

Jesse Samuel Engle

When my father came to Otterbein to teach he had spent seven of the first fourteen years of his married life in school. This does not sound too unusual today with the emphasis on advanced education. However, he began teaching when a high school diploma was not always required, he began preaching when seminary training was not mandatory, and he resumed study for further degrees. This was not easy, for he earned his own way from Academy days on. His wife helped him by her willingness and ability to manage with very little. His intellect enabled him to combine study with work and maintain a high scholastic rating. At one time while a student at Otterbein, by special permission he took twenty-six hours, worked to help pay expenses, and finished the semester with a straight A average.

When he began teaching he had completed his residence work for a Ph.D. A few examinations remained, all of which he passed; but he never found it possible to teach and write a dissertation at the same time. With a family to support and the above-mentioned years still a burden, he felt he could not ask for time off to do the writing. This was always a worry to him. For years he kept the project alive as something that needed to be done. For a long time it bothered him when someone would mistakenly address him as "Dr. Engle". While he did not take offense at it, it served to remind him that he did not have a degree that he could rightly be expected to have.

Even though he taught for many years, he continued to study for his courses. In 1954 he wrote, "Every week literally flies.

Maybe the fact that I am studying for my courses makes time go faster. I still have overstuffed notebooks, but honestly I am spending several hours going over fresh reading for nearly every lesson."

He had the conviction that one needed to know what was being said by others on any given subject. He reserved the right not to agree that their conclusions were valid. For a number of years a controversial clergyman broadcast over the radio on Sunday afternoons. My father used to get so worked up he would pace the floor and sputter, but he continued to listen. For him, reading a book was much like a discussion with the author. He would underline and write questions and comments in the margins, sometimes so furiously that a look at the book later revealed his own thoughts almost as much as the writer's position.

This was an attitude he encouraged for his students. He had little patience for the person who thought he knew it all and had nothing to learn. There were complaints now and then. Some wanted simply to come and be told what the professor thought, and then try to memorize it. Some others felt it showed a lack of religious conviction on his part not to be more dogmatic. In this they were greatly in error.

In his Bible courses the Bible was the text-book. Students were advised to buy inexpensive editions for class use so that they could underline key phrases and make annotations. This was not defacing the Scripture, but making it come alive. And that was his constant aim.

An assignment might be to bring to the next class session clippings from current newspapers that pertained to the Scripture

passage under consideration. Or, they were asked to look during the week-end for some one who put into practice a certain Christian principle. He would sometimes startle the class by a remark that added plausible, real-life details to a situation which had seemed far, far away.

He was always bothered by the suspicion that students were rather afraid of the faculty, and he appreciated it when they stopped in his classroom, or in his home, to chat. Only occasionally did he find it bothersome. No student could have been accused of successfully "apple-polishing" for he was most conscientious in grading.

Grading was always a loathesome chore, as with most professors. It was not only the time involved, but the necessity to be impartial. One afternoon he sat at his table groaning because he could not see his way out of giving a D to a student whom he considered one of the most likeable persons on campus.

On another afternoon a student who had received her graded exam paper, carefully annotated, apologized for one mistake by saying, "When I saw that I wondered what the dickens I had said that for!" The professor answered, "That was my feeling exactly!"

Sometimes he would despair. In a letter he wrote, "One boy, Junior, asked me this morning if I would tell him what compilation meant in the question asking for specific data showing Proverbs is, or is not, a compilation. I sadly refused to tell him. We have only spent two weeks on the book. Another boy wanted to know what I meant by "Part II" and "Part IV". Teaching is a thrilling vocation!" It was not always this frustrating and he could be

eloquent in praising a good student.

Guessing on exams bothered him. To discourage this he once prepared a list of names for identification which included this sequence: Melpomene, Persephone, Telephone. It was his hope that the student would know that Telephone is not Tel-é-pho-ne, even though it follows Mel-pom'-e-ne and Per-se'-pho-ne. One resourceful young man answered that Telephone was the Greek goddess of communication. The professor was not sure whether the student had responded "in kind", or had made a brave stab at the answer. He suspected it was the former and gave him credit for it.

For any faculty family committee meetings are household words. No one in such a home during those years will ever forget that faculty meetings were held on alternate Monday afternoons at 4:00 P.M. The family knew that dinner would probably be late and that father would be keyed up, if not perturbed. We also knew not to repeat what might be said at the table.

He served on various committees. The ones that stand out as being especially grievous were the Curriculum and the Honors Committees. The former was time-consuming, the latter could on occasion be embarrassing. Whenever a friend asked him, as a member of the committee, to effect his getting such a degree, it could be very trouble some to a man who was both kindhearted and conscientious.

When the departments were reorganized he was made Chairman of the Division of Social Studies. He never sought this sort of responsibility but accepted it as a duty. On his return to teaching after a severe heart attack the offer was made to free him of committee assignments. Wisely or not, he refused the offer for,

he said, "If I can't do the job, I should quit."

Every teacher gets outside demands which are not a regular part of his job, yet are related to it. One of these is the request to fill out questionnaires. My father always had sympathy for the man who was trying to get a thesis written, yet he often found himself unable to appreciate the set of questions, or unable to give them the necessary time. Concerning one, "I returned the questionnaire. . . after getting a very sharp notice from him that failure to return questionnaires was making it hard for him to do his thesis. I returned it blank."

To another request urging a quick reply to questions that required much time, he gave an answer but added that it would be nice to have a man on the campus for this purpose. It was not a desire to be uncooperative. "These good people seem not to realize how much time is required to do accurately all they ask, nor how impossible it is for them to accurately evaluate what material they do get."

His colleagues enjoyed his sense of humor, and also the students who were not afraid to laugh in class. He used to say he was trying to find out if they were awake or asleep. It is true that the more alert student might find himself, or herself, laughing alone. The remarks came with a straight face. A few could tell when he was kidding by a certain way he held the corners of his mouth. The students who had not learned this were not always sure. In such a case their own straight faces were a disappointment to him. His humor did not consist so much in telling jokes as in quick, unexpected remarks, a twist on a line of thought

already existing in the conversation.

His children's English assignments seemed to be a special challenge to his sense of fun. More than once I was handed a spoof of whatever assignment I had at the moment, be it lyric, familiar essay, or critique. He must have lain awake nights thinking them up, purely for the fun of it for, of course, he never did his children's homework, seriously or otherwise. Incidentally, it was Prof. Altman who once bemoaned at a banquet that he had to appear on the same program with "the campus wit".

Those who did not know him well might have been surprised at his interest in sports. As a participant, he was especially devoted to fishing; and until age caught up with him, tennis and volleyball. For several years the faculty played volleyball regularly. While anyone was free to come in and watch, the games were solely for their own enjoyment. They entered into the spirit of it in a remarkable way. My father marvelled that one of the group, whom he regarded highly, could relax and laugh heartily at his own mistakes. When "J.S." played he meant business, as was evidenced from the moment he served the ball. It must have been most unorthodox in technique. It was, however, one of the most sudden motions on the court.

Fishing was a sport which he could still enjoy after health prevented the more strenuous activities. There was a time when he kept his bait in the basement. After several helgramites got loose he restored family life to normal by constructing a bait box in a shady spot outside. He liked to go with a friend, often with Prof. Hanawalt. He also enjoyed taking his son with him. If the

season permitted, any visiting male relative could be sure of an invitation. His ten-year-old grandson, when hearing of his death, said, "Now I won't have anybody to go fishing with!" Many times, however, it was a trip by himself. Even though his destination was usually nearby, the excitement and flurry of getting everything together in as short a time as possible in order to have more time left for fishing often made it seem like the start of an expedition. He once said in mock bewilderment, "I wonder why it is that it always rains on the days I set aside to make garden but never on the days I planned to go fishing."

As a spectator, he was always there for College games, and cheered the team on heartily. During his illness he always listened eagerly for the bell to announce a home victory. Track and baseball received his attention as well as football and basketball. He used to wonder sometimes how a student could display such quick thinking on the football field and such a lack of it in the classroom. But that did not prevent him from admiring the skill where he found it.

In the local church he served for many years as teacher of the men's class. Several times he turned in a resignation, partly from a desire to reduce his load, chiefly from the belief that the job should be passed around. I think there were breaks in his holding the position, but usually the resignation was refused and he was persuaded to continue. At Council meetings he had a habit which may have caused ministers to wish he were not so conscientious about attending. After listening a while to a discussion about how a certain matter should be handled he would quietly ask,

"What does the Discipline say?" He usually had one with him and could turn to page number and paragraph which dealt with the issue. He would have been the last one to claim infallibility for the Discipline, but he did recognize it as the official working procedure of the denomination.

During the summer he often spoke and taught at camps and conferences. One program at hand lists him for sixteen appearances in one week at the same convention! It was not usually that demanding.

In November 1950 he had a serious heart attack which forced a leave of absence for several months. There was permanent heart damage, and from that time on he had to live a restricted life. He resumed teaching and would have retired in June 1956. A second attack came at the close of the first semester of that year; he never recovered sufficiently to return to the classroom.

He once wrote, "I got to thinking this morning before it was time to get up about some of my experiences while sick over four years ago. . . And then it occurred to me that time is a strip of tape with the ends glued together, and running over two revolving rollers. The one to the left is Yesterday, and the one to the right is Tomorrow, and the stretch between is Today. The more things we do Today the faster the tape moves. The rollers are so close together that Yesterday was here only a moment ago, and Tomorrow is so near we are apt to overreach it. And yet they are so far apart that all our knowledge cannot reach them both at the same time. And some day the tape will break, and it always breaks on the part called Today. For the strain is always there. . . ."

For him the tape broke at the age of seventy, on March 29th, 1956, a Maunday Thursday. An intimate friend of the family remarked, "How like J.S. to be Biblical to the very end!" She did not imply a will to die at "three score years and ten", but regarded it as symbolic of his devotion to the study of the Bible, and of a life lived according to its principles.

His good friend, Fred Hanawalt, wrote of him, "I have fished and hunted with Jesse, also consulted with him often, and I haven't met a finer gentleman. I have told him more than once that the only fault I could find in him was that if I did him a little kindness, he would do three or four for me in return. I don't believe that the influence of such a man as Jesse Engle can be felt like he was here, except in the small Christian college."

One incident which his family and friends never forgot occurred when his grandson Jimmy was in the Primary Department in Church School. The class was having a discussion about the nature of God. When one question arose, Jimmy said, "I'll go home and ask my Grandpa. He knows all about God." While his Grandpa appreciated the tribute, he disclaimed the distinction. However Jimmy was not the only one who felt that he knew a rather reliable source for asking about such things.

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