

Valedictory Address for Michigan State
Normal College by John D. Puffer 109.
Monday June 17, 1929
Let's not Neglect

As the red-letter day of our college life approaches, ~~our feelings glide back and forth in turn with our thoughts which~~ one moment are with our dream castles and the next are with our responsibilities or with the friends from whom we must part. Happy have been our years at Ypsi? --- yet which of us is sorry he is graduating? We are taking a step. We are going out into the world unafraid of the responsibilities which the world will expect us to assume.

It is impossible; it is unnecessary to even tentatively outline the path which we, the class of '29, will take. Most of us will probably seek from life the greatest satisfactions possible. I believe we are justified in doing so, for if we want satisfactions in our old age, we must learn in our youth how to have satisfactions. More than that, it is then when we can best begin acquiring the things which will be to us a source of pleasure. So let us not be ashamed of our ambitions ~~for~~ acquiring money, fine cars, beautiful homes, or the many other things for which our almost secret feelings crave.

But for most of us, these thoughts need no stimulation. They will occupy their share of our time and more. On this our class day, let us more deeply resolve that we will make our lives more than a mad rush for material. With this in mind, I am asking that we consider for a few moments some age-old thoughts which I have tried to group together under the heading: "Let's not Neglect".

First, let's not neglect the "folks at home". For years our parents sacrificed their time, their efforts, and their pleasures for us. We owe them a debt, classmates, a debt we can never repay. Nothing could be more cruel than to hand them a check, no matter what size, if we said or otherwise conveyed the message, "This squares my obligation to you." Their investment in us means more to them than ~~any material investment~~ stocks, houses, or batches of little pigs. I do not mean that we should not repay monetary obligations. In fact I firmly believe that each of us, whose parents are in ordinary circumstances, should repay at least the amount they expended for our higher education, provided we can do so without offending them. But there are greater things in life than money. We cannot repay our debt, but we can make our parents lives more happy, if we do all we can to ~~demolish~~ any barrier that threatens to come between us. Every little while we read an alleged wise crack such as this one: "Have you any very distant relatives?" "Yes, I have a brother in college!" Such thrusts are maddening, yet too often they are justified. Too many young people come to college where, after the first siege of homesickness is over and the first idea begins to penetrate, they lose interest in the home folks or worse yet develop toward them a superiority complex. Fellow graduates, we can half excuse such conduct on the part of the freshmen because of their tender years, we can not excuse it on the part of ourselves. Regardless of what we have accomplished, be it scholastic, athletic, or social, we are no better than they. Of course we acquire, despite the misgivings to the contrary on the part of our professors, points of view different from those held by our parents. But ~~that~~ should be no barrier. One thing we learn at college is to be tolerant.

Let's remember that toleration is more than refraining from saying, "You're all wet;" toleration comes from trying to see the other person's point of view. It seems that we should be considerate enough of our parents and brothers and sisters to take a little time to see and to understand their problems and their points of view. We do not need to try to agree with them in all things or try to make them agree with us, but we should allow them the happiness of realizing that their college boy or girl is still one of them. And this pleasure, which money can not give, we can grant them by spending a few thoughtful hours writing home when we are away, and by letting them see when we are with them that we feel that home is more than a boarding place for our vacations.

The term "folks at home" does not necessarily mean just our parents and brothers and sisters. Many of us students at Ypsi. come from places where we still know the meaning of the word "neighbor". Furthermore many of us come from communities where one's going to college is the unusual rather than the usual thing. People of such communities take an interest in one another even if this interest often does manifest itself in the gossip which is the bane of the little school teacher. At heart these people are kindly and are just as willing to commend as to criticize. Many of them watched us grow up ---- perhaps with their own children. They are proud of us and like to talk with us. Especially, the older ones like to have us call. ~~(If you will, I would like to see you again, but I am sure you are too busy to do so.)~~ Will you pardon a personal illustration? While I am as negligent as any, there is an old couple at home whom I almost always visit. The old gentleman is practically blind. When I called upon them Christmas time, in response to my greeting, the old gentleman's face lighted up, and as he extended his hand uncertainly, he choked, "I can't see you, Johnnie, but I know your voice. I heard you were home and I knew you would come." A few moments of true friendliness makes a happy spot in the lives of some of these old people, while even (unintentional neglect makes them feel a pang of hurt. Let's not neglect these neighbors of the old home community.

There is a wider circle.
 For the next phase, let us consider a thought which is more nearly independent of the size and nature of our home town. Let's not neglect ---- our friends. Wherever we go we meet people with whom we become friends. Plato couldn't quite tell what a friend is, so why should we bother with a definition? Some one has said, "a friend is some one who really knows you and likes you just the same." Regardless of whether we help one another because we are friends or whether we are friends because we help one another, mutual cooperation seems to be a large factor in friendship. At any rate, as we look over the opportunities which have come to us, can't we all get off our high horses a little and say to ourselves, "You're not so rich; this friend gave me this opportunity; another that one; another the other one ---- gee, did I ever do anything for myself? All of us owe a lot to our friends and like the debt to our parents, ~~it is only a debt~~ *it is a debt*. While in many cases we have little opportunity to do a favor in return for one done us, we can often do one for some one else. Happily, true friends are friends even though they may not bear

the obligation

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Beyond these two circles we can see another, firmly welded on the inside to the former two and extending outward like the hazy horizon. Let's not neglect ---- the other fellow. There are no bounds to this group. On the one hand are the people whom we ourselves do not know whether to classify as friends or as acquaintances; on the other hand are those about whose individual existence we are not aware and yet upon whom our actions produce an effect, good or bad. Classmates, we believe we have the right to seek the things which will bring joy to ourselves or to those who are dear to us. But have we the right to do so when by so doing we know we are depriving others of the privilege? Furthermore, have we the right to dull our feelings in order that the realization of what we are doing may not discomfort us? Of course we do not mean to carry this idea to extremes. Few of us would hesitate to sign a contract for the job we hoped we would get just because some one in Arizona might want it. The very existence, not to mention the progress, of the race is dependent upon competition. But let's be fair. We love life; so does the other fellow.

However, most of us, if we continue to be teachers, need have little worry concerning our influence on the economic struggles of those in our generation. Yet even though we may not acquire a share of the world's goods large enough to cause us to take care that we are not depriving some one else, we can still be considerate of the other fellow. We can treat people like human beings. Too many of us who are polite in our own group behave like savages toward clerks in stores, telephone operators, and others whose approval or disapproval seems not to change our social rating. If we find ourselves habitual offenders in this respect, may we not well examine some of our conventionalities to see whether we are using them toward our own group for bringing pleasantness to the group or whether we are using them just to bring social approval upon ourselves?

We can be considerate of the other fellow, especially our acquaintances, in a more positive way. We can be cheerful. Did you ever notice how some one's cheery "Good morning" made the pet worry seem not so bad after all? Since we are all much alike, it is safe to assume that other people appreciate cheerfulness in us as much as we appreciate it in them. Not only can we be cheerful; we can be thoughtfully kind, kind to all. It is easy to use a popular person well, but friends, if what we do for others is done for their benefit, can we not extend some of our efforts toward those who are less fortunate? Everywhere we go we find people who for some reason are ridiculed by their mates. Not infrequently a little encouragement on the part of some one will help such people find themselves. One success in ten trials is worthwhile. Everyone has plenty of opportunity to make life a little more pleasant for those with whom he comes into contact, but who has a better opportunity than we who are going out as teachers? Let's not let ambition, and care, and hurry, and noise break our contact with feeling humanity. It takes more brains to help than to condemn. Shall we use the gray matter? If only we try, we may be able to understand, we may be able to sympathize with, we may be able to help some fellow creature.

Let's not neglect the folks at home, our friends, or more broadly the other fellow. What else can there be? Of course. At the same time let's not neglect our college. We are loyal wearers of green and white. In our years here we have manifested this loyalty in the unbroken band which extends from the serious, plodding loyalty of our day by day work to the stirring, colorful

loyalty shown at its peak in our Junior year when we followed our football team to victory at Western State. Now that we are going out to face our life work, we have the opportunity of broadening this loyalty still more, taking care that as we do so we keep adding new material in order that the broadening process may not be also a shortening and thinning process. While the inward feeling of loyalty to M. S. N. C. is highly commendable, yet it is the outer expression of it which alone can benefit the institution. Ways in which this may be done will appear to all. One of these is to let reason temper our enthusiasm for recommending others to come here. What this college will be in future years depends to an appreciable extent upon the type of students who seek admission. While we should help others avail themselves of opportunities for advancement, we should be sane enough to realize that the promiscuous sending of people here can end only in disappointment for some of the individuals and lower standards for the college. We should stand by our college. We should recommend students to come. But we should make our recommendations qualitative rather than quantitative.

We can show our loyalty to our college in a practical way also. While a money gift in return for a favor would probably offend a friend, we need have no fears of such consequences in offering the same to our alma mater. In fact, I feel reasonably sure that if in the course of the next ten years one of us saves a million, a gift to the college of half of it would be accepted with thanks. Seriously though, since this is a state supported institution, we owe in actual cash quite a bit more than most of us will find it convenient to pay. However, we can and should show our appreciation of what the college has given us in dollars and cents by returning as much as we feel we can, especially since we know that our contributions will be expended in making college life even more pleasant for those who follow us.

My closing thought may seem out of keeping with the ones which preceded. Following upon those which are based upon the rather ideal theory that it is possible for us to ~~do things which are not~~ motivated by selfish interests, this thought may seem at first to be an admission of the contrary. Let's not neglect --- our work. Few of us will neglect to strive for possession. As was suggested before, we seldom need to have such thoughts stimulated. But there is a difference between the rewards for work and work itself. In brief, will our work mean more to us than a period of servitude between pay checks? Of course at times we must all do tasks we would rather not do. But will we be able to find joy and satisfaction in our efforts as year after year we pursue our life's work? If we can, will it not be easier to carry out the idealism of the previous thoughts? When our work is a pleasure, how much more we feel like being considerate of our associates, our friends, and those who are dear to us! While it is seldom possible to find work which suits us perfectly, it is usually possible to adjust ourselves so that we can derive pleasure and satisfaction from our daily endeavor. We can make our work a part of our lives, and by so doing bring happiness not only to ourselves, but also to others. Class of '29, I pass on to those who have not heard it the sentiment of a little verse from Mr. Lott's collection: "Work thou for pleasure. Paint, sing, carve the thing thou lovest though the body starve. He who works for glory, misses oft its goal. He who works for money, coins his very soul. Work for work's sake, and it may be that all these things may be added unto thee."