



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Adult education, undated.

I.

Friends: I have been asked to say a few words in behalf of the program of Adult Education which the Cleveland ~~Council for~~ ^{Association} Adult Education is promulgating. I do so gladly for I know of no movements in our national life today which ~~is~~ ^{are} deserving of more encouragement.

Education, which means the cultivation of the power of concentration, of effective thinking and of ^{the} creative imagination, should be a life process. It should continue in increasing scope and power from birth until death. Unfortunately, most men ~~are~~ ^{are or only} ~~are~~ ^a ~~are~~ ^{men} ~~are~~ ^{men} of formal education in their early youth and from then on they live off that small capital ^{which they} ~~augment~~ ^{augment} from time to time with ~~the~~ ^{small} little scraps of information gleaned from newspapers, magazines or from a helter-skelter reading of books. Even those who are privileged to attend ^a college or ^a university ~~seldom~~ ^{seldom} continue their education consistently and ^{purposefully} ~~purposefully~~ ^{after} ~~after graduation.~~

In manhood, one's vocation absorbs most of his time and energy.

Our age is, of necessity, an age of specialization. We demand today, that the man who sets out to serve our needs, whether it be to teach us or to amuse us or to dress us or to feed us, should be a specialist in his chosen vocation. We are no longer satisfied with people who can do numerous things tolerably well. We want ^{the} ~~a~~ man ^{who is} ~~to be~~ able to do one thing ^{and the need of} absolutely well. Our highly organized industrial life, efficiency in production, ~~and~~ distribution and service, demands such high specialization. And it is well that it is so. I have no fault to find with conditions which life inevitably brings about. I seek to utilize those conditions rather than to fight them when the fight is absolutely hopeless.

Now, as far as earning a living is concerned, specialization is a tremendous help. As far as earning a life is concerned, specialization is ~~the~~ ^a ~~the~~ ^{the} greatest menace. For a man is more than a job, and life is more than a living.

We need, in society today, more of creative amateurs. By amateurs, I mean a man who pursues an object not because he is driven to it by an economic urge, not out of necessity, but out of ^{his} ~~a~~ sheer love for it.

Now, the American business man is a professional, completely and perfectly. He is nothing else. ^{In} his business, ~~he~~ ^{he} is keyed ^{up}, alert, energetic, enterprising, full of initiative, full of daring. In his leisure, he is a dull drab, stogy, uninteresting individual.

II.

I don't like to generalize. Generalizations are, of necessity, misleading and erroneous. But I am endeavoring to stress a thought forcibly, and you can make your own qualifications as I go along.

live The American business man ~~has~~ ^{lives} one life - and a man should ~~have~~ ^{have} more than one life and more than one world in which to live. The American business man comes to his home to eat, to sleep. That beautiful art of home-building, ~~that~~ ^{the} spiritual home, ~~that~~ ^{the} home that is fashioned out of the delicate strands of associations ~~and companionship and mind and spirit, and memory, and associations~~ - that home is becoming an antiquated institution in our life today. We haven't the energy to see through this marvelous experiment of homebuilding. We come home, frazzled and worn, spiritually, mentally, ~~and~~ ^{and} physically exhausted. We go to our clubs, not for recreation, not to re-create ourselves - but we go to our clubs to ~~smoke or to play cards~~ ^{for diversion, to play, and} ~~can~~ to exchange some trivial banalities over a cloud of smoke.

in most instances We bring to our theatres - what? Nothing. No stimulation. We demand nothing of our theatres, and so our theatres give us nothing but glitter, and a sharp relish for our jaded palates.

Success, I am afraid, has become our exacting taskmaster. It has claimed everything.

I recall a friend of mine who started out ~~in~~ ^{his} life heroically, splendidly equipped, generously endowed by nature with an agile mind, a keen intellect, a sensitive soul. And men prophesied wonderful things for him. He loved books, he loved music, he had a host of friends, his interests were various - he was developing into a well-rounded human being.

But early in life he was caught up by that competitive passion which is the dominant key of our national symphony, if you choose. He became obsessed with the idea that he must succeed. And by success he meant material success in his chosen business calling. He determined to apply himself, every inch of him, every ounce of that energy of the top, to be master, to dominate. *this, to reach*

He did. He brought all his fine equipment to play upon that one job, and he succeeded. But in the process of getting there, he had no time for his books and his music and his friends. Success in an exacting tyrant. It tolerates no double or manifold allegiance. He lost contact with the ~~world~~ ^{human} ~~without~~ ^{about him}. He raced through life as if life were a race and the only thing worth while in life was the goal that man must reach.

III.

He didn't have time to pause and look about him and see the world and admire the handiwork of God. He didn't have time to live an eternity in every moment, as we can do if so we will; but he raced through life. And he arrived at that pinnacle, that mountain height of success, a triumph - an acclaimed triumph. But no one knew as much as he, himself, what a terrible tragedy he had made out of his life. He arrived, a starved, stunted, ingrown personality, emptied of content, a well-tooled, sharpened and seasoned instrument of acquisition - but nothing else.

The man in him, the God in him, ~~was~~^{was} dead. He had failed as a man even as he succeeded as a business man. And he spent the remaining years of his life nursing that health which he had wasted, squandered as a spendthrift. And I knew what darkness was in his soul and what thoughts were passing through his mind.

There is another, a finer and a sweeter way to live. A man should work, of course, and should work hard to establish himself, to provide for himself and for his family. But a man should never permit himself so to consume himself that he will have nothing left of himself for other things in life; ^{he} should not be victimized by the stupid competitive passion of our day and spend himself ~~in pursuit of aggrandizement of more and more~~ ^{in the} acquisition of those things which will bless neither himself nor his offspring.

But he will pre-empt time for himself. He will have leisure hours and they will be many, for self-cultivation, for self-expression, for self-realization, for meditation. [^] He will have time and energy for creative amateurishness, if you will. And it is creative amateurishness which brings all the romance and the glow and the zest and the splendor of imperishable youth into our lives. It is the things we do because we love to do them, and not because we have to do them, that are the real relish and beauty and lift of our mortal days. ~~And that the American business man and the American professional man ought to learn.~~

I said that a man should have more than one world in which to live - because that world may crumble some day, or you may never realize that world at all. And then what? You are left bereft. You have no other worlds to which to retire and in which to find peace and rest. A man should have more than one citadel, so if one falls, there will be others into which a man may retire.

We ought to learn to prepare ourselves for the role of the amateur in life. We ought to realize that God created man, not the business man and not the book man and not the professional man and not the jobified nor the grooved or routined man but God

He will continue his education for culture and not merely to discover the fundamentals of a successful career - which is that is the American dream. See how much is in his "amateur" is so. Character is much more by the education.

created man capable of a thousand interests, aspirations and yearnings. He breathed into him the spirit of life, the spirit of the unquenchable and aspiring life, the spirit of adventure, the spirit of seeking and searching for new beauty and new mysteries and new revelations in the world.

The ~~Council for~~ ^{Association} Adult Education in our city aims to re-awaken in the lives of the men and women of our community this spirit of intellectual pilgrimage, to rekindle the love for the imperishable things of truth and beauty in our lives. It aims to coordinate the activities of all the educational agencies in our city for a more extensive and effective program of adult education. The school, the university, the art museum, the neighborhood house, the forums, the libraries, — all ^{have} ~~are~~ united in this major effort to give every man and woman in our city ^{increased} ~~the~~ opportunities for cultural growth and development.

The movement is quite young — but it possesses great promise. It needs and deserves the enthusiastic endorsement of our entire community.