

Memorandum on The Organisation of Research

by Stephen Leacock

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By research is meant the investigation at first hand of individual single facts and phenomena with a view to combining our knowledge of them into general laws and wider truths. Research is thus different from exposition, which means only the presentation of facts, and different also from instruction which involves the method of imparting facts. It is different also from creative literary work for which facts and phenomena are only as color and oil to the painter who makes of them something which is neither colour nor oil.

Now in the various departments of intellectual activity research is of a varying importance. In some branches it stands at the top. In others at the bottom. In the physical sciences research leads to discovery, and discovery to invention, and from invention originates the condition and mechanism of our collective life. Here research is of tremendous importance and of indescribable attraction, and may meet, sought or unsought, a great pecuniary reward.

But in other subjects research is only the gathering of little facts for other men to use. It corresponds to the pick and shovel work of men making a drain in order that other men may enjoy the facilities of a bath room. It is necessary but is not attractive. It is to be desired that some one should find out for us, from the dust-bin of records, whether Dollard des Ormeaux had sixteen companions or nineteen. But the "discovery" that he only had sixteen is of small consequence to the life of the ordinary man, and to the historian only as a minute touch of colour on a brush of a painter: the problem is how to use the brush. The writing of history is only as much a product of research as a painting is a product of a hardware store. Mr. Jongers would be greatly surprised if Philbins Hardware Store (Paint a Specialty) claimed the chief credit