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(Rec. at K. College)

ON FINDING ONE'S WORK

By Samuel McCrea Cavert

Commencement, as the word implies, is a time when you begin to give attention to your life-work. Some of you seniors will now enter upon the occupation in which you will spend the rest of your days. Others will take up definite training for a profession. None of you can help thinking about your future work. And on your decisions will depend a large part of your satisfaction and happiness in life. It was a sound insight which led Thomas Carlyle to say, "Blessed is the man who has found his work: let him ask no other blessedness."

The first question which you have to look at honestly is whether you are to fall in with the current emphasis on security. To be sure the concern for security has a proper place in our planning. There is no virtue either in needless risk or in a happy-go-lucky attitude toward the future. But if we go on accenting this note as strongly as we are now doing we shall be in danger of losing the zest that comes from a more adventurous and high-spirited approach to life. Although we still give lip-service to ideals of heroic living, our American practice is softer than that in any other generation. We are too much like the romantic teen-ager who wrote to his sweetheart in a neighboring town: "I adore you so much that I would climb the highest mountain to be at your side; I would swim the widest river to gaze into your eyes; I would travel across a continent to feel the touch of your hand. I'll come over to your house tomorrow night if it doesn't rain."

At the beginning of this century there appeared a little advertisement in the London Times, signed by a famous Antarctic explorer, inviting

men to apply for certain posts. There was no assurance of high salaries, no lure of short working hours. The notice read merely as follows: "Men Wanted, - for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success. Signed: Sir Ernest Shackleton." Applications poured in from all over England. That spirit, we may be sure, can still be appealed to with expectation of a similar response.

This suggests that there are more interesting and rewarding things to do with one's life than just make himself comfortable. Let me give you a contemporary illustration, the concrete case of a man who has discovered how much more rich and meaningful his days may be when he forgets an easy-going routine and discovers something that challenges his spirit.

In November 1947 Life magazine published a picture-story of Albert Schweitzer and his hospital in the African jungle. It told how, while still a young man in his twenties, Schweitzer had achieved eminence in three different fields. He was a philosopher of distinction. He was a theological scholar and author with an international reputation. He was one of the great masters of music, the foremost interpreter of Bach. With the world of European culture thus at his feet, he decided to become a medical missionary among people whose only idea of a physician had been the witch doctor.

Doubtless most readers of the magazine merely skimmed through the story, but there was at least one man whose reaction was different. His name was William ^a ~~L~~primer Mellon, Jr., then thirty-seven years of age, born to financial security and social standing. He had left Princeton University

after a year or two because he had no special interest in a college education. He had gone first into the banking and then into the oil interests of the Mellon family in Pittsburgh but found no enthusiasm for either. He had then decided to live comfortably on a delightful ranch in Arizona, - which he was doing on the morning when he read in Life about Albert Schweitzer's work in Africa. He could not get it out of his mind. He decided that Schweitzer had the right idea about the way to make one's life significant. He entered Tulane University, and by dint of laborious effort took a degree in tropical medicine. His wife at the same time studied nursing and hospital administration. During a trip to Haiti they were impressed with the great need for a hospital with an emphasis on community health and preventive medicine. They built the hospital, with the blessing and cooperation of the Republic of Haiti. It was dedicated last December, with the name "Albert Schweitzer Hospital." It will be in full operation within a few months and the happy Dr. Mellon and Mrs. Mellon with their four children expect to give the rest of their years to the project. They have been gripped by something that makes life far more worthwhile than wealth and comfort and ease.

Another fundamental question that has to be faced has to do with the motive and goal to which you give priority in making your decision. If you follow the popular standards set by Hollywood and TV and the slick magazines, the dollar mark will be what you shoot at. You will not think yourself successful unless you have a town-house and a country-house, both much more elaborate than you need, unless you have at least a two-car garage with the latest and longest models in them, unless you belong to several expensive clubs even though you have no time to go to them. You will drift along with the tide of opinion which assumes that a man's life

consists in the abundance of things that he possesses. And in that case you will give serious thought only to types of work which hold an alluring promise of large material gain.

I am not suggesting that you should ignore the financial aspect of your life. Surely there is nothing wrong about seeking to provide for yourself and your family the resources that make for pleasant and gracious living. I am asking only whether the monetary aspect is to have the priority over all considerations. I am suggesting that this is not the most important side of life, - nor that which gives ^{the} deeper joys and the more enduring contentment. I am reminding you that there are other and more interesting ways of being "successful" than making all the money you can get.

Instead of putting the emphasis on the acquisitive impulse, you may decide to magnify the creative. This is what the artist always does, the true artist, - the musician, the poet, the writer, the painter, the sculptor, the designer. You would never think of judging Beethoven's success by asking how much he got for the Pastoral Symphony. You would insult John Keats if your first question about him was the size of his royalties on the "Ode to a Nightingale." For them and countless others success lies in the extent to which they are able to give creative expression to something deep in their own souls. They are those whom Kipling describes as living in that realm where

"Only the Master shall praise us, and only
the Master shall blame,
And no one shall work for money and no
one shall work for fame,
But each for the joy of the working, and each
in his separate star
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the
God of things as they are."

We can not all be artists but in some degree the artistic impulse exists in all of us. It takes the form of a desire to create, to express the best that is in us for its own intrinsic worth. For all of us, whatever our work, there may be the reward of happy contentment which comes from good craftsmanship and skill, - whether in an engineer constructing a bridge, a stenographer typing a letter or a gardener cultivating his vegetables and flowers. In a little town in Central New York a hundred years ago, before the coming of our factory age, there was a blacksmith shop, run by a man named David Maydole, where hand-wrought hammers were made that were in demand all over the state. A casual visitor remarked one day, "You make pretty good hammers here, I suppose." "No sir," the man at the forge replied, "we don't make pretty good hammers, - we make the best hammers that can be made." He had found the inner satisfaction that comes to any man in whom the creative impulse becomes stronger than the acquisitive. We have to admit that in this day when handicraft has been so largely supplanted by the assembly line and modern automation, it is very difficult for most workers to have any real sense of creativity but in so far as it is lost life will be the poorer.

Still another way of being successful is to identify yourself with some thing greater than yourself. This means being more concerned to serve a worthy cause than to make everything serve you. And you will find that in the long run ~~it is~~ the men in whom service has become the master motive ~~are~~ are the men who find the greatest peace of mind and the greatest zest in life.

Here, for example, is a research worker in a laboratory, - what would success mean to him? It would mean adding a bit to the store of

knowledge about our life in the universe. So the famous naturalist, Louis Agassiz, when some one expressed pity about his modest income, said, "I have too important a work to do to spend my time making money." Or here is a teacher in a school-room - what is success for her? It is helping young people to grow into the fullest use of their powers. So a college professor of my acquaintance said, "It's wonderful - I get paid for doing the thing that is my greatest joy in life!" So the nurse who devotes herself to public health, the lawyer who is concerned for justice, the statesman who works for international understanding, the editor who helps to form a sound public opinion, anyone who feels himself contributing in some way to ends that are inherently worth-while get^s a kind of compensation that wealth alone is powerless to give. Our best satisfactions come not from what we get hold of but from what gets hold of us. Our lives take on meaning and value from being related to a cause that will go on long after we and our possessions are gone. Our earthly life, at best, is so short that one would like to have it count for something that endures beyond his little span. As William James put it, "the great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast life."

Unfortunately there is a widespread assumption that the impulse to create and the impulse to serve belong to only a few professions, and that in other lines of work the impulse to get is to dominate. This is an idea that must be challenged, sharply and stoutly. Every occupation, whatever it be, may be followed from any one of these three motives. You are thinking, let us say, of being a doctor. Why a doctor? It may be because your creative impulse pushes you in that direction, because here is the work to which you feel "called" by your own natural aptitudes and interests, and to which you can give your highest enthusiasm. My own

family doctor, a woman, felt that way. Partly because of financial problems, partly because of the prejudice against women in the profession, she did not go to medical school at the normal time but she could not feel contented with anything else and became a physician after she was considerably past thirty years of age. Or you may be a doctor because you feel that medicine is the field in which you can best further such a noble cause as the health of the world. That is the way Dr. Walter Reed felt about his part in conquering yellow fever. Or, again, you may be a doctor because, like Albert Schweitzer, or William ^aLarimer Mellon, Jr., it is the best way in which you can help your fellow men in a suffering world.

Or - God forbid! - you could be a doctor just in order to make big money. You might specialize in toadying to rich neurasthenics. You might even concoct some worthless patent medicine which could be so smartly advertised as to make a big fortune for you. Judged by the money standard alone, that kind of physician might be called successful but you would never want him around when real illness came to yourself or your family.

So we make a grave mistake if we describe a few careers like those of the minister and the missionary, as "Christian service," and treat other professions and occupations as if they were merely "secular" and to be governed by lower standards. In the Christian view every worth-while work is Christian service, - a way of being a co-worker with God in building a world which is in accord with His will.

I once heard of a mother who said that she had wanted "to give her son to God" but that he had decided to go into the soap business!

We may be grateful for the mother's ideal and yet be sure she had a very deficient understanding of the matter. The ministry, which the mother wanted her son to enter, is a way of serving God but so also is soap making. Since cleanliness is a goal for God's world He must surely desire that some of us be soap-makers! Being a missionary is a way of serving God, but so also is being a farmer. Since it is God's will that all men should have their daily bread, He must surely desire that some of us raise wheat and corn. What you do is far less important than why you do it. The crucial point is the motive and spirit in which you carry on your work, whatever it be.

There is a fruitful approach to this whole question in one of the cardinal teachings of the Protestant Reformation, commonly known as the priesthood of all believers. The accepted view of the time thought of the priest and the man-in-the-world as on two different levels. Martin Luther dropped a spiritual bombshell by declaring, "Let everyone who knows himself to be a Christian be assured of this, and apply it to himself, that we are all priests and that there is no difference between us." By these words Luther meant much more than that every Christian is a priest in the sense of finding God for himself. He was insisting that every Christian is a priest also by the way in which his daily life helps to interpret God to others. When Luther is asked, "If all men are priests, what distinction is there between laity and clergy?" he answers that the only difference is in function. "A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, (he says) each has the work and function of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or function must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community."

This means that one serves God not merely by virtue of what he does on Sunday or in the church organization but by virtue of what he does, and how he does it, in every place where work essential to human welfare is carried on. The medieval distinction between the "religious" and the "secular" vocation is broken down. The carpenter at the bench or the mother in the home may glorify God as truly as the priest at the altar or the missionary in Africa. No occupation is merely a way of making a living or of amassing a fortune: it is a way of helping to make human life what God intends it to be.

What this adds up to is that your attitude toward your work involves your whole philosophy of life. If you regard our human existence as just a meaningless riddle, there is no reason to expect that you will find meaning in it or help to put meaning into it. But if you believe that God made the world for some great and good purpose, then your mission in life is to be a co-worker with Him. Then you have a right to feel as, in George Eliot's poem, the famous violinmaker, Stradivarius, felt:

"When any master holds
'Twixt chin and hand a violin of mine,
He will be glad that Stradivari lived,
Made violins, and made them of the best.
. . . For while God gives them skill
I give them instruments to play upon,
God choosing me to help Him. . . .
. . . If my hand slacked
I should rob God - since He is fullest good --
Leaving a blank instead of violins.
. . . He could not make
Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio."