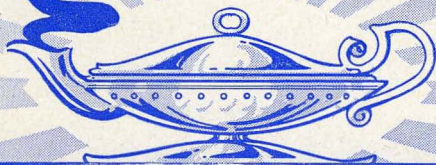


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Here's How to Learn

By Daniel A. Lord, S. J.



A QUEEN'S WORK
PAMPHLET

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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HERE'S HOW TO LEARN

By

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SOME PEOPLE stop learning the day they finish school.

Some people go on learning all their lives.

But then some people spent their days in school without learning a thing. Oh they got enough on the surface of their minds to pass an examination; but the surface of the mind is a very slippery surface indeed, and in no time at all the information that had briefly rested there slid away into oblivion.

Some people are avid for knowledge.

Others seem to have developed a real allergy to knowledge. Their skill at dodging is miraculous. They can come right up against a most interesting fact and not even notice that it's there. They can listen to a lovely melody and promptly forget it; in fact they never caught it. The big city they live in is running an industrial fair; they take in the nearest movie, where they won't have to bestir a brain cell. The art museum is playing host to the world's greatest paintings; they are still content with Li'l Abner and Nancy (good comics, but not particularly high art). If they pause on Prince Valiant, they feel that they have done their duty by their cultural education.

Limited Audience Perhaps

So before you read any further, there's a little examination of conscience you should make.

Do you want to learn?

Or does the whole process of learning bore you insufferably?

Are you interested in your inner growth? Do you want to have an expanding mind? Or do you prefer to stagnate?

But if in apathy and lethargy you wish merely to stagnate, you're making a very big mistake: Nobody stands still mentally. Either—as in the case of everything that regards your soul—you go forward, or you go backward. You can't stand still.

So I write these lines with the realization that this booklet may have an amazingly, an almost alarmingly small reader audience. The movie-makers, who have for years been convinced that the mental age of the movie audience is a junior fourteen, wouldn't think much of my subject. Teachers who have battled with student indifference for many a long generation would regard me as a hopeless optimist . . . but perhaps not all teachers. When the winnowing process of education has sifted the mental sheep from the goats (and isn't that a beautifully mixed figure of speech?), the few who remain to go on for professional education, the future doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, graduate students, are the professors' prides and joy. They want to learn, and they do learn.

Wanting To

For learning is largely a matter of wanting to learn.

People who want to learn eventually learn.

The cleverest person in the world who doesn't want to learn can't be taught. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink . . .

and, as the proverb was twisted by a cynic, you can lead a boy to college, but you can't make him think.

George M. Cohan, who gave us some of our immortal tunes—"Over There" and "Mary" for instance—never went beyond third grade and played the violin only in one key. But he learned to be a great dancer, actor, musician, producer, author, composer. Irving Berlin went to "school" in Nigger Mike's Cafe, where he kept his eyes open and learned how people feel and think and sing.

Of Shakespeare it was said that he had "little Latin and less Greek." What difference? He went on learning all his life, and he learned enough to write those great tragedies "Hamlet" and "King Lear."

Edison never wangled a high-school diploma, but he never stopped learning. And even on the other hand . . . the Compton brothers for example, who were trained graduates of the universities, made contributions to science that were largely the result of their learning once their formal education was behind them.

Curiosity Does It

When I finished the long and rather grueling education that is prerequisite for the Jesuit priest, I put my books aside with the conviction that my education was over. I had stored up information and knowledge. From that moment on, I told myself, I should dispense what I had learned. I had been given enough; now I would start giving.

But the first time I walked into a classroom, I knew that a fresh phase of my education had begun. Learning enough to get a degree and learning enough to teach a college class, I soon realized, were two quite different things.

In addition I had been taken over by the

greatest school in the world—the world itself. From that time on against the background of my formal education I really began to learn.

Young people taught me—and how much! and how!

Travel taught me.

The fact that I had to do a deal of writing forced me to learn. A writer can't dish out the same old stuff over and over again. Alexander Woollcott tried it. Never did a man have a lovelier prose style and do less with it. He rehashed the same story until it was no longer digestible. He had about a dozen tales to tell, and he told each one in a dozen forms. He could write like an angel, but he never bothered to learn anything really worth writing.

Once my formal education was over, I found that I had a new teacher, a wonderful teacher: curiosity. God had given me the gift of curiosity—and curiosity does it.

With Eyes Wide Open

I should be a conceited fool were I to set myself up as a learned man. As for information, I confess that I am no booted encyclopedia. The experts on "Information Please" make me blush; but then I blush at the stores of data accumulated by the "Quiz Kids."

A mere collection of unassorted facts has never much interested me. In my youth we played a game called "Observation." The hostess spread out on a table in another room a heterogeneous collection of odds and ends, everything from a pencil to a pear, from a saucer to a satchel, from a tack to a tennis racket. The guests walked slowly once around the table and then returned to the other room and sat down and wrote what they could remember. I did very badly at the game. It seemed a little silly to stuff a mind with all that unrelated junk.

Were I to play the game today, I am quite sure that I could make a good score. But it would not be the result of precise information; I would sit me down to my pad and write, not what I could remember, but what I was sure any hostess canvassing her house would collect and lay out for observation. I've been taught to reason; I think I could reason rather accurately just what most houses possess, what most women can locate without buying for the game, what most closets, drawers, and storerooms would yield to the one in charge of the game.

But if I have not gone about collecting facts, I have gone on learning.

To my great good luck when I was a very young teacher, I gave a lecture to a group of completely unappreciative college girls. I begged them to live "with their minds and their five senses," to learn to use their minds and their senses and to keep on using them as long as they lived. Whatever I did to bore that audience, I much impressed myself: I have tried to live with my mind and my eyes wide open, and it's been a lot of fun.

Out of the Rut

The highest wall in the world is the side of a rut.

Once you get down into a rut, you can see only back and a little distance ahead; you can't see a thing on either side of you. You're walled in more completely than is a criminal in solitary confinement. For though bars do not a prison make nor locked doors a cell, and though a man in jail may find the whole of life around him awaiting his observation and a library crammed with the written thoughts of mankind, a man or a woman in a rut is far more hoodwinked than is the ancient horse wearing blinders.

Perhaps saddest of all is the number of well-educated men and women who get right down into a rut and stop looking, listening, watching, or learning.

They forfeit their curiosity.

Like hungry spiders they continue to live out of themselves.

Their thoughts become pale carbon copies of the thoughts they had last year . . . and ten years ago . . . in their youth . . . and right after they entered kindergarten.

Once I was taught by a brilliant man who had stopped learning. He taught us from the wonderful set of notes he had compiled during his own formal education. The first year he taught from those notes, he was a magnetic and compelling force. The second year he taught from them, he was excellent. The third year, he was good. But by the time I inherited him and his notes, I found him uninspired, dreary, out of touch with anything that had happened in our generation, a brilliant mind gone totally to seed.

A curious man won't let himself get into a rut.

How could he? There is much too much going on around him. The world is too full of interesting things. The earth is too exciting. No bus that doesn't contain someone of real value, someone worth studying or speculating about. Each new book is a promise and a challenge. Every new issue of a news magazine is full of discovery and excitement and advance and achievement.

A man in a rut doesn't learn.

A man possessed of the curiosity needed to learn won't let himself get into a rut.

Reintroducing My Grandfather

With apologies I refer once more to my paternal grandfather, whose life story I have already

told in another booklet, "My Grandfather Was a Minister."

I reintroduce him here because he has been a lifelong inspiration for my own less diligent pursuit of learning.

Each year he tackled a new subject and spent a happy twelve months mastering it.

Fortunately for him he lived in a much simpler day, a time when it was almost possible to learn a great deal about any subject in a year's time, since a great deal was not known about a great many subjects. He had however a gentleman's conviction that he should know a little about everything. He had not the scholar's other conviction: that he should know everything about one thing.

So when he died, I found that his library was delightfully variegated. His collections of slides and china and curiosities were almost a museum library. And I understood why even when I was a child I found him an exhaustless source of information and a companion whose curiosity was a bright stimulus to my own young mind.

He lived alive. He did not carry around, as many a man and a woman do, a dead or dying mind. He was content to die when his whole being ended, and his soul progressed to the fullest knowledge that comes with eternity; he was unwilling to let his brain and his heart and his hands and his eyes die until God's appointed time. He had in a word the essential of constant learning—he had curiosity.

Correspondence Courses

Every year tens of thousands of men and women start to take correspondence courses. If everyone who started continued, the correspondence schools would probably go broke: Postage, the staff needed to correct papers, the individual attention demanded by each pupil would be a

heavy financial burden. Fortunately for the schools and unfortunately for the students, most people who start those courses never finish them. They just lose interest. Or they haven't the stamina to carry through. They want to learn, but they don't want that learning badly enough to stick at the learning.

Yet the finest engineer I personally ever knew got most of his training from a correspondence school. And I have heard the legend of the farmer who, paralyzed in an accident, started at the simplest forms of mathematics, worked his way by correspondence courses through to calculus and beyond, and became one of the country's really great mathematicians.

It's a matter of grit and perseverance.

Examinations—Good and Bad

When I was young enough not to know better, I thought that examinations proved something. I could loaf through the first quarter of a year, plug under the midnight Mazda the night before the examination, take the examination and knock out an A, and convince myself that I knew the subject. I didn't realize that cramming like that was no more mental nourishment than you could call it physical nourishment to stuff oneself with a Thanksgiving dinner and then not eat for the rest of the month. Cramming knowledge, like cramming food, gives you a glorious case of indigestion and contributes almost nothing permanent to your brain.

Yet boys and girls and somewhat older young men and women continue to cram for examinations and convince themselves that they have mastered the subjects. Poor chumps! No wonder the schools turn out degreed ignoramuses.

The one purpose of an examination from the viewpoint of the student is that it forces him to review material he has already learned. The

review ties together what he has learned and serves to hold that material in a unified firmness. But if he has not studied throughout the quarter or the semester, if he has not done the slow, day-by-day learning that is essential for memory, he has learned very little. The high mark that may crown his crammed examination merely proves that he could have learned if he had gone about it in the right way. Actually what he crammed, he will forget so fast that were he to take that exam six months later, his erstwhile A would be a D or less, and he would flunk the subject that he thought he had mastered.

Learning Is Slow

There are of course no rules for genius.

So if you are a genius, you have probably not read this far; and if out of your insatiable curiosity you have read this far, you can safely stop here. I'll be able to teach you nothing.

For the run-of-the-classroom and the run-of-the-world man and woman learning is a slow and tedious business. We are a little like the frog in the well, jumping up two feet and falling back one, jumping another two feet and falling back another one. We don't acquire knowledge in one great leap. We acquire and forget, learn again and forget again, master and miss, grab and realize that much of what we grabbed is slipping through our mental fingers.

It was a great professor of psychology who outlined for me an unforgettable approach to learning that I have used a thousand times. I pass it on to you because it has been invaluable to me. Others who have used it have found it top-notch.

Attention to the Expert

The outline began with this simple fact: When an expert talks, he is worth listening to.

I had been sitting in classes a long time before I mastered that very obvious principle. It took a psychologist to make it clear to me. Since that day when an expert has talked in my presence, in class or elsewhere, I have listened, and if possible I have taken notes.

Whoever the expert might be, I entered his presence with a notebook in my hand. As he talked, I took down carefully what he said—though not verbatim. I never learned shorthand; even had I mastered the hooks and angles, I know I should not have used them. For I have learned that a stenographer can take down exactly what you say and at the end of the time remember nothing of what you said. It is important that a court reporter take down an exact record; an exact record is not particularly valuable to a student, a learner.

(Even if you are no longer in school, don't stop here. This holds for school and out of school.)

Because I could not take down the expert's every word, my mind had to work continuously. I had to sort out his ideas and select those I needed and wanted. I had to learn to synopsise, to abbreviate. I was digesting as I was listening.

For years of my formal education I took elaborate notes in class. I still have those notes. For at the end of class I went at once to my room and typed the notes in highly visible form. I used capitals, underlining, the red section of the typewriter ribbon, careful spacing, a system of indenting that I developed for myself. To my listening I added the writing; to the writing I joined synopsizing; to the whole procedure of his lecture I added a rewrite in a visual form that helped my eye and my memory.

Listen When He Talks

The average student in a classroom sits and listens. The laziest of our senses is hearing—

the laziest and probably the most inaccurate. Also the steady drone of any voice however fascinating soon lulls you to restfulness, to a relaxed attitude, to sleep.

If you don't believe this, try when next you have listened to a radio broadcast to write down even a small portion of what the radio star or speaker said. Try to list the subjects touched on by the commentator . . . the names mentioned by the gossip columnist . . . the jokes cracked by your favorite comedian. You are going to be appalled at your short memory—or your realization of how badly you have listened.

If the speaker happens to be discussing a tough subject, one that brings out a lot of technical details, and you simply sit and listen, your retention—unless once more you are a genius—is very slight. Your mind goes drowsy or becomes overpacked, refusing to take in any more. You have put your full reliance on your hearing, and that is a weak reed indeed.

But if you follow intently and makes notes as you follow, those notes will with time become more and more systematic, more and more comprehensive. When the talk is over, your brain will have retained what your hearing transmitted to it; but your fingers have pinned to paper far more than your brain could continue to hold; your fingers have worked with ears. So you have two records, one reenforcing the other. And you really have caught what the star, the expert, the commentator, has said.

Maybe the Man Is Good

It's very possible that the man you've listened to is worth hearing.

More than likely he is an expert, or he would not be teaching you.

Or since you bothered to attend his lecture, you evidently took it for granted that he knew what he was talking about.

The speaker must be somehow worth while . . . or why did you bother to listen at all?

For years he has been accumulating the information that in distilled and condensed form he has poured out for your thirsting mind. He read a hundred books to get the knowledge he now possesses. He traveled and observed and listened. And into this hour of class or lecture he concentrated for you the results of his study.

Genius though you be, you cannot master in an hour what has taken him a good part of a lifetime to gather. But because he probably talked so clearly and so logically and jammed so much information in your direction, you flattered yourself, as you listened, that you were becoming on the spot an educated person. The truth of the matter is that the quantity and quality of his material were too much for you to assimilate on the spot. You need more time, a leisure retrospect on what he said.

If you are a member of one of these women's clubs at which the mastery of the history of modern painting is promised you between luncheon and the first hand of contract, skip my suggestions.

It is as a teacher that I make the suggestions. As I stand before a class, I look eagerly for watching eyes and waiting pencils. The class that reclines on its spines, the audience that just gazes at me with however flattering an attention, may enjoy my talk; they will remember little of it. My witticisms may briefly amuse them; the content of my talk will elude them; and what they remember, they will remember with amazing incorrectness or bewildering incompleteness.

Nothing else pleases a speaker more than the sight of an eager beaver pushing hard on a

pencil. I beg my audiences to take notes. I plead with classes to jot down what I say: "Take down everything—except my jokes. Please leave me those; I shall need them again next year."

The Simple Steps

So in class, or at the lecture, or riding on the streetcar, you take notes on what you want to remember.

Then comes the second step: As soon as possible after you have taken the notes, you transcribe them into whatever form you approve for yourself.

That transcription is a new way to tie in the fresh information with the information you already have and make it part of your permanent knowledge. What you heard through your ears and noted down with a pencil, you now pour into yourself through a pen or the keys of a typewriter; you really recatch the information a third time.

Now, says my great psychologist, you sit down and quietly and slowly read what you have written or typed. Do this the last thing at night before you retire. What you read then has a way of sticking with you through the course of your sleep; your subconscious is a great help to learning. When you enlist the subconscious, you have a new ally. All night long the new knowledge has churned in your subconscious, readying itself for your awakening.

On your awakening or as soon in the morning after you waken, you carefully reread your notes. You are fresh then and mentally vigorous—even if you feel sleepy and on the mentally drowsy side.

At the end of the week you carefully reread the notes of the entire week.

At the end of the month you carefully reread the notes of the entire month.

Believe me, you have the information now—with knowledge and understanding. You will not need to cram for the examination. What you have slowly digested through a variety of approaches is stored within you beyond possibility of swift forgetfulness. You may even have made it a part of yourself for life.

Reading's the Same

So many books in recent years have been written about how to read that one hesitates to offer his own particular how.

Yet learning is so intimately tied in with reading that it is impossible to write this pamphlet without some references to books and the reading of them.

Books are essential to modern living. The beating that the publishers took in the depression days indicates that to many people books are a luxury. For that matter to some people all forms of learning are luxuries, not essentials. All kinds of Jacks and Janes don't want to learn; they find it so much more comfortable and relaxing to be "happy in ignorance."

But we do learn from books, learn so much about so many things. It's not alone the geography that teaches us of foreign lands, the biography that introduces us to the achievements of the great, the psychology that probes into human minds, the history that lays out before us the panorama of world events that is important. There is the book on religion that takes us by the hand and leads us to God . . . the poetry that gives us the secrets of the human heart . . . the great drama and the magnificent novels that introduce us to lives that make us understand our own lives, our own emotions, our own experiences.

There are books that are frankly texts arranged for our instruction; there are books so

profound that the writer seems to be writing for a very select audience, into which we move perhaps with reluctance.

Some books are worth only the most cursory reading. They take us into the land of Never-Never, where for a short time we escape from the land of Here-and-Now. Fairy tales whatever their form offer us such escape . . . the fables of our childhood, the pulp and slick magazines of the current month, the Arabian nights, the best-selling novel that heads this week's list. All fables, all fairy tales, all avenues down which we run to escape the drabness or the apparent uneventfulness of the average life. To try to remember the plots or the characters in these books is to burden our minds with uselessness. Better to remember important phone numbers; in the long run they will be of much more service. These books are meant as brief respites from reality, brief forays into lands and lives and minds hitherto unexplored, brief contacts with people whose constant companionship would be boring, dangerous, and in the end perhaps tragic associations.

Digesting the Book

But even the most cursory reading is some kind of education.

People who read are just that much better off than people who don't read, as people who have eyes are more blessed than people who are sightless.

The cheapest book may leave some residue of learning. The comics can bring a brief laugh, a short thrill, an association with adventure, a contact with the unusual and the different.

Worth-while books however are basic to any form of learning. Great plays, great novels, great poetry, great history and biography, great books of science, great philosophy and theology—

all are mines from which we can gather the rich ore that can become part of our mental and spiritual treasures.

Those figures of speech, ore and treasure, have been for generations natural ones, almost incapable in their symbolism for learning.

We handle a book in much the fashion that a miner and a smelter handle ore.

We desire and look for the high-grade book or the high-grade ore.

Reading a great book or mining gold and diamonds is a process of digging, a process made pleasant by the constant promise of our striking a vein or turning up a Kohinoor. But in a book we strike the veins and come upon the precious gems, far, far more frequently than the most fortunate prospector comes upon the treasure he seeks.

Digging and reading are however only the first steps toward learning. A book is no good to us if we go no further than the reading of it—as the ore just from the mines is not much good if it is not run through a series of further processes. We shall omit here the crushing and washing and sifting, the smelting and careful refining comparisons of the ore with books; but we can keep those processes in the back of our heads as we consider the matter of learning from books.

Some Pointers

With me the steps of reading are rather simple:

1. I decide whether the book I am about to read is momentary entertainment and relaxation, a passing fillip to the imagination, a stimulus to the emotions, an introduction to characters who are worth only a nod . . . or a book that will supply something of knowledge and experience for my life.

2. If the book is worth remembering, if it has something to teach me, I approach it, not with a running flash of the eye, but in a series of steps.

3. I read it through for the first time almost rapidly and as a unit. I want to get a general picture of the whole story or purpose of the book. I want to feel what the author felt when he was writing the book: the main purpose, the main line of development, the relationship between the principal facts or ideas and the subordinate ones.

4. I then go back over the book for a second perusal. Note that I do not say a second reading; the perusal may be along lines different from the first reading.

5. If the book is really worth remembering, if it will add appreciably to my mental breadth and capacity, out comes once more the inevitable pencil:

- a. I make a careful synopsis of the book.
- b. Or I simply page through the book and work out for myself what I consider are the author's purpose, main lines of discussion, plots or counterplots, thesis, proofs for the thesis, and development of characters.

6. With the book still before me, I read through my own notes, my personal reactions to the book. I treat these notes as I treated the notes of the great teacher or the interesting lecturer:

- a. Before I retire for the night, I reread my synopsis.
- b. I reread the synopsis on my arising in the morning.
- c. I glance over the synopsis at the end of the week.
- d. With the book before me I go through my notes at the end of the month.

7. It may be that the book is worth discussion. The pleasantest way to discuss a book is with a friend or a group of friends—naturally with a friend or friends who have read the book; it is sheer waste and merely a catering to conceit to allow someone to discuss a book he has not read. The number of people who are quite willing to give their opinions on a book that they have never cracked is something to astonish the somewhat more honest among readers.

8. In my own case if I can get an audience to listen to me, I like to give an hour's lecture on the book in the form of a book review. I suppose that somewhat the same value could be got from one's writing a book review for a journal or a local newspaper or even putting one's discussion of it in a letter to a tolerant friend.

Whichever of these means you choose to discuss the book, when you have passed that stage, the book has become part of your mental and emotional equipment. If it is at all possible, the book should become a part of your library. For in the course of the years a good book should be picked up and paged through again and again. Each time it will offer you something new. Even the mere scanning of it will bring back worth-while passages you had forgotten, characters you had understood only rather casually, and a fuller realization of the author's mental and emotional richness.

Digests Won't Do

Some books deserve a digest—and nothing more.

Typical of the modern attitude toward books was that of the lady who gushed when she met the author: "I so much enjoyed your last book. The story was told to me by a lady who read the digest in a current magazine."

As an experiment I tried to find out what I would get by reading digests of current books. I confess that most current books are hard enough to remember. If you doubt this, try to recall the plot of any of the popular books you have read recently; then try to draw up a list of the characters who figured in those books. Nature is merciful; she sees to it that we swiftly forget most of the contemporaneous junk we read.

But if it is hard to remember the book, it is simply impossible to remember the digest—at least that was the case with me. I read for three months a series of digest magazines. Out of them I remembered a few medical facts, one or two amusing jokes, a character or two that seemed unusual . . . and nothing else. Of those condensed novels and collapsed books there remained in my mind so pitifully little.

A book was written because an author needed elbowroom in which to play around with his idea. That central thought was, he felt, too large for an essay. It could not be compressed into a short story. It needed fullness, a carving in the round, some flesh, some blood, some breathing space. So the idea was embodied in a book. . . . Then it is squeezed, cut, digested . . . and the result is usually nearly indigestible. Better perhaps to read a digested book than no book at all; but a digest will do little for your mental development or your progressive learning.

Theory Not Enough

An ancient joke told of the young man who took correspondence lessons in swimming. He practiced faithfully, lying on his bed—and he drowned when he dropped off a dock and into the water.

You cannot learn to play a piano just by listening to others play.

You cannot learn to dance by lying back on your spine and watching two great dancers perform for you.

You can learn the tricks of great oratory by listening to great speakers; you will remain inarticulate as long as you yourself do not talk.

All of which is just another way of saying that to learn you have to couple—and promptly—practice and principle. Theory is essential; but it remains just theory until you put it to work, practice it.

Wedding Principle to Practice

In my high-school days science was taught by the lecture method. I sat and listened to principles of chemistry and physics, and I observed—with less rather than more interest—while the teacher worked the experiments before my eyes. Today I know nothing of either chemistry or physics, though I passed my examinations with A grades.

When it came to literature however, talk by the teacher was cut to a minimum. He demonstrated the rules that underlie good writing. He opened for us the books in which those principles were employed by great writers to produce great writing. Then I plunged with avid interest into the task of writing. I wrote and wrote and wrote. Luckily I fell under the lash of teachers who demanded plenty of written exercises. I joined the staff of the school paper—and I rewrote many times the material that was finally accepted. I tried my hand at writing for outside publication, professional publication. I landed the very first story I submitted and the first light verse I offered . . . and for three years I failed to land again.

But I was writing and writing and writing. The wonder is that I did not become a writer instead of the approximate-writer I confess to be.

The importance of the wedding of theory and practice holds for any phase of living. Naturally awkward and ungraceful, I was sent to dancing school. We had a minimum of theory, I recall; but we did learn the waltz step. In a side excursion I managed to learn the break step that is essential to the ancient buck and wing and still fundamental to tap dancing. I never became a dancer, heaven knows; but the basic principles were exemplified for me in enough practice to make me understand good dancing and relish it in others.

The Steps to Take

To learn to use principles in practice, it has always seemed to me, we could take note of the way that a great writer trains himself to write. What he does in order to learn, all learners do in some way.

Let's follow the great-writers-to-be.

1. Deep inside him there awakes an interest in writing, perhaps because as a child he read and enjoyed reading . . . perhaps because he is enthusiastic about some author and longs to copy him . . . perhaps because he has had some experience, some emotion, some hate, some love, that he wants to put before the reading world.

2. Of this you may be sure: He has read. If he has not read and read widely, he is never going to write.

3. When he picks up pen or pencil, he fumbles and hesitates. He realizes how little he knows about how to write. He has no words for the thoughts inside him, and he confesses his ignorance. That confession is a great start toward great learning.

4. So he gets a textbook. A textbook on writing is nothing more than this: a compilation of the ways in which the better writers came to write. Shakespeare said it this way. . . . Macaulay wrote this kind of sentence and used these figures of speech. . . . Here's the way Hawthorne wrote . . . and Conrad and Kipling a hundred years later. This is verse as the Elizabethans did it . . . and here is the poetry of the Cavaliers . . . and Pope's challenging mind in his verses . . . and Keats' burning passion in his songs. Finally Ogden Nash . . . and T. S. Eliot. Once a writer has become great, he ceases to study the textbooks; the textbooks study him. Before he becomes great, he finds out somehow how great writers have written and write, and he becomes like them . . . or he sets off on his own individual style.

5. During all the time he is reading, our future writer is writing. He writes anything that occurs to him, and he does it with infinite labor and drudgery. He knows how bad his stuff is — save for occasional flashes. But he writes, rewrites, tears up and writes again. If he turns out a good paragraph in an afternoon of sweat, he is satisfied.

6. He goes back to the great writers. How did they do so well the kind of thing he has done so badly? So perhaps he models himself on them, copies them, unabashedly imitates them. He sits at the feet of the masters; and they teach him even though he has met them only through their published works.

7. As he reads and writes, he comes to realize how little he knows of life and people. So he watches and listens. He goes out of his way to meet unusual types of people. In his studying he notes what other lands and other times were like. He gets into circumstances and situations unlike his own. He does not confine himself to a limited

circle of people; he wants to know various kinds of people living various kinds of lives and having various kinds of ideas. He wants experience.

8. When he has gathered some material and acquired some skill in writing, he applies skill to material.

9. Perhaps a kind friend will be a satisfactory critic, and to him he submits his work for criticism.

10. But the best critic is the professional editor. So the potential writer reads a variety of magazines to learn what each periodical wants, and he submits what he feels the particular magazines may need or approve. And if his stuff comes speedily back to him, the rejection slip is an unmistakable criticism.

11. When he lands his first manuscript, he has just begun to learn. Bad authors get into the rut, the groove. Good authors continue to experiment, to learn, to observe, to adventure along new lines, to strive toward improvement . . . until the end of their lives.

All the Same

The scientist works in the same way that the writer does.

And so does the dancer . . . the musician . . . the chess player . . . the photographer . . . the painter . . . anyone who wants to continue to learn, to increase his store of knowledge, to widen and deepen his skills.

We learn by:

1. Admiring others.
2. Being curious about life.
3. Wanting to assimilate to ourselves.
4. Reading.
5. Associating with interesting people.
6. Living with open eyes and keeping our curiosity alive.

7. Doing things ourselves — first fumblingly, then as pleasant amateurs, then with skill.

8. By exercise, exercise, exercise; by doing things again, again, and yet again.

Everything Can Teach Us

My great good fortune has taken me into a wide orbit of space and a wide circle of people. This I have learned and this I now know: that every place is a classroom, every thing is a textbook, every one will teach you — if you let him.

Each place in your own community, your town, your city is worth learning about. It is amazing however the way we can see things without seeing them, can wander through varieties of physical and mental architecture and not realize the infinite variety. Each American city is a complex of the nations. How many people learn Europe and Africa right in their own home town!

Everything can be a text for our instruction. I am not one to laugh at the men who pause at an excavation and watch the machines at work. Future architects may be there . . . and youngsters who are witnessing and will experience the creative urge. The husband planning a home and now watching the laying of a foundation of a building may really be seeing how the cellar of his own house is dug.

I recall that a great pianist and orchestra conductor spent an afternoon a week listening to popular records. The melodies were stale and banal; but the orchestrations he found exciting, different, and technically material that he could well study and profit by.

Everyone has experiences, stories, sides of character which, if we ever reached them, could give us new breadth and depth. Too many of us talk, and too few of us listen. Too many of us

want to tell our story; our story would be vastly improved if we listened more attentively to the stories of others. We can learn very much from the characters and the "characters" — the strong ones, the eccentric ones, the very unusual ones.

Summing up: We need never stop learning.

To our great consolation we may be sure that if we have curiosity and an open mind, if we live with our five senses on the alert, even though we learn slowly, the learning is enormously pleasant and stimulating.

Learning Goes On

How wrong I was when I thought that my formal education was the sum of my education! How lucky I have been that throughout my life so many people and so many things have continued to expand my mind, delight my eyes, add to my slight store of information, give my sympathies new depths!

When I was a very young priest, I carried with me a notebook, and I made jottings. Now I make notes and jottings on slips of paper and the backs of envelopes. Out of those notes and jottings has grown a column which I mildly syndicated, "Along the Way." If my readers enjoy the people I describe, the humorous things I recount, the places I talk about, the retailed incidents I find exciting, I can assure them that their enjoyment could not possibly match my enjoyment of those people and things. I did not start to write that column because I dreamed it would be great literature; I wrote because the need to fill a weekly section of newspapers would, I believed, make me continue to learn.

I have had to listen. I have had to observe people. I have been avid of new experiences. I have heard variously striking things.

I have continued to learn, and the learning has been to me delightful.

God's Way

God intended us to continue to grow. Once our bodies stop growing, our minds take over the fullness of growing. Our bodies can reach only certain normal heights. But our souls have no limits. They can continue to grow and grow. Curiosity can become keener. Minds can become sharper by their impact on and contact with interesting books and people. Senses can become continuously more perceptive. We come to get more and more from a printed page in less and less time. Our memory of old music and familiar pictures matches our zest for new harmonies and the strange, inchoate beauties of modern painting.

To our great solace the painful process of learning that marked our school days eventually becomes the delightful, half-unconscious mental growth that characterizes an alert and interested adult.

God meant us to grow and grow and grow.

Heaven will be largely a constant growth in our knowledge of the infinite beauty and truth that is God, a clearer perception of the Beatific Vision.

But earth can be a very satisfactory — if temporary and partial — prelude to and preparation for heaven . . . men and women going through life wholesomely curious, watchful, attentive, eager, learning more and more of the great world that God has placed around them.

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