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THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

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AFTER preaching the following doctrine at conferences all around the triangle—Chicago, Cambridge, and Philadelphia—I have learned what reactions to expect from objectors, and this experience accounts for the emphasis placed on certain points. The reactions are conveniently expressed in these questions:

What is the good of research?
What is worth doing?
Shall we be allowed to do it?
Who will do it?

In answering the first question, I hold that by the scholarship which is the product of research the standing of our work in the academic world will be improved. It will make us orthodox. Research is the standard way into the sheepfold.

We have lacked scholarship. We complain of prejudice and unjust discrimination, and we have grounds; but we had best face the truth. In the long run men pass for what they are. We have lacked scientific foundation for our special work. We have fought a great deal about our particular way of doing things. Some have stood for imitation, some for systems of rules, or other systems; and many have thrown all systems away and preached the one magic word, "Think," without much consideration of what thinking involves. It is a great word, but salvation lies in no word.

We are split up into all sorts of schools of belief. To a certain extent that is desirable, but we fail to agree on the most fundamental matters. We have of course made spotty progress; but if we are to make rapid progress and deserve fully the recognition we demand, we must have the services of investigators; we must encourage young men to take up research in our field.

I am talking to my own kind now. I have no great humility before teachers in other lines. Toward them we bristle with

defiance. But that is just the trouble—we do bristle. We are not able yet to take ourselves for granted. We shall feel better and do better when we can. And this is where I connect the higher with the lower motive: we shall not only stand better but teach better, when we have more scholarship; when we have the better understanding of fundamentals and training in the methods which test and determine truth.

Is it not true that as a class we trust too much to limited observation, theorize too quickly from limited data? Finding that a certain method helps in some cases, do we not too often jump to the conclusion that it embodies a great principle? And we repeat our guess until we believe it proved. We need the man of patient research to subject our guesses to rigid investigation. For example, I happen to believe there has been a deal of nonsense talked about the force of brevity in public speech, and believe I can make a pretty good case for my contention. But it would be nonsense to claim that I have really investigated the subject. I have reflected and theorized on the basis of narrow observation.

Now, is there any reason, in this age when every other branch of human knowledge is being ruthlessly pulled to pieces and tested why our branch should be passed over? Ideas that have been held truth for centuries on somebody's say-so, or on superficial common observation, are being overturned, or in many cases they are being re-established on firmer bases, and made more useful because their whys and wherefores are better understood. For be it noted, research does not mean the destruction of all. What we believe we have learned by experience will in most cases stand up. And in the process of investigation many new truths, before unsuspected, will be discovered.

In every field common-sense resists the investigator; for common-sense is a stand-patter. Frequently common-sense is right in the long run; and frequently one investigator overthrows another, whereat common-sense rejoices. Yet it is largely due to the investigator that progress is made in engineering, in medicine, in economics, and in what field you will. For it is simply not true that common observation reveals all the truth.

A dozen years ago I was with my mother-in-law on a Southern Pacific Train which was running out on the "Mole" which juts from Oakland into San Francisco Bay. At a considerable distance north a rival road was building a bridge work, perhaps a mile long into the bay. "Why," inquired mother-in-law, a woman of strong common-sense, "why do they build that on a curve?" I tried to explain that the trestle was actually straight and that the curve was an optical illusion. "But," she demanded with the air of one who will not be hoodwinked by any college professor's theories, "do I not see it with my own eyes?" Nor did my best arguments prevail until on our return trip we came to a point where we could look down on that bridge work, straight as a gun from start to finish.

You and I have our individual experience and observation, and our theorizing. We argue about this and that. I give you all sorts of theoretical reasons why the trestle is straight and you do not accept them. Scientific research says, "Let us go and see, and if necessary let us take the most delicate instruments to settle the question." We talk of standardization of our work; but there can be no standardization until we have more standardized truth.

But having delivered myself in this fashion of late, I was taken aback to hear a friend rise and say that he could see no need for research, that to him public speaking was a simple thing and no mystery; it is just a matter of being clear and convincing, etc. Anyhow, speaking is an art and art can learn nothing from science. One is not so much surprised when an outsider fails to see that we have any opportunity for research; for outsiders, including our colleagues, often see nothing in our work except voice-training, and that is as simple as telling people to stop talking through their noses. To the outsider one may explain as patiently as may be that a subject which deals with human nature at every turn is not too simple for investigation. One may ask him why, if it is profitable to study how corn is best planted and its sprout brought to maturity, we may not profitably study how an idea is planted in a human mind and brought to fruition. Or the cross-fertilization of plants might be compared to the cross-fertilization of minds.

But when men of our own profession ask, as one asked, "What is the use; have we not perfectly good thumb rules?" then we must wonder. Sometimes we find that the objectors do not understand what is proposed; they think everything is to be overturned. Sometimes the objector has been so hard at work that he hasn't stopped to think. Sometimes he has asserted certain beliefs so long that he cannot consider the possibility that they are wrong, and sometimes he has invented a special system on which depends his darling reputation. But when one hears a teacher say that speaking is too simple for research, one loses his breath and sputters. Just to be clear and pleasing and convincing and persuasive—yes, indeed, that is all there is to it! One recalls the advice to a shy man: "Adopt an easy and graceful manner, especially toward the ladies."

We are now well on our way to answering the question: What is worth doing? Suppose we take first the matter of voice-training. How little we actually know about that! There are systems enough; there are some teachers who admit they know all about it, but unfortunately they fail to agree. Study the books and see what is established truth about so fundamental a matter as breathing. Only yesterday I was reviewing with a friend who has exceptional knowledge of voice a recently written chapter on the subject. We agreed that the treatment of breathing was even vicious, and we found other important matters to challenge. Now, we may have been right, or the author may have been. The point is that these fundamental questions (questions of fact, mind you) ought to be settled. Is there not need for patient, scientific research in voice? No field has suffered more from quacks. It is no answer to say that some teachers can sometimes get good results.

I speak of voice work first, not because our needs are more real in that phase, but merely more apparent. There are problems enough waiting for us, and of a variety to suit every taste and capacity. Our field touches many another, especially psychology, education, and English. Much work has been done in those fields which is immediately available for us, provided we learn how to adapt it. For some time, probably, while we are learning the use of the tools, our work should be adaptation. Then we shall

be able to take up many problems that others will not touch. It is useless to attempt to go into great detail here; for no one can tell in advance what will be opened up, once we begin prospecting; but some general suggestions can be made.

Those of psychological training may revel in congenial problems. Professor Joseph S. Gaylord will no doubt present discussions of such problems in these pages. Some of us may not be able to follow his methods and may wonder how such problems can be scientifically studied; but we may trust to men who have made a study of such methods. We can all understand such a work as *The Metaphor: A Study in the Psychology of Rhetoric*, by Professor Gertrude Buck of Vassar, done as a Doctor's thesis at Michigan. I am not prepared to pass on the quality of the work, but use it to illustrate the sort of thing that can be done. And, by the way, Miss Mary Yost, also of Vassar, is working now a second year at Michigan, producing heresies, as she writes: or rather finding that there is no orthodoxy. We must all agree that in spite of the good work done in argumentation, we are far from the end of the matter.

The relation of logic to belief, of attention to belief, of emotion to belief—there is a plenty of material ready to be adapted to our use on these questions. Persuasion, a tremendous study in human nature, needs much work. The very meaning of the word is hazy. I know a young man who is preparing a thesis in English on the uses of the words "fancy" and "imagination" in literature, which, I am assured by high authority, is a genuine contribution to human knowledge. If that be true, surely a study of the words "persuasion" and "conviction" should be worth a Master's thesis. I know one would-be author who would be saved a great deal of trouble if that work were well done; and I know that our teaching on the subject would be much improved by clearer ideas.

The whole psychology of persuasion needs labor. Professor Woolbert will soon publish a book on the subject. I know he agrees with me that, instead of establishing many truths, he will start controversies which should be settled by investigators.

Many have used the speeches of Brutus and Antony to illustrate persuasion. A Master's thesis might well be written on

them, reviewing the literature touching upon them and considering their psychology.

The whole topic of "suggestion" bristles with hints for us. There has been a deal of nonsense talked about suggestion, but it presents possibilities. Professor W. D. Scott, in his *Influencing Men in Business*, makes a comparison of suggestion and argument. It is not satisfactory, but might form a starting-point.

Novelty, familiarity, and interest might form a subject for intensive study. Studies in crowds, and in the means of influencing society are pertinent when we take the broader view, and these are waiting for those grounded in history, psychology, and social science.

Men of literary training will find many studies awaiting them in the literature of oratory. If it be worth while to study the influences which form a writer, why not the influences which made a Webster?

Problems enough of every sort for every sort. Some are large, some small. We should not be put to the straits of some of our friends for worth-while subjects. I have heard Professor Charles DeGarmo, the well-known authority on education, chuckling over the men in language work, forced to get out a new edition of a classic which has more than enough editions already. We shall not for some time be driven to the painful emendation of the text of Demosthenes or to studying the influence of Quintilian on Patrick Henry. We ought not to be led into dry-as-dust studies, and I do not fear that we shall be; we are too constantly confronted by the practical nature of our work. Our difficulty will be in getting into a sufficiently scientific frame of mind. Probably we shall do foolish things at first, as others have. We should begin humbly and grow. Each man of course can do but a small part of the work. We shall proceed, but slowly—all the more reason why we should begin soon.

Will research in public speaking be permitted in the universities? Research is not likely to be done unless for degrees and under encouraging circumstances. Probably it will not be encouraged at first everywhere. Professor Winter informs me that the outlook is hopeful at Harvard. At Cornell, as strict as any university in regard to her advanced degrees, I am told by the dean of our Graduate School, a professor of philosophy and a man of severe educational ideals, that he is glad we wish to do advanced work;

that it will be good for us, good for our work, and good for the university.

Who will do the work? is a question asked. It is hard enough to get men now. We recognize that the work must be done by brainy young people. We who have reached middle life without training in methods will not do much more than try to keep up, restrain excesses, and give encouragement. My belief is that we shall find it easier to win young men to our field when we show them a chance to use their brains, to win a degree and a respected position.

When men can enter our fold in the orthodox manner, we shall not be limited to the rare young man who has a real vocation for it, and those who take it up casually as a makeshift, or because they have large voices and have won a prize from other still worse, more "collegey" orators, or to those who go into public speaking because that is the only field they can break into without preparation. I hope that Ph.D.'s will never be put above real merit, but I hope that some genuine study in preparation will become imperative. I look forward to a good time coming when our work will have the recognition we crave for it; and that will come as a matter of course when we have developed a body of established knowledge.

I preach, in season and out of season, the value of conferences and periodicals, because they stir up our minds, jar us out of our complacent faith in our pet systems, and start us digging. I wish also to throw out again a suggestion which aroused a great deal of interest at the Chicago meeting last fall: that we should have a summer school for teachers of public speaking old and young. Let it be in a jolly place where we can rest and have some fun, say in a camp. Let there be no faculty and no fees, except for absolute expenses. If twenty-five teachers of speaking with three or four of the right sort of workers in educational psychology and in English could live together four weeks, three weeks, even two weeks, in a sort of continuing conference, each giving his best, and all working together to find out what our problems are and how to attack them, we should go home with opened eyes. The result would be a great impulse to research. And the new ideas, breaking down the old monotonous round of thought, would give mental rest.