

Bottles and Books

STERLING W. SILL

My brothers and sisters, I appreciate very much this opportunity to be with you in these wonderful surroundings at this great University. Somebody has said that a thing is usually not only important for itself alone, but it is sometimes even a lot more important for what it is a sign of; and the fact that you are here at this University is a sign of something very important that is going to happen in your life and in the world. Tonight I would like to say something that might be of some benefit or encouragement to you. I do not know that I can do that, but I promise you that I would like to.

I am going to borrow my text from the prophet Amos as he talked about two particular kinds of famine: one was a famine of bread and a thirst for water, and the other was a famine for hearing the word of the Lord (see Amos 8:11). Our earth has frequently been devastated by this famine for bread, but the famine for hearing the word of the Lord can be even worse and can take place in the very midst of the greatest material abundance.

The people of our world have suffered a great deal from each of these two kinds of famine. We remember that in the days of Elijah the Lord shut up the heavens so that no rain fell for three and a half years, and in our own day we begin to worry when the precipitation

starts to fall below normal. We are usually not so concerned when our apostasy from God or our lack of study brings upon us a famine for hearing the word of the Lord. And as a foundation for my remarks, I would like to tell you something about two of the great inventions of the world intended to help offset these two serious plagues, each of which has caused so much trouble in our human society.

If you had lived in the year 1800 and you owned a most magnificent peach orchard, those peaches would be valuable to you only during the harvest season, as they would soon spoil after harvest time had passed. However, at about this time the French government commissioned one of its greatest scientists, a man by the name of Nicolas Appert, to invent some process by which this fruit could be preserved and carried over for use at a later date. In the year 1809, the year that Abraham Lincoln was born, Appert announced to the world his new process of putting food in bottles and cans and heating it and sealing it so that it could be

Sterling W. Sill was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 1 May 1977.

preserved and carried over beyond the growing season. The press announced that Appert had made the seasons stand still, that now one could have peaches not only in September, but on Christmas, or even ten years later. Our ability to preserve perishable food has done a great deal to avert this famine for bread and this thirst for water.

The other invention that took place was the development of the ability to put ideas down on paper so that they could be carried over from one century to another and from one continent to another. Only then could people utilize great ideas beyond the time of their development. This also meant that, in the night of the darkest apostasy, men and women could read the discourses of former-day prophets and relieve their most urgent needs for hearing the word of the Lord.

A story illustrating the magic of writing is told in connection with two explorers who were working several hundred miles apart in the then-dark continent of Africa. One of the explorers wanted to send a message to the other; and having a native who knew the way and who agreed to carry whatever he wanted to send, the explorer made some marks on a piece of paper with his pen, folded the paper up, put it in an envelope, and gave it to the native. After some weeks in the jungle the native arrived at the camp of the other explorer and delivered the envelope. The explorer unfolded the message and looked at the marks on the paper; and without one single word having been spoken, the man to whom the message was delivered knew where his explorer friend was and what his problems and needs were. He knew about his health and several other personal things just by looking at the mysterious marks on the paper, which meant nothing at all to the native. This miracle so astounded the native that he fell down on his face and worshiped the writing.

And, next to obeying God, those of us who are inclined to worship would probably do

well to learn to obey the great ideas written down by wise men for our benefit. Each of us should have in his possession a great collection of these miracle-working papers. We may have our religious papers, and the papers containing our occupational know-how; we may have some self-improvement papers, some papers of patriotism, papers of loyalty, papers of inspiration, and some entertainment papers. For our convenience, these papers can be made into books. Thus we may make available to ourselves all the messages that have been thought by the greatest minds in past ages, from every continent, on every conceivable subject having a benefit for us. Then, in case of any mental, spiritual, or emotional, famines we may take down the appropriate papers from their place on the bookshelf and devour the message to our heart's content.

Occasionally I like to go down into my wife's fruit room and be reassured by inspecting our year's supply. My wife has made ample preparation against the famine of bread by using Mr. Appert's invention. In seasons of plenty, she has provided shelves of bottles containing preserved peaches, cherries, apples, pears, apricots, and all other necessary kinds of fruits and vegetables enough to last us for many months.

But I get an even greater thrill when I go up into the library and see my bookshelves loaded with their magic papers containing the finest ideas and motivations to sustain my mental, spiritual, social, and emotional health. I have those papers written by the finger of God when he descended onto Mount Sinai in a cloud of fire, accompanied by the thunders and lightnings of that sacred mountain. I have the papers of Jesus giving the account of his three-year ministry among the children of this earth, including that greatest of all discourses, the Sermon on the Mount. I have many wonderful papers from the prophets, poets, playwrights, historians, and captains of industry, all neatly bound into books to minister effectively to my

every cultural need. I even have some of the papers of the great musicians containing their most inspiring music, which took them a lifetime to develop. It gives me a great charge of enthusiasm to know that in our family library we not only have a year's supply of great ideas but are also made secure for a lifetime against any encroachment upon our success by famines, spiritual hungers, mental boredom, or any lack of culture or faith or character that may beset us. And while I would like all of you to have that year's supply of food that you put into bottles to protect you against the famine for bread and the thirst for water, I would also like to have you insure yourselves against mental want, emotional poverty, and moral hard times with that lifetime mental and cultural supply that has already been put into books to protect you against that more serious famine for hearing the word of the Lord, of success, of culture and faith and happiness.

To help motivate you in this direction, I would like to give you a little bit of a sales talk for the preservation and use of great ideas and the great thoughts of great men and women as they have been made available to us in their papers, where they may be continually devoured by us and at the same time remain undiminished on our bookshelves. Someone has said that "books are among life's most precious possessions. They are the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else that man builds ever lasts. Monuments fall, civilizations perish, but books continue. The perusal of a great book is, as it were, an interview with the noblest men of past ages who have written it."

Charles Kingsley said,

Except a living man there is nothing more wonderful than a book! A message to us from the dead, from human souls we never saw, who lived perhaps thousands of miles away. And yet these [little sheets of paper speak to us,] arouse us, . . . teach us, . . . open their hearts to us as brothers.

Without books, God is silent, justice dormant, philosophy lame.

John Milton said,

Books are not . . . dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy . . . of that living intellect that bred them [Areopagitica]

On many occasions I have heard President David O. McKay refer to Ralph Waldo Emerson as the greatest thinker that America has ever produced. And what a thrilling possibility it is that I can run through my little weak brain every idea, so far as it has been recorded, that was ever run through the brain of the greatest thinker that America has ever produced! I can also run through my mind the greatest moral and cultural stimulants from the prophets, the statesmen, the poets, the playwrights, and the philosophers.

We can live with Abraham; or we can go up onto the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus as he was transfigured and appeared in shining garments talking with Moses and Elias before Peter, James, and John. We can have all of these great experiences out of the past and bring them down and put them right on the piston head to produce for us the inspiration of a good life lived at its best.

William James, the great Harvard psychologist, once asked this question: "How would you like to create your own mind?" And isn't that exactly what each of us does? Professor James said the mind is made up by what it feeds upon. He said the mind, like the dyer's hand, is colored by what it holds. If I hold in my hand a spongeful of purple dye, my hand becomes purple. But if I hold in my mind great ideas of righteousness and faith and devotion to God, my whole personality is colored accordingly.

The greatest possession I have in the world is made up of twenty-five idea notebooks.

They are just regular eight-and-a-half-by-eleven-inch, three-ring looseleaf binders with about three hundred pages in each one. That would be seventy-five hundred pages of the most valuable ideas that exist in the world, so far as I know. Victor Hugo once said that the most powerful thing in the world is an idea whose time has come, and an idea's time comes when we are able to get a harness on it so that we can get it to work for us, doing those things that we most want it to do.

However, I am not equally interested in all ideas. Some ideas are better workers than others, and even in the Bible itself there are some ideas that do not have great value for me. For example, the other night I reread Moses' instruction to the Israelites on how to cure their leprosy. Well, it just happens that at the moment I am not interested in leprosy. I just do not happen to have any leprosy at the moment. Now if someone had put a paragraph in there about a deteriorating retina, I would eat that up in a hurry; but leprosy I am not interested in.

I read another idea about Zedekiah, who went out and killed sixty people, and I tried to figure every possible way I could use that skill of his to promote my own personal program, but I did not come up with any answers. So I am not going to spend any more time with that part of Zedekiah's success. But when in my reading I come to some little nugget of an idea that sends a chill up and down my backbone and gives me an ambition to do something important, I take that out and put it in my idea bank, and then when I have time I memorize it.

I would like to tell you about one of the most profitable experiences that I have ever had in my life. In 1943, I heard Adam S. Bennion give a talk on the value of great literature. He tried to get us to form the habit of appraising and doing something about becoming familiar with great human thought. You can sell the idea of the value of being familiar with great ideas to anybody, but most people

lose their share of the benefit by saying, "I don't have time to read." We have time for everything else, but we do not have time to read; and as a consequence, we are pretty well forgetting how to read effectively.

But Dr. Bennion tried to get around this idea by saying: "Suppose that you didn't have anything to do but read." And inasmuch as we were then nearing the end of the Second World War he said, "Suppose that you were going to be a prisoner in a Japanese concentration camp for the next four years, and suppose that you would be allowed to take into the concentration camp with you the complete works of any ten authors. Which would you take, and what would you expect to get out of them?" It is a well-known fact that people get pretty hungry for great ideas when they get into a concentration camp where they are purposely deprived of good reading material. Then Dr. Bennion told us which authors he would take and why.

At that time I was teaching a class in salesmanship, and under his stimulation I decided that I would like to reread the Bible with the idea of getting out of it its salesmanship. The Bible is the world's first book of religion, the world's first book of knowledge, the world's first book of poetry, the world's first book of history, and the world's first book of business success and the world's finest sales manual.

The very best way that has ever been discovered to be a good salesman is to be a good man. The very best way that has ever been discovered to be a good attorney, or a good husband, is just to be a great human being. Just to have these great qualities of character and personality that are talked about in the holy scriptures and that the Lord has always tried to get his children to develop in themselves tends to make us healthy, wealthy, and wise. I therefore decided to reread the Bible with the idea of getting out of it its salesmanship.

When you read the Bible to get its theology, it is quite a different book than when you read

it to get its salesmanship. Whenever you read the Bible with a new purpose, it becomes a new book. I had a thrilling experience reading the Bible for its salesmanship, and I tried to master those fundamental success principles given in the Bible on which all success is predicated. But there are also some successful sales *methods* given in the Bible. And I would like to tell you about just one of them.

As Moses was about to start across the desert with this great group of Egyptian slaves, he needed somebody who knew the desert to go with them to be their guide. There was a man by the name of Hobab who lived on the edge of the desert. Moses wanted him to go with them, but Hobab did not want to go. So it was Moses' job to try to persuade him to go and be their guide in the wilderness. He approached him and said: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." And Hobab said, "I will not go." We know that that was not a very good approach, because it did not get the job done.

But Moses needed Hobab, and so he tried again. And this time he did much better. He said, "Leave us not. I pray thee; . . . and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes [in the wilderness]." And that is an entirely different idea. The first time Moses said, "Come with us and we will do thee good." That is, he said, "You come with us and it will be good for you to associate with nice people like us." And while that may be a good idea, it does not usually work very well. We sometimes make that kind of approach in the Church. We say, "You come to church and we will do you good." That is, "It will be good for you to associate with nice people like us." But nobody wants anyone to do him good on the basis. Too many people have had someone *do them good* under those circumstances.

Then Moses said to Hobab, "Look Hobab, if you let us get out there in the desert alone, we will probably get lost and all of us will die of starvation. You come and be our eyes in the

wilderness. You come and show us the way." We sometimes also make that kind of an approach in the Church. We say "You come and teach this class; we don't have anyone who can do it as well as you can." This is the service approach, and it has a much stronger appeal. And before Moses had finished, Hobab had on his hat and was ready to go (see Numbers 10:29–33).

I had a thrilling experience learning the salesmanship of the Bible, and I have written quite a little bit on this subject. Then I decided that I would like to take up Shakespeare. Shakespeare comes pretty near the top of most peoples list of great authors, and so I decided to read every word that Shakespeare wrote. That is, I decided to rethink every idea that Shakespeare ever thought, to run through my brain every idea that ever went through his brain. I got started, and I had a pretty hard time—he wrote a long time ago, and a lot of things I did not understand, and I had to look up and go back and reread some things many times, and in the meantime I let my work drag a little bit. I decided a number of times to discard the whole idea, but I had made myself a promise and I do not like to disappoint myself. So I would go back and work at it some more; and finally the clouds began to part and a little bit of the sunshine began to come through, and I had a tremendous experience with Shakespeare as I read his great speeches, felt the power of his motivation, and watched the players upon his stage as they acted and reacted upon each other. Let me give you just one idea from Shakespeare.

When Henry V was the King of England, France was one of his subject nations, and Henry had a little trouble with some of these Frenchmen. He therefore took an army and sailed across the Channel to put these Frenchmen in their place. But the job was a little bigger than he had expected. An early winter cut off their retreat and they were forced to spend the winter near the little French village of

Agincourt. It was a heavy winter; many of them died, and they did not have supplies, and they were in hostile territory. The next spring, when they might have expected to get on their way, they found themselves surrounded by a great army of 60,000 well-fed, well-trained, well-horsed, well-armored Frenchmen, intent on wiping out the British and getting their freedom.

Now what would you do if you were met with a circumstance like that? What do you do when things get a little tough, the lessons get harder, the finances get low? What do you do? One thing you can do is to quit. You can just give it all up. But that is not what Henry did. He was not that kind of a person. He got his people together to talk it over with them, and we might say that he gave them a pep talk. This is what he said to his soldiers before the battle of Agincourt. (That is, this is Shakespeare edited by Brother Sill. When Shakespeare does not say it as I think he ought to, I just cross off what he said and write it in as I think he should have said it. I do not read Shakespeare to please Shakespeare; I read Shakespeare to please me, and if he does not say it to please me I change it so that it does.)

This is what he said as the battle was about to begin:

*Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
... The blast of war blows in our ears. . . .* [act 3,
scene 1]

*The French are bravely in their battle set,
And will with all expedience charge upon us. . . .
'Tis a fearful odds . . .*

There's five to one; besides, they all are fresh. . . .
[act 4, scene 3]

*. . . 'Tis true [there is] great danger;
The greater therefore [must] our courage be.*
[act 4, scene 1]

Then he said:

O God of battles! steel my soldiers' hearts;

Possess them not with fear; . . . [act 4, scene 1]
God b' wi' you, princes all; . . .

[We may never meet again] *till we meet in
heaven. . . .*

God's arm strike with us! . . .

All things are ready if our minds be so.

Perish the man whose mind is backward now!
[act 4, scene 3]

And then he said,

. . . On, on you noble English, . . .

I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,

Straining upon the start. The game's afoot;

Follow your spirit. . . .

[I'll to my task.]

. . . There is throats to be cut and works to be done.

[act 3, scene 1]

Now Henry did not say, "This is going to be an easy job." He said, "Probably none of us will live until sundown; we'll never meet again till we shall meet in heaven." But just notice some of these great lines: "God's arm strike with us!" Or think of this one: "All things are ready if our minds be so." If we just make up our minds, then usually we do not have very much else to worry about. Sometimes we cannot do that. I heard of a psychiatrist who asked a patient, "Do you ever have any trouble making up your mind?" And the patient said, "Well, yes and no." We do not get very far in anything when we are in a "yes and no" state of mind. You students, if you would like to get good grades, just make up your minds about them. Just make a program and decide that you are going to stick to it.

After his speech, one of Henry's backward-looking soldiers came up to him and said, "Look, King, we've got a million Englishmen over across the channel that are asleep in bed right now. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had them over here to help us with these sixty thousand Frenchmen?"

Henry got after him and said, "That would dilute our honor. What honor would there be in a million Englishmen whipping sixty thousand Frenchmen? If twelve thousand weak, sick footsoldiers can whip sixty thousand well-horsed, well-trained, well-armed cavalymen, that is honor!" He indicated that if a million men should come across the channel to help them, he would send them back. He gave his soldiers the spirit of wanting to win the victory on their own power.

Then said this negative-thinking soldier, "God's will! my liege, would you and I alone, / Without more help, could fight this royal battle: (act 4, scene 3). That is, he said the two of them alone could whip those sixty thousand Frenchmen. That may not be very good judgement, but that is courage, and that is what most of us need more than about any other thing.

It just happened that the battle of Agincourt was fought on Saint Crispian's Day. Crispian was a Christian martyr. He was a shoemaker who had given his life for the church a few hundred years before, and they celebrated the feast of Saint Crispian on his birthday. Henry said to his soldiers:

*This day is call'd the feast of Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is name'd, . . .
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not
here . . .*

[To fight] *with us upon Saint Crispin's [sic] day.*
[act 4, scene 3]

I imagine that those British soldiers who fought the battle of Agincourt would feel very grateful that they were not among those poor, unfortunate people over in England who were asleep in bed and who were deprived of the privilege of giving their lives for their country in this famous battle. When any soldier or anyone else can learn to think like that, then he

will not have very much difficulty in winning the victory.

Incidentally, the British won the battle of Agincourt. You may have seen in the movies how they drove stakes into the ground to stop the horses, and then the footsoldiers stood behind and from their English longbows shot arrows over among the French and knocked their horses down. They got the heavily-armed Frenchmen down in the mud where they could not get up, and then they went around with their spears and gave them some individual attention while they were lying there on the ground. But anyway, the English won the battle of Agincourt.

After Shakespeare, I read nine hundred eighty-seven of the great classics that have stood the test of time, and I have all of the potent passages and other great ideas all catalogued in my notebooks, a substantial part of which I have memorized.

One of my heroes for many years was the famous sports writer of a long time ago named Grantland Rice. For fifty years, Grantland Rice went around the country following the great champions of sport to find out what it was that made men champions in athletics, and then he isolated these traits and wrote seven hundred poems about them so that the virtues of the champions could be made negotiable in the bloodstream of those people who read his column. One of these explanations of virtue he entitled "Courage"; in it he said:

*I'd like to think that I can look at death and smile
and say,
All I have left now is my final breath; take that
away,
And you must either leave me dust, or dreams, or in
far flight,
The soul that wanders where the stardust streams
through endless night.
But I'd rather think that I can look at life with this
to say:*

*Send what you will of struggle or of strife, blue
skies or gray,
I'll stand against the final charge of hate by peak
and pit,
And nothing in the steel-clad fist of fate can make
me quit.*

That is, he was not about to become a drop-out. Grantland Rice was not a quitter. And I can get a harness on his courage and make it do work for me.

Ernest Henley was a hopeless cripple when he wrote "Invictus" and said:

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud:
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this veil of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

If any of you are interested in going up a few notches on the success scale, get the spirit of the following idea into your muscles and keep it there for a few hours every day. Someone put an ability into verse under the title of "The Champion." He said:

*The average runner sprints until the breath in him
is gone
But the champion has the iron will that makes him
carry on.*

*For the average runner begs when limp his muscles
grow,
But the champion runs on leaden legs; his spirit
makes him go.
The average man's complacent when he's done his
best to score,
But the champion does his best and then he does a
little more.*

[Author unknown]

If you want to be a champion, all you need to do is follow this poetic recipe.

I understand that there are quite a number of missionaries in this group tonight. You are going out for two years into the mission field. What are you going to do about it? Suppose you get into your muscles this little verse on "Conquest" so that it can be said of you two years from now when you come home.

*Two years ago the stubble leered at him,
And great boulders stood to bar the way.
Old dying trees with twisted trunk and limb
Snarled in defiance like wild beasts at bay.
Others from time to time had scanned the space
But had not dared the struggle to begin;
So tangled was the growth that ruled the place
That few who passed it by would venture in.
And then he came and vowed to clear the land.
With drag and chain he slowly inched his way.
At night some new attack he sat and planned'
At dawn, undaunted, he resumed the fray.
I saw him once in battle, and I thought
His courage and his patience all in vain.
Today I passed the field whereon he fought
And it was flaming gold with ripening grain.*

[Author unknown]

Whether the debris we are trying to clear away is rocks and tree trunks or whether it is sins and weaknesses, it does not make very much difference if we just make up our mind; and then, if we do not allow too many exceptions, we have it made.

Anyway, I got off Shakespeare. After I had finished Shakespeare I read twenty-eight volumes of Elbert Hubbard—and I love Elbert Hubbard. And then I read the Harvard Classics. Many years ago President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard got some of his finest scholars together to compile the greatest ideas that had ever been thought or spoken in the world into one set of volumes called the Harvard Classics; I can go through them now and make myself the beneficiary of many lifetimes of work. I read very slowly and maybe not very comprehendingly, but I always read with my pen. I mark only those ideas that do something important for me. Now if you think the ideas that were lived by the apostle Paul or Emerson or Shakespeare or Jesus of Nazareth, your mind will start responding as their minds did.

At President Eisenhower's first inaugural he said, "The great driving forces of the world are not intellectual, but emotional." That is, how we *feel* about things. I walk three and a half miles to work every morning, which gives me about an hour in which I have nothing to do; and if I want to build spirituality or faith, I get those ideas and run them through my brain. Let me just give you one:

*O God, I thank thee for each sight
Of beauty that thy world doth give;
For sunny sky and air and light —
O God, I thank thee that I live.
That life I consecrate to thee,
And ever as the day is born,
On wings of joy my soul doth flee
To thank thee for another morn;
Another morn in which to cast
Some silent deed of love abroad
That, greatening as it journeys past,
May do some earnest work for God.
[Author unknown]*

I would like to close with another great poem. John Gillespie Magee was an American fighter pilot connected with the Royal

Canadian Air Force who was shot down over London in the Battle of Britain in the first part of the Second World War. Before going into the service, John Gillespie Magee had done the usual things that seventeen-year-olds do; and then, after his basic training had been completed, he felt for the first time in his hands the controls of these powerful engines capable of sending his air craft through space at stupendous speeds. Feeling the exhilaration that came from doing well his part of the work of the world, he wrote this great poem entitled "High Flight," which is now found in the Library of Congress under the title of "Poems of Faith and Freedom." I share this with you tonight because you are also engaged in a high flight. You are engaged in the greatest high flight ever known in the world. John Gillespie said:

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling
mirth
Of sun-split clouds — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and
swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.*

*Up, up, the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
Where never lark, or even eagle, flew;
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.*

That is the purpose of our lives, my brothers and sisters. The greatest good fortune in the life of any of you is that every one of us, in this building and out of this building, was created in God's own image; we have been endowed with a set of his attributes and potentialities, and we have inherited his destiny. The Lord

himself said, "Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High" (Psalm 82:6).

May the Lord bless you, my brothers and sisters, that, as you go forward and take up your share of the work the world or the work

of the Lord, his spirit may be with you to inspire and direct you in all of the things that you do. This I sincerely pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.