

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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## GRANDMOTHER HAD CERTAIN OBJECTIONS



### GREETINGS:



It was rather fortunate for all concerned that my esteemed Grandmother lived in a rather well-ordered period in American history. The years between the Civil War and World War I produced the aeroplane, the motor car, and the motion picture. These inventions had not yet overwhelmed the individual. Grandmother recognized the existence of these new and useful devices, but they never interfered with her peace of mind. She had certain forebodings however on the subject of education. A trend was developing which met her hearty disapproval. She observed on one occasion that "commerce, not culture, was becoming the foundation of great wealth." It was obvious to her that society was falling under the spell of industrialism. In the business world, formal education was largely neglected.

In the years immediately preceding World War I, large organizations were not interested in resumes or college credits. They preferred to employ young men fourteen or fifteen years old and build them into the business. There was no job-jumping in those days. The young person expected to remain with the same organization until retirement. If he was a good and faithful employee, he received an increase in pay every year; and in his early twenties he could contemplate marriage and the establishment of a home. In those days there was no Social Security, but most corporations pensioned retirees; and some, more sentimental, even kept a desk in the office so that the oldster could drop in occasionally and relive his business career. This all seemed very reasonable to Grandmother. It was respectable and grounded in the merit system. The greater rewards went to those of outstanding ability. Some organizations liked to have employees who were religion-oriented and conscientious in their relationships with fellow workers and family members.

Grandmother considered it appropriate for doctors, lawyers, educators, and clergymen to graduate from a college or university; but only those in learned professions actually benefited from academic backgrounds. She simply could not understand why the average young person should want to spend the first half of his life in school. It seemed to her that the average graduate was being ruined with the increasing emphasis upon formal education for those who gained little or nothing from the academic policy. In those days higher business opportunities were reserved for those who showed indications of the ability to think for themselves. By the time that a student had earned his master's degree or a doctorate, his individual common sense was deeply undermined. In fact, he was not allowed to think at all. It was a disadvantage to all concerned to struggle with an individual who was overschooled and undereducated. Year by

year, the situation grew worse and a certain prejudice arose among employers. It was very likely that the multimillionaire president of an industrial conglomerate had left school in the fourth grade while his clerks downstairs had Phi Beta Kappa keys.

It naturally followed that a young man who had struggled for years to accumulate academic credits felt that he was entitled to be considered as a minor executive at least. This was disagreeable all around in a business where practical experience was the secret of success. On a few occasions, young people sought advice from Grandmother, and occasionally one would accept her recommendations. Those who went to college for the sake of status were warned that it was a serious mistake. Young people should never lose the right to think before they reached an age of thoughtfulness. If there was something that you knew you wanted to do and it was respectable, you went to work immediately. After all, it may well have happened that a young person in his teens would not know his own mind. If this was the case, you strengthened mental resources by travel, good books, or well-informed acquaintances.

Grandmother also said to try to stimulate an internal directive; stay with it even though the family may object. Each personality is made up of characteristics which can be brought together to indicate a career. The greatest mistake of all is to make wealth the principal goal of existence. To sacrifice everything to accumulation is to have a sterile and barren existence. There is little fulfillment and a great deal of compromise in the compound of success. One young man who caused Grandmother a serious headache seemed to be completely unequipped to do anything with his life. He had no aspirations, lacked imagination, and was at the bottom of his class in high school. He finally graduated because there was nothing else to do with him. After adding up the deficits, Grandmother announced solemnly, "There is nothing you can do but go out and get rich."

In Grandmother's book of etiquette, all children should grow up to become human beings. To accomplish this appropriate state, gentility was mandatory. The "gentle" must be patient, thoughtful, courteous, modest, frugal, and sincere. There must be no pretension, boasting, or ostentation. Selfishness, the tendency to exploit others, must be overcome by self-discipline. One of the prerequisites of refinement was that the person should be an interesting conversationalist. He must talk about worthwhile things and be able to converse with the informed with quiet dignity. He should never argue, condemn, show irritation, or lose control of his own disposition at any time. If he cultivated these qualities, he would make a good husband and a proper parent. Grandmother admitted that this level of personal conduct might interfere with the accumulation of a great fortune, but she also felt that only those with such qualifications had any right to be rich. From her own experience she was convinced that an employer who did not appreciate honor and integrity had no right to corrupt those who worked for him.

During the early years of World War I, many young men either enlisted or were drafted into the armed forces. As a result they were replaced by women, most of whom had no previous employment. Grandmother had advice for them also. She insisted that whether you were a cook, a stenographer, or a private secretary you must always be a lady. In those days, ladies did not chew gum, smoke cigarettes, or drink hard liquor in public. They dressed neatly and appropriately, and under no conditions should they flirt with the male employees.

While Grandmother passed on a little too soon to be involved in the suffrage movement, she was a firm believer in equality with women slightly more equal. She also felt that in all social matters the woman must set the highest example of conduct and insight. She was the civilizer, and should remember at all times that the fate of the world was in her hands. She considered it perfectly proper for a lady to be employed. She predicted that sometime in the future that they would make the laws by which nations and families would be governed; and as far as Grandmother was concerned, she had already attained this goal.

When Grandmother moved into a new locality, she attended nearby churches. If the minister brought politics into his sermon, she rose and departed. The entire political theory lacked gentility. It was often barbaric, violent, and combative. It was only fit for men--and only those who were not gentlemen. She liked to think of government as a more or less necessary evil. Whoever was elected made very little difference, and she was convinced that human nature would remain in a state of confusion throughout the predictable future. She adjusted reasonably well to early motion pictures, and in those days programs generally included a newsreel bringing to the screen miscellaneous happenings of the moment. As the subject matter was not especially refined and was sometimes even in bad taste, she usually closed her eyes until the piano player changed his musical numbers.

If Grandmother was alive today, she would set her face in an expression of hopeless resignation. It would be worse than she had feared. She would not have been contaminated, however, fully realizing that in due time she would retire from this mortal state and find her place in a civilized and genteel world beyond the grave. She more or less took it for granted that the celestial spheres were without sin. Wherever sin ends and barbarism is no more, Grandmother would be happy.

Always most sincerely,

*Mary P. Hall*

RECOMMENDED READING:

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