

授课文本

The Pleasure of Learning

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As more schools are set up today, learning is compulsory. It is an Ought, even worse, a Must, enforced by regular hours and rigid discipline. And the young sneer at the Oughts and resist the Musts with all their energy. The feeling often lasts through a lifetime. For too many of us, learning appears to be a surrender of our own will to external direction, a sort of enslavement.

This is a mistake. Learning is a natural pleasure, inborn and instinctive, one of the essential pleasures of the human race. Watch a small child, at an age too young to have had any mental habits implanted by training. Some delightful films made by the late Dr. Arnold Gesell of Yale University show little creatures who can barely talk investigating problems with all the zeal and excitement of explorers, making discoveries with the passion and absorption of dedicated scientists. At the end of each successful investigation, there comes over each tiny face an expression of pure heartfelt pleasure.

But if the pleasure of learning is universal, why are there so many dull, incurious people in the world? It is because they were made dull, by bad teaching, by isolation, by surrender to routine, sometimes, too, by the pressure of hard work and poverty, or by the toxin of riches, with all their ephemeral and trivial delights. With luck, resolution and guidance, however, the human mind can survive not only poverty but even wealth.

This pleasure is not confined to learning from textbooks, which are too often tedious. But it does include learning from books. Sometimes when I stand in a big library like the library of Congress, or Butler Library at Columbia, and gaze around me at the millions of books, I feel a sober, earnest delight hard to convey except a metaphor. These are not lumps of lifeless paper, but minds alive on the shelves. From each of them goes out its own voice, as inaudible as the streams of sound conveyed by electric waves beyond the range of hearing, and just as the touch of a button on our stereo will fill the room with music, so by opening

one of these volumes, one can call into range a voice far distant in time and space, and hear it speaking, mind to mind, heart to heart.

But, far beyond books, learning means keeping the mind open and active to receive all kinds of experience. One of the best-informed men I ever knew was a cowboy who rarely read a newspaper and never a book, but who had ridden many thousands of miles through one of the western states. He knew his state as thoroughly as a surgeon knows the human body. He loved it. Not a mountain, not a canyon which had not much to tell him, not a change in the weather that he could not interpret. And so, among the pleasures of learning, we should include travel, travel with an open mind, an alert eye and a visit to understand other peoples, other places, rather than looking in them for a mirror image of oneself. If I were a young man today, I should resolve to see — no, to learn — all the 50 states before I was 35.

Learning also means learning to practice, or at least to appreciate, an art. Every new art you learn appears like a new window on the universe; it is like acquiring a new sense. Because I was born and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland, a hideous 19th-century industrial city, I did not understand the slightest thing about architecture until I was in my 20s. Since then, I have learned a little about the art, and it has been a constant delight. As for reading books, this contains two different delights. One is the pleasure of apprehending the unexpected, such as when one meets a new author who has a new vision of the world. The other pleasure is of deepening one's knowledge of a special field. Learning extends our lives (as Ptolemy said) into new dimensions. It is cumulative. Instead of diminishing in time, like health and strength, its returns go on increasing, provided ...

Provided that you aim, throughout your life, as you continue learning, to integrate your thought, to make it harmonious. If you happen to be an engineer and also enjoy singing in a glee club, connect these two activities. They unite in you; they are not in conflict. Both choral singing and engineering are examples of the

architectonic ability of man: of his power to make a large plan and to convey it clearly to others. Both are aesthetic and depend much on symmetry. Think about them not as though they were dissociated, but as though each were one aspect of a single unity. You will do them better, and be happier.

Much unhappiness has been suffered by those people who have never recognized that it is as necessary to make themselves into whole and harmonious personalities as to keep themselves clean, healthy and financially solvent. Wholeness of the mind and spirit is not a quality conferred by nature, or by God. It is like health, virtue and knowledge. Man has the capacity to attain it; but to achieve it depends on his own efforts. It needs a long, deliberate effort of the mind and the emotions, and even the body.

During our earthly life, the body gradually dies; even the emotions become duller. But the mind in most of us continues to live, and even grows more lively and active, enjoys itself more, works and plays with more expansion and delight. Many people have played

themselves to death, even eaten and drunk themselves to death. Nobody has ever thought himself to death. The chief danger confronting us is not age. It is laziness, sloth, routine, stupidity? — forcing their way in like wind through the shutters, seeping into the cellar like swamp water. Many who avoid learning, or abandon it, find that life is drained dry. They spend 30 years in a chair looking glumly out at the sand and the ocean; on a porch swing waiting for somebody to drive down the road. But that is not how to live.

No learner has ever run short of subjects to explore. The pleasures of learning are indeed pleasures. In fact, the word should be changed. The true name is happiness. You can live longest and best and most rewardingly by attaining and preserving the happiness of learning.