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ON THE EDUCATION OF THE TOTAL MAN

I am part of a departmentalized society. Lawyers are members of a specialized field. As Attorney General, I am the law officer of North Carolina. I am a part of a departmentalized society.

Tonight, however, I will not talk about law or patriotic principles. You might expect, therefore, that I should talk of the great truths that comprise those rules of human conduct which we call laws. Or that I should speak of those eternal principles for which a million or so Americans have died on a thousand battlefields to preserve and protect.

I want to talk about your education which is now beginning. But tonight I should like to step out of my own departmentalized society and to talk to you for a few minutes about your education that is now beginning. It goes without saying that you who wait here before us are to be congratulated upon the achievement which your presence here represents.

We Honor and salute you for your achievement. You have thus far demonstrated an endurance, an ambition, and a capability

for a far more important thing, for a degree of self-discipline. So it is our privilege now to honor, salute, and to confer upon you official recognition.

What is it you have achieved? What are your responsibilities? But in so doing, it seems to me that we would be failing in our duty if we did not try to help to define what it is that you have really achieved and what the responsibilities are that will attend it.

You are not yet educated - made - Only a beginning. First of all, and as disillusioning as this may sound to you, it would be a grave mistake for you to assume that you are now educated. It would be a reflection upon the instruction which you have already received. Even in those fields in which you think you have achieved proficiency, you have made only a beginning. The Greek philosopher, Socrates, spoke often of the folly of man's pretention to learning.

False pretention of knowledge is one source of world's ills. It seems probable that a great many of the world's ills, perhaps some of our most alarming ones, may be attributed to ignorance, and more seriously, to the false pretention of knowledge where there is none. One of your safeguards in the future will be your freedom from any form of self-deception.

Why pursue for more education? You wonder, naturally, at this point: If graduation, then, is such a limited thing, then why have we pursued it? How are we to regard what we have done?

What does "Education" mean? In answer to that, let us explore for a moment the meaning of education itself. By what signs can it be known?

You have studied many diverse things. Many of you here have been trained proficiently, in one or more of a dozen arts and techniques. Preparation for the tasks of a varied and complex society must be made upon a tremendously wide range of disciplines. Music, art, business, humanities, highly technical scientific studies - the list that you have pursued is impressive. Your field of inquiry and the special language you have learned to use, say in science, has been foreign to the language of another field, to that of your neighbor, to such an extent that the two of you seem not to have been preparing for life in the same world.

Specialization in our society is important, but specialization in one field not excuse total ignorance of all others. The more complex a society becomes, the more our mastery of our environment depends upon an increasingly specialized language and technique - language that is substantially private

except to the technician in that field. So, then, it appears that gaps between fields of study are steadily becoming wider and wider. You may know something of science and nothing of art; you may know something of economics, nothing of the history of man. I was told recently of a distinguished nuclear scientist who professed that he was finding greater and greater difficulty in talking to men in his own field.

Perhaps, then, there is no escaping the highly departmentalized study, the high degree of specialization of inquiry which society through formal education has forced upon us.

We should seek after the ideal, the whole man - Emerson's ideal. Try to relate to a total view, not just our niche. Recognize our own shortcomings. A hundred years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson had much to say about the departmentalized society of his time, about his great fear of departmentalized man. Time and time again he plead for a vision that transcended the splintered interests and endeavors of his colleagues. He plead for the appearance, somewhere, of the whole man. What he would say of us today, we can only assume. But what we can do and what we have the highest moral obligation to do, is to examine the training that we have had; to make some effort to understand what our training is and what it is not. To try, in other words, to relate our lives to as total a view as we can command and thereby accept the knowledge of our own incompleteness.

Only this it seems will lead to a clearer view of what education really is.

Education is unending. Not susceptible to measurement.

The process of becoming educated is never-ending; it is a way of life. It can not be measured, in terms of books or teachers or years in school. The mere acquisition of accumulated data is in itself no key. No yardstick of degree or period of application can be revealing except in a limited sense. Perhaps, then, for a better understanding of education, it is to the quality of the mind that we must look: to its integrity, its desire and need and will to learn, its inquiring spirit, and, finally, its undeceived self-knowledge.

How we live tells of our real education. Real education, then, can be measured only by the way that we live. Real education manifests itself in every department of our lives: the direction of our behavior with our fellow man, in the quality of understanding and charity which we give to others, in our ability to assess values fairly and objectively, in the courage with which we distinguish between the true and the false. The signs of his education are unmistakable in the life of a mature man or woman.

Has our specialization cost us our perspective? It is our right then to ask to what extent have we really been

prepared? At what cost has our specialization come? Has it come at the loss of real perspective, has it come at the loss of your desire for a fuller view of life? Know whereof you speak, but in the same hour, know something of the vast areas around you where you have not trod.

Only whole men can save our civilized society. The civilized society, which we are here committed to perpetuate must be watched over and guarded by our total selves. Not alone by scientists, not alone by technicians, nor even alone by the poet, can a clear sense of perspective be maintained - can an overall view of life be maintained.

One answer is to read. Read to understand the knowledge of others. One answer at least, if not the total answer, is for each of us to read, read, read. The respect that you will have for your own training will be determined by the awareness and understanding that you have concerning the knowledge and the training of others.

Read without prejudice - read to inquire not to confirm. Read. And read without prejudice. To read only for the purpose of confirming what you already believe to be true, to read only to support your previously inherited convictions, is to violate the basic spirit of intelligent inquiry and to deny yourself the fruit of your own mind.

Study that does not cause re-examination of values is a waste of time. If, at the completion of your study here, you take nothing away except that which you brought, you might as well not have been here at all. If your early convictions have not to some degree been shaken, if your view has not been extended into the depth of history, you have wasted your time.

Read not necessarily to reaffirm convictions - but to inquire - where instinct and insight may lead. Read. But read without prejudice, having the courage to follow where instinct and insight may lead. Examine your own convictions. How many of them are prejudgments? How many have you reached through a process of discovery for yourselves?

Read to broaden horizons. Read. But read without prejudice, to broaden your own horizons and your outlook.

Responsibility is proportionate to understanding. Bible parable of talents. Of one thing in this world we believe, you may be fairly certain: Responsibility is always proportionate to understanding. As individuals you can never escape the personal responsibility of what perceptions you have, nor the responsibility for the recognitions which your understanding may bestow. The Biblical parable of the talents tells us there is a penalty for the possession of knowledge and the refusal to use it. Your possession of training is at once

both your privilege and your obligation. From where is authority in the affairs of men to come, except from the qualities and capabilities of enlightened minds?

Your experience in school remains to remind you of what you might have been! You may forget a great deal of the information which you have received here, but the memory of your one-time possession of it will stay with you forever. And that one-time possession will remain your goal and your guide.

It will forever remind you of what you could have been.

You must accept your new responsibility. Your understanding has conferred on you added responsibility. To assume your responsibility is your obligation; to deny it will create within you a sense of emptiness and waste.

President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University had this to leave his students:

"Now, press you on. In backward ages Universities keep alive philosophy, and in progressive ages they lead the forward movement....They bring a portion of each successive generation to the confines of knowledge, to the very edge of territory already conquered, and say, 'Thus far came our fathers. Now press you on'."

And so I say to you tonight, "Now press you on."