

Levi Pennington

People

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### The Challenge of the Closed Door

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## THE CHALLENGE OF THE CLOSED DOOR

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We used to hear, much more frequently than we do today, talk of "the challenge of the open door." Here was a fine business opportunity, the challenge of the open door; here a favorable place for the location of a new church, the challenge of the open door; here a needy field for foreign missionary work with the inhabitants eager to hear the gospel, the challenge of the open door.

If I were going to give a title to what I have to say in this memorial service in honor of Gilbert Shambaugh, who with his devoted wife, have given to George Fox College the greatest gift the college has ever received, I should call it "The Challenge of the Closed Door." What he achieved in his life was done in the face of difficulties that most men would felt closed and locked the doors against such achievements.

I have not a word of disparagement to say regarding his parentage, but they had not had the opportunities most of us have had, and it would have taken keener eyes than most of us have to have seen in that home the prospect of such a career in one of their sons as that which we have seen.

His childhood environment was not of the sort from which many of us have come, an environment in which higher education is as definitely expected as in an earlier day young people were expected to acquire at least some proficiency in the "three R's." Not many young men and women from his community went to college.

Wealth is always a relative term, but even by the standards of their community, the family of Gilbert Shambaugh could not have been called wealthy. In many homes of many college students, meeting college expenses is merely a matter of writing an occasional check, which does not cost the loss of a single ~~man~~ comfort or even a single luxury. Not so in the family to which Gilbert Shambaugh belonged.

And this man had to face a physical handicap that would have sent many of us into the doldrums of discouragement and listlessness and dependancy. Not so with Gilbert Shambaugh.

He had the keys to unlock all these closed and bolted doors. There was ambition, the desire to achieve, the determination to conquer handicaps. When illness struck that would have sent many a child and youth to the cemetery, his will to live made him master of disease, which could make inefficient part of his body but left him "master of his fate" and "captain of his soul."

There is no need and no time to tell the story of his winning struggle that carried him through his own educational acquisition of learning. The common schools, the High School, the undergraduate work leading up to the bachelor's degree, the graduate work that gave him the master's degree and after more years the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, it was a long road and a hard road, with many a door closed and locked against further progress, but with those doors unlocked by ambition, enthusiasm, industry, persistence, the never-ending desire for worth-while accomplishment.

I can recall my own doubt and trepidation as I faced the question of whether I should or should not recommend a man so physically handicapped for a position on the college faculty. I can see him now as he made his way laboriously down the hall from one class room to another, his one effective hand upon the shoulder of some man in student body or faculty but with a smile on his face as if that were the best possible method of transportation.

And I recall how he fell in love with my first secretary, a student who had graduated at the head of her High School class and later of her college class, and how she fell in love with him, seeing in him possibilities that we older and "wiser" folks were not wise enough to see. He did not have the front of the brawny football player, which is so attractive to some young women. He did not wear the uniform which so flutters the hearts of many a maiden. He did not have the "charm" which some men seem to have as a natural characteristic that is often associated with lack of real character. But he had what it takes, what it took, to unlock the door of Olive Johnson's heart, and which led to a happy marriage and to her active association with him in his and her successful educational work and in the business career which enabled them later to make the wonderful gift to George Fox College, the Shambaugh Library.

But Gilbert Shambaugh's success in opening the closed doors of opportunity, in winning his way to education and through higher education to the doctor's degree, the success that he and his wife achieved in teaching and school administration, and later their success in the business world might have meant little except to the immediate family if there had not been with all of this the keen sense of Christian stewardship. I remember with what earnestness he said to me, "This property does not belong to us; it is God's. We are his stewards, and it is our desire to use what He has enabled us to gain for the help of humanity and the advancement of the Kingdom of God." It was that sense of dedication, in which his wife shared fully, that resulted in this great gift to the college.

I recall the time when he said that his contact with the student body of George Fox College completed his decision that here was where the best investment could be made in humanity through Christian education. Hence the gift that does and will mean so much, for the present student body and for on-coming generations.

How this man's career should stimulate us all, and especially the students who are participating in this memorial service, to overcome whatever handicaps are ours, to meet our difficulties and overcome them, to open the closed doors of opportunity, and go through them to the greatest possibility service to God and humanity. We should respond to the challenge of the closed door, as he did in whose memory we are holding this service.

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Taken from the address of Levi T. Pennington at the Memorial Service in honor of Gilbert Shambaugh, held at George Fox College, January 10, 1963.