

AT LARGE AMONG THE AESCULAPIANS

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President Rainsford, Mr. Todd, trustees, members of the faculty, parents, brothers and sisters, friends, members of the class of 1980.

Some years ago, The Saturday Review published a series of articles called "What I have Learned," in which men and women who had lived lives of achievement told what they had learned. The idea for that particular series came out of the last lecture that the historian Charles A. Beard gave at Columbia University. At the conclusion of that lecture one of the students asked, "Dr. Beard, do you think you could summarize for us in just five minutes everything that you have learned in a half century of teaching?" He said, "I can do better than that, I can tell you everything that I have learned in just four sentences: 1) When it is dark enough, you can see the stars. 2) The bee that robs the flower also fertilizes it. 3) Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad with power. 4) The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly well." And he sat down. Fortified with these aphorisms I would go around the world and ask notables what they had learned. I would generally use the aphorisms of Professor Beard as a pump primer. In 1955, I put the question to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India. He replied, "The one thing I have learned in my lifetime, unfortunately, is that I have learned nothing." I put my pencil down. He resumed: "I have learned, and this is something that Mahatma Ghandi taught me, that when you have something to do and you start out on the road towards its achievement, you'll discover that there are many detours along the way. Nothing will be more difficult than to keep your destination in mind. If you don't you will never get there. The next thing I think I have learned, is that there are difficult situations, especially in politics, and you must never allow a personal triumph to become more important than the unity you have to create with those who work with you."

The next year, at a small jungle hospital in Africa, I put the question to Albert Schweitzer, and he said, "Mr. Nehru was right. The one thing we learn is that we learn very little. But," he added, "I would like to think about it and perhaps in the morning, when I am rested, I may be able to give you an answer." In the morning he came up and said, "Yes, I will tell you what I have learned: 1) If you have something very important to do in life, do not expect people to roll stones out of your way. 2) It is not necessary to go searching for magnificent cathedrals in order to have an encounter with the deity. If you can just sit still long enough, you will find your cathedral."

About three years later in the Vatican I put the question to a man who was dying of cancer. Pope John XXIII then said, "I have always learned never to fear to accept an outstretched hand, and never fear to hold out your own." And then, finally, in the Kremlin the next year I put the question to Nikita Krushchev. He listened to this recital of all the others beginning with Nehru, going through to Schweitzer and Pope John, and he said; "You know those fellows were long winded. I can tell you everything I have learned in just four words: Never turn your back."

There comes a time, it seems to me, that all of us have to ask that question. What really have we learned? And I think you probably are asking that question now. I would like, presumptuously perhaps, to tell you some of the things that I have learned. I am not sure that I have learned the full meaning of those lessons, but I would like to share them with you just the same. First, the tragedy of life is not death, but what dies inside us while we live. The greatest tragedies that I have seen have not been of people, with access to everything that was required in life, but who turned away from their own potentialities. People who are afraid of finding out what was inside that could grow, or people who deferred that particular development.

The second thing that I have learned, perhaps, is that one of the great gifts of human life, one of the prime aspects of human uniqueness, is creativity. Therefore, make the most of it if you want to come fully alive. I have learned, too, that creativity enlarges, enhances, and prolongs life. One year I had the privilege of visiting with a great human being who is also a great musician, a cellist and a conductor: Pablo Casals. He was ill. His heart was failing him. He had emphysema and rheumatoid arthritis. His wife had to help him to get dressed. And in the morning he came in for breakfast stooped and shuffling, his arms at his sides, his hands clenched, wheezing. He sat down at the piano. I hadn't realized that he was hardly less adept at the piano than he was at the cello, and I didn't know what was going to happen. I looked at those clenched fingers and those arms fastened to his sides. But then as his hands reached out towards the keyboard, they began to open like a beautiful morning flower. In no time at all those fingers were racing with dizzying speed across the keyboard in a Brahms Concerto. And now his back was straight and his eyes were bright and he finished the Brahms, put his hand over his heart and said, "Brahms for exercise, Bach for the spirit." And then he played the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, after which he stood up, walked very erectly to the breakfast table, had a full breakfast, went out for a walk on the beach, came back, practiced at the cello, took care of his correspondence, had lunch, took a nap. And then, once again after the nap, the body tended to close down. Not to the same extent as before, but perceptively so, and his wife said, "Don Pablo, you must prepare yourself. Very soon the young people from public television will arrive to film your master class." He groaned, "No, I can't do it, I am just not up to it today." "Don Pablo," she said, "we can't send them away, they are on their way. They will be here in a few minutes. besides," she said, "you don't want to disappoint those young people, especially that beautiful young lady with the golden curls whom you noticed the other day." He said, "Will she be here?" And now his back straightened once again, and in three minutes he was at the cello sawing away with complete

control. It was difficult to see this demonstration without recognizing that creativity is the best medicine in the world. Creativity enlarges life, enhances life, prolongs life. Creativity is an aspect of human uniqueness and as it is exercised, it serves.

A related thing that I have learned is that humor, too, is part of human uniqueness. And that humor, too, serves life. And I would like to tell you another incident, that bears on this point. When I went to see Dr. Schweitzer at his hospital in the Gabon, he was then the same age as Casals, 89. He maintained a full schedule. You didn't know how this man could engage in physical labor as he did. Helping to build the bungalows, moving these large crates of medicines to more sheltered spots. He was always encouraging the others, and always with humor. For example, when the young staff, the young doctors, and nurses, met in the dining room in the evening, they would trudge in from the day's labors. You had a frying pan for sun. You had to work under saturating moisture. You may have had two or three hundred cases a day to take care of, and Doctor Schweitzer insisted that you had to focus on each one, because, he said, "This is not an assembly belt. We have a lot of patients, but each person must feel that he or she is an individual." It took time and it took energy, and now you saw the effects of that particular drain. The staff came into the dining room. The young doctors and nurses sat down. The doctor began the evening with the Lord's Prayer, but he would never start the meal without a story of some sort. "Coming up from the dock," he said, "today I stopped because I noticed that Edna the hen had given birth to six chicks. I wanted to give you the latest news of the hospital." And then he said, "I am really ashamed of myself, I am losing touch with affairs at the hospital. Do you realize," he said, "that I didn't even know that she was that way?" Then, the next night, he began very gravely with a brief announcement. "As you all know," he said, "there are only two automobiles within 75 miles of the hospital. This afternoon the inevitable happened. The cars collided. Now," he continued, "we have taken care of the superficial injuries of the drivers. Anyone with a reference for machines may treat the cars." Two nights later, he said, "I have been asked why I haven't told you about my visit to Europe several months ago. No reason. It just didn't occur to me, but since some of you have asked, I will be glad to tell you. The most interesting thing that happened was that I had a visit with Danish royalty. I was invited to dinner. It was quite splendid, a long dining room table of teak wood and the magnificent chandelier. I sat at the head of the table, the king sat at one side, and the queen sat at the other. But then," he said, "when I looked down at my plate my heart sank because of what was on the plate. It was a herring. Now," he said, "I happen not to like herring. Especially," he said, "do I happen not to like Danish herring; I'm an Alsatian. What was I to do? Here was my dilemma. My parents, bless their souls, had always said to me: 'Albert, never leave anything on your plate, especially when you eat out.' But my stomach had also said to me, 'Albert, never put anything down here that we can't use.' I was absolutely certain of two things, therefore. One that I was not going to eat the herring. Second, that I would not do dishonor to my parents. So when the king and queen were engaged in conversation, I very deftly pocketed the herring. Two days later, the evening newspaper in Copenhagen reported the visit of the distinguished Dr. Schweitzer, la grand doctor, to the royal palace, and quoted the

queen. 'The king and I were delighted,' she said, 'to have Dr. Schweitzer dine with us, but she said 'I must say, we were rather surprised at the strange habits he had picked up from his jungle companions. Not only did he eat the meat of the fish, he ate the bones of the fish. There was nothing left on his plate.'" Well it was so interesting to see the effects of these little stories on the staff. Yes, they had the nourishing food on their plates, the food grown at the hospital, but Dr. Schweitzer always knew that there was a certain spirituality to humor, and that humor was life-giving. I commend it to you. I commend it to you not as a sometime thing but as a daily exercise. It's a form of internal jogging, it moves the parts around, it oxygenates the blood, it helps to activate the endorphins and the enkephalins, substances in the brain that form a natural anesthesia. In short, it is part of the health process. It's a divine gift. Make the most of it.

I have also learned, as I said yesterday afternoon, that no one knows enough to be a pessimist. You will find as you go through life, that there are many people who will give you fully documented reasons why certain objectives that are necessary cannot be achieved. They will tell you for example, that in the world you live in, that things cannot be changed because they are beyond the reach of the individual. Therefore, I ask you to believe two things. First, never minimize your problems. Look at them very starkly, but never underestimate the ability of human beings to do what has to be done. The uniqueness of human life is represented by the ability of human beings to do something for the first time. In the course of your lifetime, you will discover you can do things for the first time. Don't hold back because of cynicism. You will have people tell you that this world is too much for us, and of the problems concerned with nuclear war, the arms race, pollution, poisoning of the air and the oceans, population pressure, the poisoning of the seas, the depletion of the world's resources, the disappearance of energy. You will have people say, "Well, all you can do is just live out your time and hope it doesn't explode before your time is up." Don't believe them.

Human uniqueness is represented by the fact that if you can understand a problem, you can solve the problem. We went to the moon, not because of our technology, but because of our imagination. Someone had to imagine that this was possible. Technology became the servant to the imagination. Let technology be your servant.

As I get around the world, I have a sense that the world is divided not primarily into communists and democrats or capitalists. As I get around the world, I realize that there is a spiritual division in the world. And this is not between one country and another country or between two vast funnels marked east and west. The division is inside us, mostly. And that division is represented not by an understanding of world problems. It is represented by a difference as to our confidence in the ability of human beings to meet those problems. In short, the fundamental difference of the world is between those who look out at the world's multiple problems and say "this is too much for human beings to solve." And then there are those who look at the same problems and say "Any problem that was made by human beings is within the reach of human beings to solve."

When you say that, you lift your heads and you develop new energies. Like Casals discovering new strengths through creativity, you discover through your convictions that you have energies of your own that you never dreamt existed. We are problem-solvers, this is the nature of the human species. I can't think of a more exciting time to be alive.

GOOD LUCK!