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### Author

Gardner, David P.

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FIRST STEPS AND LONG JOURNEYS

Commencement Address at Dixie College, June 1, 1974

by

President David P. Gardner

University of Utah

## FIRST STEPS AND LONG JOURNEYS

President Losee, distinguished guests, members of the staff, faculty and student body of Dixie College, ladies and gentlemen. This is a homecoming for me in a very real way. The Gardners, like the <sup>CANNONS, ROMNEYS, ATKINS, WHITEHEADS,</sup> Snows, the Leavitts, the Walkers, the Eyrings, the Bentleys and dozens of other grand old families in St. George, took their stand in Dixie well over a hundred years ago. Some of their descendants have scattered, others remain, but like me they all have their roots here and continue to draw strength from Dixie soil, a rich legacy of history and culture, the way Antaeus in the Greek myth remained strong by keeping his feet solidly planted on earth.

My father and his before him and his before him lived much of their lives in Pine Valley and St. George--attending school, running cattle, cutting timber, rendering church and community service, and contributing to the development and growth of southern Utah.

My great-grandfather, Robert Gardner, who is usually referred to in the histories as "the head bishop in St. George," rejoiced in his diary at the founding of this very college. He had seen hard times and lean years

along with everyone else in the Cotton Mission, and a college, like the Tabernacle and the Temple, on both of which he had labored and for which he had sacrificed like so many others, seemed to him a great achievement after the earlier struggles to start an academy and a normal school.

I wish he could be here today; I think it would please him that one of his grandsons has been asked by descendants of his fellow founders and pioneers to speak at the institution they dreamed and worked into being. He and they are here in spirit, in the manifestations all around us of a thriving community in a land which once seemed unrelentingly hostile but which faith and irrigation have made green and fruitful and alive with hope. How different from the shock he registered in his diary late in 1861 when he reached Washington in Erastus Snow's company. The first settlers there, sickly and discouraged, presented a sorry sight: "Their clothes and their faces were all of the same color, being of a kind of blue," he wrote, "as most everyone had the chills. This tried me more than anything I had seen in my Mormon experience, thinking that my wives and children... would have to look as sickly as those now around me."

Today, of course, St. George attracts from throughout the country those seeking leisure and recreation rather than those who came "willingly because

they had to," as many called to outpost settlements by Brigham Young so wryly put it. What might he enter in his diary today about the ease with which air-conditioned cars and jet travel have made St. George a part of living for so many residing elsewhere? Could he look in on us he would think, no doubt, of all those plodding miles with teams when they hauled glass for the Tabernacle from San Francisco, where it had been delivered by sea, or lumber for the Salt Lake Tabernacle organ searched out and cut from nearby mountains, or got timber for the Temple from Mount Trumbull, eighty miles away, where grandfather was in charge of the crews at the sawmills.

Grandfather was bishop of the Fourth Ward and even before there was much of a city was named Presiding Bishop by the Camp Council and was put in charge of all the tithing business. In a day when tithing was paid in kind, that put him at the heart of the material welfare of the community. Even the School of the Prophets, as it was called, of which he was a vice president, was a sort of forum or town meeting, concerned with economic planning as much as with spiritual matters. As a counselor in the St. George Stake Presidency he was one of those who struck the capstone of the Tabernacle with a mason's mallet when it was laid in 1871 before the architect placed his square on the rock and pronounced it level. And at one time he had to deal on behalf of

Brigham Young with "willful spirits," as the record calls them, who left the Muddy Mission when things got too tough. (I can hardly blame those settlers, and grandfather must have sympathized with them. In those days flour cost \$25 a hundredweight and wheat \$5 a bushel, and George Hicks sang, "My wagon's sold for sorghum seed to make a little bread.") But grandfather's own determination never seemed to flag. His life was such an energetic and dedicated one it's as though he walked briskly through all these vicissitudes to the tune of "Marching to Dixie," that Marseillaise of the Southern Mission, sung with feeling and good humor at Dixie celebrations.

I have lingered over this personal history not to celebrate my grandfather. His was a representative life, not at all unusual by St. George or southern Utah standards. I intend rather a tribute to those virtues which he shared with his contemporaries and which can set us an example. What shines out is a community's self-containment, making do materially and culturally with a life-support system, to borrow a term from modern technology, admirably adapted to conditions difficult to adapt to. They were, in a word, self-reliant. In our own way of life we have shifted, by and large, from the home-made to the ready-made: culture and education are so attractively packaged,

like those frozen, pre-baked, ready-mixed preparations for a TV dinner or a Betty Crocker cake, we are in danger of forgetting Thoreau's truth, that the value of anything is determined by how much of ourselves we put into it. Knowledge is not instant. The ABCs and the multiplication table, Sesame Street notwithstanding, still require effort.

In the small town, the small college, we have more chance to put more of ourselves into more things. If you sense an element of envy in my remarks, you sensed right! "Bigger and better" is a national disease; the cure is to discover that "less is more," as in Mies van der Rohe's school of architecture, which gets its effects from what is elemental and honest in function and materials, as in the St. George Tabernacle or Temple and in so many of the homes here and in nearby communities. I am sure that in the life of St. George in the pioneer past "less was more" in the joy and intensity and full participation brought to daily activities and special events, whether it was a spelling bee at the St. George Library Association, a lecture at the Lyceum, or an all-night dance in the St. George Hall.

I know, of course, that the small town is an American legend: it has fed the cities, supplied the country with leaders who spent their formative years and shaped their ideals and visions there; it has endured wars and depressions,

and stood the strain of peace and prosperity no matter how the world wagged. It is there, constant as the seasons, and it is easy, with our big cities now turned into nightmares, to feel as nostalgic about one's hometown as Mark Twain felt about Hannibal. I am also aware that the small town can be deadly and stultifying, an inhibiting and constraining environment rather than a positive influence, as in The Last Picture Show, a movie you may have seen and recognized to be an indictment not of the small town so much as of unimaginative lives. In literature, think only of Sinclair Lewis's Main Street, or Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, or Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, all fictional places with real-life counterparts where the young are restless and the old have given up, content to vegetate. There are too many country towns where life stands still or, no longer fed by a live tradition, tries to copy the glamor advertised in the slick magazines and TV commercials. Rural electrification has been a godsend; I am not so sure that everything we electrify is! Of improved means we must always ask, "To what ends?" And that's where education comes in, particularly education in a small college: I can think of no better place to start life's adult journey than from a hometown or an alma mater still small enough to be a part of in real and fundamental ways.



Life is a journey, and sooner or later we have to leave home, either physically or psychologically, or both. Commencement, a time of new beginning because it marks an ending, is as good a time as any to consider first steps and long journeys. Even the longest journey, says the Chinese proverb, begins with the first step, a saying I take to be either an encouragement or a warning, depending on the nature of the journey. That is, if your goal is distant, if what you see ahead of you after your education at Dixie College, seems far away and arduous to attain, be encouraged that the first step is the important one. A first step lays down a direction, is an exertion of will, a commitment--to a future good or ill. A first step in the direction of a bad habit may be a long journey to a cure. In that sense the saying is a warning. On the other hand, a first step in the direction of a professional or personal objective may be a long journey of satisfactions and rewards commensurate with the hard work. A commencement is a good time to look at possibilities because with some years of college behind you, you have increased your options. The essence of freedom is choice, and the more options you have to choose among, the greater your sense of freedom with all of its implied opportunities and latent risks.

Most of you are two years older than when you first came to college, and two years in the school of life,

even without college, are bound to make a difference. College should help you grow wiser as you grow older. In the school of life you learn by trial and error, which is often costly. In college, learning is accelerated, directed, cumulative, hopefully creative. T.S. Eliot once observed that if we know more than did the ancients it is because they are what we know. We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Emerson said that he could no more remember all the books he had read than all the meals he had eaten, but they had made him. During your days at Dixie you have enlarged your freedom

through books, through direct observation (which Emerson called the study of nature), and through action, another name for experience. All three are legitimate and necessary avenues of growth. In our own time we have more books, more instrumentalities for observing and understanding the physical and social world in which we live, and multiplied opportunities for action or experience, for the gaining of knowledge, the enlarging of wisdom and the rendering of service. A world awakened to the pressing need of preserving spaceship earth itself before we destroy its beauty, or exhaust its natural resources, or destroy ourselves in political quarrels, should offer you no fewer challenges than taming the Virgin River and

settling a resistant and hostile environment offered our forefathers. If saving the world does not appeal to you, there is at least yourself. Your first step may be the beginning of an inward journey as momentous as any adventure outward. Knowing yourself better increases options too: you may find the key that opens the doors to other journeys.

There are as many doors opening on as many paths as there are graduates here today. For those about to take a first step toward a four-year degree and possibly even graduate school, the journey may lead into a future of new knowledge still waiting to be discovered by sciences still unnamed, new knowledge which will require its interpreters and adapters to human use, because any development in the physical or biological sciences sooner or later makes an impact on the social and behavioral sciences and the humanities, just as new inventions lead to new technologies that affect the whole of society.

The journey, especially for the humanists, may lead into the past as new view points in history and archaeology and philosophy unfold it. New Roads to Yesterday is the suggestive title of a recent collection of essays in archaeology. Think of the length of that journey into mankind's past, and the even more limitless horizons of geologic time. There is nothing terminal about knowledge.

The terminal degree, as it is so unhappily called, is not a closed door but an intermediate one. (Nothing in life is terminal until life itself is over or until we stop living even though still alive.) If for some of you the door closes on formal education, another now opens onto informal and continuing education. Doors open and paths lead to friendship, love, work, service, belief, the callings of citizenship and adult responsibility. If your education has been liberal, which is to say, liberating, no matter what your vocation, you will not cease to grow. Business, the farm, the workshop, the office, the home are paths as narrow or broad as the spirit you bring to them. The Greek word for beauty and a synonym for order is cosmos: that is the human endeavor, to bring order or cosmos out of chaos or disorder. You can do that within yourselves and in your immediate surroundings whatever your vocation. And let me remind you that vocation literally means "a calling": to be dedicated to one's work, even a summer job, to give it one's best, is to feel one's vocation.

For those about to make a literal journey, those who will leave St. George or southern Utah, let me urge you not to uproot your past but to build upon it. Modern man, as we know too often, feels homeless, alienated, lonely in the crowd. He is rootless often as not,

or without a knowledge or sense of belonging either to the past or present with which he can convert to the future. I hope you will be spared that existential anxiety. Growing up in St. George or nearby, or having gone to Dixie College may pose more questions than there are immediate answers for, but don't deny your local heritage or years here wherever your home may be or may have been. "Men," says Horace Kallen, "may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religion, their philosophies...; they cannot change their grandfathers." What philosopher Kallen calls our "psycho-physical inheritance"--the givens of our nature and conditioning--is the inalienable ground of our being, ancestrally determined, and we do ourselves violence to deny it. The journey toward self, the full realization of which is the aim of all education, begins at home, and psychologically at least, ends there; and Dixie College, as your alma mater, stands in a special and unique relationship to each of you. Though the traveler by the end of the journey will be profoundly changed, he need not be alienated.

Let me conclude, as I began, on an ancestral note, because the past is such a continuing presence in St. George. Here is Erastus Snow's advice to parents on training their children as <sup>Professor A. KARL LARSON</sup> repeats it in his biography of Snow:

"So let every father and mother begin the work of education with their offspring, and teach them to bear their own burdens at the earliest practicable day...Let no mother, in her misplaced sympathy and her love, and her anxiety to serve her offspring, wear herself needlessly out in waiting upon them when they are able to wait upon themselves; but make such provision as is necessary, which children are not able to make themselves, and teach them to wait upon and serve themselves, and also repay their father and mother for the labor bestowed upon them. Let them have a place for their hats, bonnets, and clothing...and instead of going round the house after them, picking up their shoes and other things, take them and, if necessary, spank them, and make John understand that it is his duty to hang up his hat, and Sally to put her sunbonnet in its proper place. And when they want a drink, let them understand that there is the cup and there is the pump, instead of mother waiting upon them; and so commence and so continue that practical education. And when they are able to begin to hoe the potatoes and sow the onions, teach them how to do it instead of doing it all yourselves, and leaving them to lie in the shade or to run round the streets, wearing out shoe leather

and learning mischief. If you are too old and feeble to take the lead in the performance of these several labors take your rocking chair into the shade under a tree somewhere, and sit and give directions and tell James or John what to do and how to do it."

"Good sound pedagogy," comments Professor Larson, "practical, fool-proof, and tailored to the needs of any household." With Erastus Snow's sentiment about teachers I can also agree and fittingly close: "Do not feel," he said, "that it is a hardship to pay the teachers who have charge of our day schools."

Students, graduates, I hope both you and your teachers and your parents feel amply rewarded on the occasion of this commencement. I congratulate you. "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare," Spinoza reminds us. True of your college work and true of life. Should any of you come to the University of Utah, let me know you've come. We'll do our best to help you find and take the second step on that long journey, should that be your course.