

FORWARD MARCH

An Oration

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Junkyards are filled with the rotting bodies of once new cars. No matter what a beautiful car it once was, or how well taken care of, if a car is left to sit, it will break down into a hunk of rusty metal. Humans are much like cars. If we allow ourselves to quit moving forward, we will stagnate, deteriorate, or much worse, be left behind. The importance of moving forward cannot be overestimated.

The first danger we face if we allow ourselves to quit moving is that we will stagnate. To stagnate, according to Webster, is to become dull or inactive. The danger lies in neglecting to stretch our minds, in ignoring our need for a change of scene, or even our need for companionship.

Many of us may know an older person who seems to be stuck in a time warp. The way things were done in 1952 is good enough for them, and the world today is full of dangerous and immoral shenanigans. It's difficult to communicate with such a person. On the other hand, there are people for whom age is no excuse to cling to the past. Such people are engaging and interesting. They allow themselves to keep up with the times and expand their personal horizons.

My great aunt Ollie was exactly that type of person. A schoolteacher for many years, the farthest she had ever been from her northeast Oklahoma home was Joplin, Missouri. But after she retired, she began to travel farther and farther away from home. She made trips to Greece, Switzerland, England---you name it, she'd be the first one on the plane. She didn't begin to travel in earnest until she had taught for over forty-five years. She remained a vibrant, interesting person because she kept moving forward, gathering new experiences.

Our lives are much like a river. Constantly moving and changing, a river is a dynamic force. A pond, on the other hand, may be peaceful, but because a pond is still, eventually it will stagnate.

The historian Edward Gibbon once warned of the second danger we face by not moving forward, when he said, "All that is human must retrograde if it does not advance."

Consider this scenario: we begin building a great house of stone or brick, and halfway through we decide to stop, leaving the building half completed. The building is left to deteriorate while we move on to other things. Eventually, we will return to our project, but find that while we have been gone, the half-finished house has changed. The bricks we have to complete the building won't fit because the walls we left half-completed have become worn by wind and weather. To complete our project now, we must tear down what we have already accomplished and start from the foundation.

Our body is much like that building. If a bone is broken, the care does not stop after a cast is applied or even after the bone has fused. There is physical therapy to insure that the broken bone is restored to its original state. If the bone is not exercised, strengthened, and set properly, it may have to be broken again to start the healing process anew.

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