

THE THOUGHT IN THE BALANCED MIND
Address as High Chancellor of the American College
Quill Club at Denver, July 1925

College teachers often have a mistaken idea of education. Their usual theory — their common obsession — is that education is something to do things to a boy or girl — something to make him grow. They forget that growth is an eternal thing — always going on in a boy or girl. The real purpose of education should be the removing of impediments to this growth, opening wider channels for its manifestation and expression, so that it may proceed in the simple and orderly and natural way that God intended it to unfold. The work of educators should be merely to remove those things which bind, which check or which tend to stifle this growth; in other words, as far as possible a policy of hands off, a letting be, a letting-go — letting the young person unfold as he naturally and normally would.

The continuous interference — from without — of the educative process, tends to arrest the student's development, instead of furthering it. We all suffer from arrested development more or less. This is proved conclusively by the fact that the only normal man was Christ. To attain a measure of Christ-like power we must go back to a simple, natural way of living and growing — always from within out, never from without in. That colleges have hindered as often as helped the progress of genius is evidenced by the fact that over half of the greatest writers of America have never attended a college and that their unusual and unique genius is partly attributed to the fact that they did not attend college.

Edison would not have been the genius he is today were it not for this natural unfolding — from within. Lincoln would not have been the great figure he is today had too much been done to him from the outside. Socrates and Shakespeare are towering figures who were fortunate to have been born before examinations and grades and promotions and degrees were invented.

I said that real growth, lasting growth, colossal growth always is from within out. It begins with the boy and the girl, inside him — in his mind-hunger, in his heart-yearning — not outside of him — in the classroom, in the curriculum, in the teacher. How can we stimulate and nourish and release this growth the best? As a teacher of English composition, more and more I have of late been throwing away most of my old reliance upon the laws of rhetoric and grammar, and the conventional laws of writing made so much of by teachers in the past. These secondary laws of technique are as nothing compared with the great inner primary laws of the deeper self. And where shall we go to get authentic guidance regarding these laws of the deeper self?

First let us go to Socrates, the wisest man of Greece. The secret of growth and power of the real man, the inner self, according to Socrates, is all summed up in the words: KNOW THYSELF. Let us go, next, to Marcus Aurelius, the wisest man of Rome. The secret of power and growth, according to him, is bound up in the two words: CONTROL THYSELF. Let us go finally to the wisest of them all, the Man of Galilee. According to him, the secret of life and power lies enfolded in the simple statement: DENY THYSELF.

Friends, in these three statements are to be found all the laws of growth of the individual, the very heart and core of the educative process. The first law, Know thyself, the college and schools are today just beginning to recognize as worthy of a place in their method and technique. The analysis and study of each student as an individual and the measuring and evaluating of his powers and capacities and the furnishing of expert guidance in the selecting of a vocation is in its beginning stages.

As teacher of composition I find that this is a great and important part of our teaching which we have been neglecting. First find what your student is interested in, what he is good at; find his heart's greatest desire, his all absorbing dominant passion, and then set him to work writing

about it.

The second law, Control thyself, finds its place in our curriculum in the training in application and concentration of the student, the bringing of his mind under perfect control for the mastery of a subject. This law is the only one of the three which the college has been giving serious attention to, almost its sole attention to, perhaps too much attention to.

But the last phrase, that covered by the dynamic statement, Deny thyself, has received little or no attention from the viewpoint of the educators. It has been spurned and neglected. All too frequently it has been ridiculed by having a royal robe put about it and a crown of thorns placed upon its brow by those very ones whom we would expect above all others to be honoring it, but who in the depth of their hearts scoff at it and would gladly see it crucified.

Let me say a few things about this law and its relation to creative writing. By "deny thyself," Jesus meant for you to put the little self aside and let the greater self flow through you. Open the sluice gate of the little self and let the living springs of the greater self flow through and irrigate your garden of ideas into eternal life. I spent twelve years writing and rewriting an article for the Atlantic Monthly. When it was finished, with all the technique and all the ideas and all the gray matter I could pack into it, I sent it on its rounds. Not only did it journey to the Atlantic, but it journeyed to a half dozen other magazines. And it invariably came back. Then one evening I sat down to answer a simple little question a student had put to me. No longer did I try or have any desire to write for fame, for money, for recognition. Forgotten was myself, the little self. Within my heart was merely the desire to serve, to help, to comfort. A friend who read my answer said I should send it to the Atlantic. I followed his suggestion and my article was instantly accepted and they wrote back, "Send us half a dozen more like it."

Friends, that is the difference between doing your own writing, and letting the greater self write through you. I am not talking from one chance instance. I have made a careful investigation into this matter and know whereof I speak. I could line the side wall of this room with names and statements of great writers who ascribe their power of writing to just this thing. Homer and Vergil and Milton did not invoke the Muses as a mere matter of form. They were actually and unqualifiedly by that act putting their little selves aside, "denying themselves" that the highest spiritual powers of which they could conceive could flow through them. Pericles began every oration with prayer. Demosthenes opened his oration on the crown with prayer. George Eliot says that all her greatest writings came when she let go and a "not me" took hold. Joel Chandler Harris said he never wrote anything worth while till "the other fellow" looking over his shoulder took the pen in his hand and did the work for him.

Ladies and gentlemen, I come here tonight to call the American College Quill Club to this larger conception of the art for which we stand. It is a mistake for us to think that the art of writing, for which we are banded together, has its beginning and ending within the laws of rhetoric, of grammar, of the conventional text book canons of writing. The privilege is given to us to choose higher standards and higher ideals, accept a higher challenge and in turn demand higher results. I for one can set for my goal nothing short of colossal results for the literary efforts of the young aspirants in writing in America today. If we wish to cultivate and bring into existence a higher American literature, we must accept nothing lower than Christ's ideal — the ideal which Homer and Dante and Shakespeare instinctively accepted and so grandly applied. It is within our reach, it is within the scope of our minds and the reach of our powers. Inspiration is not a thing limited to one time or to one age. There is just as much of it around today in spite of all our institutionalized learning, our artificial thinking and our machine-made and standardized processes of living. It is for us to break through the doors that the little carpenters of education have built about us and burst forth into the fresh air of God's pure light. It is for us to lead the way and show the path for others to follow. Here, and here only is the spring from which all literature flows. And it brings us back to the simple formula, which

we must not only know, but must LIVE: PUT THE LITTLE SELFISH MOTIVES ASIDE, DENY THYSELF, ACKNOWLEDGE THE GREATER SELF — GOD; TRUST HIM, COMMIT YOURSELF TO HIM, OBEY HIS CALL, THEN LET HIM WRITE THROUGH YOU.

For there are three laws that govern all education, all growth, all life. They are: Know thyself, Control thyself, Deny thyself; these three, and the greatest of these is Deny thyself. These are the three strings of the Muse's harp. "Of myself I can do nothing; but through Him I am all things." "For His is the power and the strength and the majesty, and the glory and the victory."