

“The Problem of Self-Education” by Dr. F.L. Landacre, OSU College of Medicine, December 1928 Commencement Address (from January 1929 Alumni Monthly)

Graduation from college is just the beginning of real education. I can think of no more unfortunate frame of mind than for one to leave the University with the feeling that he is a finished product. Almost every successful college graduate has to make himself after leaving the University.

[Article paraphrases: “A feeling of disappointment at what he has accomplished, Professor Landacre asserted, is the best evidence that the college graduate has begun to group up to his opportunities. On the other hand, a feeling that”] you have arrived and that you are glad your college course is over is probably the best evidence that you can be happy though uneducated.

It is hard to think that anyone can spend four years in the university and not emerge a totally different individual. Even if you do nothing for yourself, nature will change you almost against your will.

[Landacre then expressed two wishes for the graduates, saying that] most important of all that you have acquired a taste for the solution of problems [and that] you may leave the university with a curiosity that will follow you all the remainder of your life. [The absence of curiosity in the unknown he characterized as] more to be feared than any other possible attitude. So far as science is concerned, the surface has not been scratched, and the changes going on in literature and the fine arts indicate that the leaders in these fields are not much better satisfied with past results than are the scientists.

It is better to bury yourself in an idea than to allow yourself to be paralyzed by contemplating your own personality too much. I know no better evidence for this conclusion than the lives of some of the great scientists.

The old, familiar terms, service and duty are in partial eclipse just now, if one may judge by popular discussions and magazine articles. The idea of self-expression is very popular, even if one has nothing to express. We can, however, without eliminating tested ideals, substitute without prejudice to these old ideals the idea of opportunity.

At far more expense than you have incurred personally, the state has made it possible for you to become better citizens than you might otherwise have been. On the part of the state this is largely a matter of self-defense. Democracy needs nothing so much as an intelligent constituency. . . It is not too much to expect an intelligent attitude toward popular misconceptions in politics, toward mawkish sentimentality on historical subjects, toward the deifying of ordinary individuals, toward the understanding of individuals less well known in the popular mind, toward the feeling, for instance, that all office holders are venal when frequently they are not simply equal but superior to their constituents.

Do not for one moment believe that you will not be busy, or that you will be particularly popular but in opposing these misconceptions you will certainly win your own self-respect and you will assist to some degree that slow labourious growth that we know as the evolution of a social organization.

I need hardly warn you that this attempt to use an opportunity for self-improvement needs tact. It is useless to reform a man if you have to kill him in the progress. You should try to invigorate even possibly at time to prune, this growing organization we know as society, but its welfare must always be in your mind.

The problem of modern business, is largely ethical. The scientific principles underlying it are not different from those of the older sciences except in the nature of the material. And yet it may be that wealth arouses stronger impulses than are aroused in other fields and that competition in business places a greater strain on the love of fair play than do other occupations.

[The newspaper is] more nearly than the school or the church the greatest educational force we have today. Catering to morbid public taste, can be justified only on the basis of a low business standard.

It is easy to soothe your consciences with the idea that you have been so busy during your college course, and that your classes have so absorbed you time and energies that you have been so busy during your college course, and that your classes have so absorbed your time and energies that you have been unable to acquaint yourselves with much more than the comics in art, with jazz music, and with the trivial in literature... Nothing in my opinion can excuse this attitude today in a college graduate except a lack of appreciation of the fine things in literature and the fine arts and, let us hope, as unconscious enjoyment in being permanently illiterate.

The popular device of sidestepping the problem of teaching children by turning it over to the public school does not work. You force the public school in turn to pass the problem over to the university and the university in turn passes it on to the public, and as a result we move in a vicious circle. The remedy lies, of course, in the home. The problem in education needs nothing so much as better parents or at least more intelligent parents who are able to teach their own children and this teaching will come only as parents stay abreast of education.

The contributions of science to knowledge have been remarkably conservative. The conflict between ignorance and prejudice and applied science has only one outcome, and the conflict will be reasonably brief as such things go.