side by side with the safety of those who obey its laws, lies the ruin of others, once pure and strong, who defied and broke them. The insurgent heart of more than one Jude the Obscure has been battered, and broken, and stilled forever in wild rebellion against the accredited wisdom of society. And when one reflects even so little upon the multitude of men and women shielded by these social commandments from the perils of their own weakness or badness, and from the cunning, evil fascination of others; or when one thinks of that miserable company of ruined souls who, trusting to the infallibility of their own judgments and the purity of their own intentions, despising the larger wisdom of society, have made their own laws, framed their own maxims of social conduct, only to make shipwreck at the last,—surely we can delight in the commandments and statutes of society, and rejoice that our lives must be lived under their sway. What restrains us we rejoice in, what controls the freedom of our acts we are glad for, when we see what disobedience may bring, and what obedience secures.

So is it that absolutely unrestrained life is anything but best. Therefore, when we hear God’s commandment laying upon us the austere duties of justice, truth, compassion, reverence, and acknowledge that through the exercise of these, life’s noblest powers are developed and refined, we ought to rejoice. But too often we complain that we are under law; complain that what that law enjoins is hard. It is burdensome and irksome everlastinglly to struggle for what is just, and pure, and true. Why must incli-