

The Matter of Social Duties.

J.R. Miller:

There are two extremes in the matter of sociability. One is to want to be with others all the time, never to be alone. There are girls who must either always have company, or be company. They do not seem to themselves to be living, unless they are chattering with somebody. There are young fellows who never spend an evening at home. When the day's duties are ended, as soon as they can hurry through their evening meal, they are off to meet someone, or to attend some entertainment. That is one way.

The other is the unsocial way, never to go anywhere, nor to receive others at one's own home. Young people who adopt this course are sometimes book-worms. They are eager to read and study; and they regard every minute spent in society, or in showing hospitality, as lost time — time stolen and wasted. Or if they are not book-worms, they may be shy people, who cannot meet others without embarrassment and shrink from all social contacts. So from sheer timidity, they stay at home, perhaps not doing anything worth while — but merely avoiding meeting others.

Or it may be through dislike to society. Many people are bored by company. People do not interest them. The conversation of the parlor wearies them. They feel themselves under no obligation to entertain others, or to put brightness and cheer into their hearts. They enjoy uninterrupted quiet more than any general companionship. For these or other reasons there are people who avoid company as far as possible. They prefer to be alone rather than with others.

Neither of these two ways of regarding social duties is the ideal way. To be out on the street or in company continually, is to neglect duties to one's self and to one's home, which come in among first obligations. On the other hand, to keep altogether to one's self, away from people, is to neglect duties which one owes to others, and at the same time to miss opportunities for self-culture which can be gotten only in contact with other lives.

Young people cannot afford to let regular habits of reading and study drop out of their life. They fail to make any true and worthy use of their education, if, on leaving school, they shut up their books, and at the same time close the doors of their mind, and cease to add to their store of knowledge. The object of their education is to prepare them for reading and thinking intelligently.

Every young person, therefore, should form and courageously and persistently maintain regular habits of reading and STUDY. This will require the setting apart of certain hours of each week when company must be excluded, when one must be alone with one's books. It will not do to leave this duty to any haphazard chance, taking up a book, the book that lies nearest, merely whenever there may be an unoccupied hour. The only way to make anything worth while of reading, is to do it systematically, to put one's self under rigid rules in the matter. If young people are busy during the day — hours must be taken in the evenings. If they would grow in intelligence and advance in self-culture — they must be content to give to society only a proper proportion of time, putting self-improvement always first.

Christian young people have duties also to their CHURCH. These will require at least one evening each week. There is an old proverb which says, "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey." Anything else would better be left out of life, than one's Christian duties. Self-culture is the highest of all culture. To forget God, is to cut one's self off from the source of all joy, blessing, and good. Yet one is not required to give all one's spare hours to Christian meetings. There should be daily spiritual exercises, the keeping unbroken of one's relationship with God; but this does not involve daily public services. We can soon run our soul very thin by going continually to meetings. Bible study is essential to true spiritual culture, and the best Bible study is usually in the closet. We should so order our life that we shall have daily silent times, when we can let the words of God speak themselves into our heart. It is the blessing which comes in such quiet moments which prepares us for the life we must live outside, in the face of the world.

The young people have duties to their own FAMILIES which should keep them much at home. There is something wrong with the girl who is restless when she is not out somewhere, who never has time for long quiet talks with her mother, whom home duties irk and tire, and who is happy only when she is with her young friends outside. There is something wrong with the young man who never wants to spend an evening or an hour quietly with his own family. If the home is happy and true, the young folks in it can have no sweeter enjoyments than those they may find within their own doors, with no stranger to intermeddle. Then they owe it to their loved ones, to bring their share of fellowship and brightness into the home life. It is not fair to keep all one's cheer for others, robbing those who deserve the best one has to give.

Young people cannot afford to give all their time and interest to social matters. But there are duties which we owe to society. The rule of Christian love, requires us to think of the things of others, as well as of those which concern ourselves. We owe a debt of love to everyone who comes within the range of our influence. We are commanded to please others for their good, to edification. An unsocial person is not showing the best there is in religion. Love is cordial, kindly, sympathetic, obliging. It makes the disposition sunny. The truest Christian has the kindest interest in others.

Jesus was always ready to give himself to men. While he often spent his nights apart with God, and had his hours when he hid away from men – yet he went among the people freely, and was a wonderful dispenser of cheer, comfort, and kindness. We should train ourselves to be in the world, as he was. We should not selfishly withhold our life from those who need it. We should carry out to others, the blessing and the good we get for ourselves in the quiet of our study, or in the sweetness of our home fellowships. We are to be dispensers of God's good gifts. What we receive, and would keep for ourselves only – will not avail for good even to us; for we really have – only what we give. Keeping for ourselves – only is Losing. Hence no young person should be a recluse, shutting himself away from others, on the ground that he must devote all his time to self-improvement. He owes a debt of love to others which he can pay only by going among others.

Of course, it follows that one's social influence should be always wholesome, refining, inspiring, uplifting. It is a serious thing to touch another life – if the touch is not in blessing. There are young people whose influence is unwholesome. They do not make others better, happier, truer, richer-hearted. They lead toward lower planes of living, not higher; they are of the earth, earthy.

This is not a proper use to make of one's life. It is possible, however, for young people to do much good in their social relations, not by preaching – but by sweet Christian living. They may be so true, so courteous, so thoughtful, so helpful – that even in hours of play and amusement, their influence shall be refining and wholesome. That should be the intent of all Christian influence.

Hospitality is a Christian duty. We are exhorted in Holy Scripture to be ready to entertain strangers, since by doing so some have entertained angels unawares. Some people say they have not time for hospitality; that duties press too urgently; that guests in the home interrupt the order of the household life. Some busy Christian men think, too, that they must shut themselves away from calls. But it can only be with twofold loss, that one declines the privilege of showing hospitality – the losing of countless opportunities of doing good, and the loss to one's self of the good which "angels unawares" bring when they come. Not many young people can plead that they are too busy to see such as come to them; and they cannot know the value of a cordial welcome to those who come, nor can they estimate the blessing to themselves that even a stranger, received in the name of Christ, may bring to them.

Thus there are social duties which one may not refuse to perform; they are binding and incumbent. Then, to shut ourselves away from others is not only to withhold the blessing we owe to them; it is also to rob ourselves of great good which we can get only through wholesome contact with other lives. Without being sanctimonious or priggish, we should make even our social relations opportunities of being helpful.