MASTER OF MY FATE

A Discussion of Personality & Behavior with Emphasis upon Self-Direction

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TO THE MEMORY
OF MY BROTHER

PAUL,

A PERSONALITY STRONG
UPRIGHT AND ATTRACTIVE
Chapter IX

Self and the Other Fellow

Human individuals live together in groups. By nature and education man is gregarious. Alone and without compensating advantage or different training, he is dissatisfied and restless. The presence and favorable notice of others please him, and their disapproval makes him uncomfortable. From earliest infancy he has been associated with other human beings and has found, on the whole, greater satisfaction when they are present than when they are absent.

But it is not simply for the pleasure of being with one’s fellows that men live in groups. On the contrary, it is also to secure ends that can be attained in no other way at all, or in no other way so surely and so economically. Association is compelled by the very conditions under which men live. They could not live apart, except in the most primitive way, if they would.

Association Introduces Conflict

In their attempts to satisfy desires for food, clothing, shelter and other goods, human beings are brought frequently into competition. The conditions of life are such that, even without intention on the part of anybody, the thing one person does often conflicts with the thing that another person is trying to do. The statement may be illustrated by a simple traffic situation in which a pedestrian finds it impossible to cross the
street in safety until the stream of rapidly moving cars has passed. None of the drivers wished to delay the pedestrian; the delay was entirely incidental—but inevitable, if the desires of the several drivers were to be realized.

Individuals, indeed, find their own impulses leading in opposite directions. This is the truth expressed in the saying, "A person cannot both eat his cake and have it." It is necessary continually to choose one or another of the different possibilities that are presented and to surrender the possibility of attaining the others.

Groups, like individuals, find hostilities within and without. To serve the interests of some of their constituents is to curb the aspirations of others. Similarly, the objects which the group as a whole desires are frequently unattainable except through some restriction upon another group.

This, then, is the dilemma of all human association: coöperation is absolutely necessary for the satisfaction of human longings, but at times the pursuit of their own desires brings individuals and groups into sharp conflict with each other. It is idle to long for personal liberty, if we mean by it the right of an individual to do as he pleases regardless of others. For the satisfactions which are made possible through coöperation a person must pay the price of surrendering other satisfactions which he might have if conduct were unrestricted.

Control Over Human Relations Is Needed

Human engineering is confronted with the difficult problem of arranging a social structure and training personalities of such a nature that each individual and
each group will attain the greatest possible self-realization, will conflict as little as possible with others, and will contribute most effectively to the enterprises which must be carried on by coöperation. This is an undertaking in which society has so far been only partly successful. Success in gaining control over material forces appears to have been relatively greater than success in gaining control over human relations. Men so far have learned but imperfectly how to live with each other. The recent World War, the lawlessness on the part of many of our citizens, the frequent faithlessness of persons in positions of public trust, the too common selfishness of capital and the lack of honest effort too often shown by labor, the racial and religious antagonisms throughout our population, the demands for personal liberty regardless of the welfare of the group, and the bitter personal enmities of factional fights in almost every community—all these bear witness to the enormity of the task ahead. To be sure, we have come a long way from the law of the jungle, but we have much yet to accomplish.

*Loyalties Need to Be Transferred to Larger Groups*

The same person is a member of many different groups—political, social, vocational, recreational, fraternal and so on. The membership, however, may be only nominal; it does not guarantee active coöperation in its productive activities or even harmless behavior toward other members. Moreover, as we have seen, there is competition between individuals even in the same group. Nevertheless, almost every person exemplifies to a certain extent the social virtues of coöperation
and mutual helpfulness within some group. There is honor even among thieves, it is said. The lack of cooperation frequently shows itself, therefore, at the points where groups come into contact. A member of one group finds it easy, in general, to dislike, suspect, fear and oppose a group (or individuals within that group) not his own. In a certain sense, then, advance consists in enlarging the group of which an individual regards himself as really a part. The progress of civilization has been marked by the transfer of family, neighborhood and tribal loyalties to larger and larger divisions of the world’s population. It has been marked also by the elaboration of machinery both for carrying forward common tasks effectively and for reconciling inevitable conflicts in an orderly fashion.

One lesson in training individuals or groups for cooperation has already been stated. It is that, if there is to be justice and fairness to all, some desires will have to be modified or else remain unsatisfied.

Again, individuals need to be taught the fundamental interdependence of persons and groups. They need to know in detail the benefits that come from cooperation and the losses that result from antagonism. There needs to be less emphasis upon the battles of history and more upon the forces that have brought people together. People need to come to the realization that, after all, selfishness and disregard for others are essentially shortsighted.

*Intelligent Sympathy Is Needed*

Impulses toward cooperative conduct will be strengthened if one has an intelligent sympathy. We need to
understand the kinship of all peoples and to realize that in reference to the springs of human conduct men of all races and nations are much the same. An insight into the way other persons live, their difficulties, their purposes and their contributions to civilization will help in promoting understanding; and with understanding will come sympathy. A wider point of view than that of the narrow circle in which most men live will lead toward the realization that apparent conflicts do not exist at all or else that they can be settled on a basis of justice and right to all concerned. One of the most prolific causes of suspicion, fear and hate between individuals, groups and nations is that the one simply does not understand the other.

Team-Work Is Learned by Participation

Team-work is best learned by participation. Persons learn more about each other and gain greater sympathy for each other by working together. Engaging in a common task which each regards as worth while is probably the best single guarantee of mutual understanding and friendship. Young people frequently find that acquaintances for whom they have had little concern or whom they have positively disliked are really fine folks when they have been thrown with them on some committee or in some contest. Labor for a common cause cements industrial organizations, political parties and even nations.

An individual who finds himself somewhat selfish and lacking in the ability or inclination to cooperate with his fellows should deliberately seek opportunities for
coöperation. (Incidentally, one of the best correctives of the practice of finding fault with others who are working on a particular task is to accept some share of the responsibility one's self!) Ordinarily, it will not be necessary to form a new organization in order to find a place for work. While it is not universally true, it is frequently the case that communities are over-organized. Usually there are already organizations in the field with which one may become associated—civic organizations, church groups, professional societies, the Red Cross, social clubs and so on. Obviously, the objects of the group with which one seeks association should be such as rightly to challenge one's loyalty. There are so many important tasks to accomplish that one should not spend time with trivial ones just for the sake of learning to coöperate. Nor should one be simply a "joiner." The ability to coöperate is developed with activity, not from having a name on the membership roll. The number of organizations to which a person can make a real contribution of time and effort is limited.

The Other Person May Be Right

Inasmuch as persons will always differ even when they are seeking the same ends, it is necessary to add a word concerning the ability to engage in team-work when the other person's ideas have prevailed. This does not mean that a person will surrender the position which he believes to be right, but it does imply that he will not refuse to play because he can't, perchance, be captain. There is no place for pouting and personal en-
mity in social life: One cannot afford to slight or hold in contempt any person, however lowly, who honestly differs with him. To know the circumstances is frequently to forgive what has seemed an unusual and unnecessary personal slight or injury.

**Unified Action Requires Leadership**

Coöperation implies organization. At one extreme of organization is the very formal arrangement in which the part that each is to play is carefully outlined; at the other is that in which the several parts are assumed without definite agreement and are even changed as the work proceeds. In all, however, there is at times a division of activity in which an element of leadership appears. Coöperation requires that some person or persons initiate activity, decide upon a course when opinions are varied, harmonize conflicting effort and furnish a basis generally for unified action.

The need for competent leaders is so great and the rewards of leadership so inviting that every one may well aspire to such a position in some of his activities. It is therefore pertinent to inquire what, if anything, can be done to develop leadership.

**Qualities That Are Admired Prepare for Leadership**

In the first place, it may be stated that leadership is not an elemental quality at all; it is the result of various combinations of favorable traits. In general, the development of traits that people admire prepares one for leadership. It is implied, of course, that character-
istics which one manifests are admired by the particular group that one aspires to lead. Physical appearance, dress, manners and acts which are in accord with the ideals of the group lay the foundation for leadership in that group. To depart from the characteristics valued by the group in any of these things is to weaken one’s chances. Excellence far beyond the average of the group is a tremendous advantage, so long as it does not reduce one’s understanding of and sympathy with the group and mark one as queer, or create in others a feeling of jealousy or opposition. A better physique and a greater skill in some physical work or game in which others engage are almost sure to excite admiration. The ability, also, to be a good loser is characteristic of the best leadership.

Friendship Promotes Leadership

It is particularly important that the leader show an interest in the person whom he wishes to lead and in the things which this person values. The friendliness of the politician is proverbial. Human beings desire the attention and approval of others. The would-be leader must learn how to give this attention and this approval. A selfish attitude does not encourage personal loyalties.

Unless the group is already convinced of the desirability of the action which the leader is attempting to promote, it is important that he be able to present the cause in a favorable light and in a convincing manner. The ability to speak and to write effectively is a considerable asset always, and especially to those who desire positions of leadership.
Learn to Lead by Leading

The production of leaders demands also the exercise of opportunities for leadership. The attitudes and habits of the leader are developed largely through leading. One who aspires to lead must seize the opportunities that are offered. Without becoming obnoxious, officious or obtrusive, one must be ready with suggestions and proposals that have some merit. If, for example, nominations are to be made for office, the leader will have thought over the situation and will have proposals ready. If it is a social gathering, the leader will have suggestions to make when it comes his turn in the conversation or entertainment. He will not drive and will not pout if his suggestions are not followed, but he will be ready to step into the position of leader as opportunity presents.

The last topic has suggested the element of preparation, and this must now be made explicit. Many persons fail when opportunities for leadership are presented because they have not prepared for them. They do not know parliamentary law, they have never learned how to speak in public, they do not know how people should be introduced, they have not studied the topic under discussion, they left their music at home, they have arrived at no judgment of their own—and so on through a long list.

It will often happen that persons are deterred from developing qualities of leadership by timidity. They find it embarrassing and momentarily unpleasant to stand before a group or to speak out in a crowd. Yielding to the desire to escape this unpleasantness, they
cultivate habits of inactivity and really increase the likelihood of embarrassment when they do attempt to have their say.

_Friendship Has Value_

We have seen that cooperation promotes friendship and that friendship in turn makes cooperation easier. But friendship has a direct value for the individual as well. Friends make life richer and more satisfying. Friends come to our relief when we are in need. Friends make sorrow more endurable because they show concern. Friends make joy more intense because they share it. Friends reprove us when we go astray, and they commend us when we do well. Friends are not simply conveniences to relieve financial embarrassment or physical suffering; they are companions in work and recreation, success and failure, joy and sorrow. Friends take us as we are, and they help us to become something better. Friends are more important than wealth, fame or fortune.

Who, then, should be friends? To what extent should we follow the conflicting ideals of aristocracy and democracy? What should be the nature of personal friendships? How does one gain friends? These are some of the questions to which answers are needed.

_Who Shall Be Friends?_

In these days much is said about the brotherhood of man. We are reminded repeatedly that all men are akin the world over. It is said that, while abilities differ greatly, human nature is, after all, much the same; and
that persons of different race and birth are striving in the long run for about the same things. This argument emphasizes the common factors in human life and states that every man is worthy of the opportunity from which he can profit most. It agrees with the philosophy expressed in the famous document which states that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” It is not meant, of course, by informed holders of this doctrine that abilities are equal or that traits are identical; rather it is meant that persons are equal in their “unalienable rights.” This is the doctrine of democracy.

Opposed to this view is that which emphasizes differences among men. It is said that men are very unequal. It is pointed out that only a small number ever make great inventions and great discoveries. Human welfare, according to this philosophy, depends upon the few who are most gifted; it is these who are important in the long run. If this proposition be accepted, it is easy to have little concern for the masses of the people, provided, of course, their condition is not one of extreme distress. When there are not enough goods to go around, naturally those who are among the chosen few will be taken care of first. The many may be relatively poor and relatively ignorant; but what does it matter if they are accustomed to no higher standard? This is the doctrine of aristocracy.

*Begin at Home*

The aristocratic ideal is not represented so much in formal statements as it is in attitudes and behavior. It is easy to give mental assent to an abstract principle
and at the same time to repudiate it in practice. Many follow in the footsteps of the lady who wept copious tears over conditions depicted in a play while her coachman froze to death outside the theater. It is possible to espouse social theories with great emotion and yet lose the best opportunity one has of putting them into practice—namely, the opportunity of living the principles among one’s fellows. The example is not unknown of a man who in theory would change the whole social order to benefit the masses, and yet who in practice is tyrannical and selfish toward his friends and associates.

The Democratic Ideal Commends Itself to Thoughtful Persons

Which philosophy is best for human society—the aristocratic or the democratic? The answer depends somewhat upon one’s outlook on life. The position here taken is one that harmonizes with the great western experiment in democracy. The underlying theory of a government by the people is one of individual worth. It asserts that persons are intrinsically more than steps in biological or social development, that the life of each is important in itself. When a person contemplates the division into classes which the aristocratic ideal presupposes, the state of his enthusiasm depends a great deal upon the class into which he expects to fall. We are not inclined to justify the slavery that produced the Egyptian pyramids, even though we recognize their worth as magnificent monuments, if we place ourselves imaginatively among the cruelly treated slaves. As a model of deliberate social practice, the doctrine of the
survival of the fittest will appeal most to those who consider themselves among the fit.

In this discussion the doctrine of the fundamental worth of every individual is accepted. It is assumed that every person has certain inalienable rights equal to those of his neighbor. It is believed that the Christian principle of love for one’s neighbor is the best conception of social relationship ever enunciated.

This position is not inconsistent with concern for social progress. That society is best which gives to each individual the maximum opportunity that is consistent with the welfare of the whole, both for the present and for the future. Indeed, social progress, in the long run, means progress with reference to the individuals who make up the group.

Be a Friend of Man

This means, then, that the ideal personality must be a “friend of man.” He will participate in coöperative tasks and will welcome the participation of others. Some will be leaders, and there will be wide differences in achievement. But these differences will be gradually evolved from the activities of the group rather than forced from without or established through accidents of birth or wealth. The leader and the follower will be willing participants in the same work. Offices, rules and regulations established in the right way are not at variance with democratic ideals.

Barriers of Caste Should Be Avoided

In high school and college, democracy is frequently endangered by the formation of groups that too greatly
restrict the intermingling of students. Sometimes too early membership in fraternities and sororities or an unfortunate policy on the part of these organizations is antagonistic to the principles of democracy. It takes careful adjustment to realize the benefits of exclusive organizations without at the same time developing a wrong attitude toward non-members. Many young people seem unable to escape a certain feeling of superiority and a certain distortion of values when they become members of such societies. It is amusing, and yet pathetic, to see the standards by which many college young men and young women "rate" individuals and organizations. A person is wise who, regardless of his own affiliations, refuses to be bound by the artificial standards of college caste. It is doubly fortunate if persons of this kind come into positions of leadership where they can influence, toward a recognition of the democracy of real merit, those who are just entering upon the great adventure of college life.

The High Cost of Living

From the standpoint of democracy, the expenditures of individual students are of considerable concern. Commonly, in a large body of students there are marked differences in financial ability. These differences sometimes become barriers to desirable social contacts. It is obviously impossible for the poor to expend as much as the well-to-do. The rich, however, need not have everything that money will buy. All, or nearly all, can meet on the plane of reasonable expenditures. In the interest of democracy it is to be expected that an earnest
effort will be made to keep the expense of dress, parties, organizations, programs and the like within sensible limits. It is not a sufficient excuse for a lavish outlay to retort that the individual or group has “money to burn.” The effect on the general social situation needs also to be considered. A practice can hardly be justified if it results in an aristocracy of wealth, if it warps the character of others less able who are striving to approximate the same standard, or if it produces, through vivid contrast, a feeling of envy and inferiority in the young man or young woman who happened to be born in a poor home.

*The Teacher-versus-Student Attitude*

It should be clear that the obligation for the development of democracy in a school rests upon teachers and students alike. It is unfortunate that teachers and students are sometimes placed in positions that seem to be antagonistic. It should not be so, any more than that a lawyer and his client or a physician and his patient should work at cross-purposes. The spirit of coöperation should characterize the classroom, the laboratory, the campus and the residence halls. But regulations are often irksome when they curb individual activity. Occasionally, the untutored man attacks the chair that stands in his way; students, likewise, at times attack their officers, their teachers and even their parents for a similar offense! There is, of course, this difference: human beings are not always so innocent of error as is the chair.

The old relation of master and apprentice has, at
its best, much that is suggestive still for education. The teacher should be a master not only in his subject matter but also in his adjustment to the conditions of life. Presumably, the pupil or the student is an apprentice, working for a brief time with the master that he may learn his work and the ways of life. It is the glory of the real teacher that his young associate may some day outstrip the master's skill. In our effort at mass education we are getting too from this ideal. We should develop an organization and method, especially in higher education, that make teacher and student participants in a common task which both wish very much to accomplish.

*Men and Women Can Be Friends*

The problem of helpful friendships between men and women is complicated by the sex factor. In the first place, there are obvious limitations upon the contacts which men and women may make with social approval. Then, the very fact that they are male and female causes them normally to meet on a different plane from that on which members of the same sex meet. Since human nature and the social structure are as they are, it is hard for a young man and young woman to be very close friends and at the same time nothing more. It is expected that a single person of marriageable age will be looking about for one of the opposite sex with whom a happy marriage seems possible. Unless persons are quite sensible, therefore, a relation which one regards as simply a matter of friendship may prove quite a disappointment to the other. Yet, there is no doubt that
young people should have many friends—frankly just friends, but good friends—among members of the opposite sex.

These friendships, of course, should be frank, honest and sensible. Often the attitude of others makes this difficult. There are proverbial match-makers who want friendships to turn early toward courtship. Association a few times at social events and attentions of one kind or another are to some the sure signs of love and "serious intentions." This fact makes it the more desirable that the young man and young woman who are thus associated be frank with each other and careful in the things they do.

There Is Safety in Numbers

There are ample reasons why a young man should have social engagements ("dates") with more than one young lady, and vice versa—at least, until the associations have been extensive enough to lay the foundation for wise choice of a life-mate. This helps to keep friendship on the proper basis and to guard against the embarrassment of a misunderstanding on the part of others. It gives one the advantage, too, of contact with a number of different personalities.

After marriage the association of a man and a woman not husband and wife demands an equally sensible outlook. It goes without saying that mutual understanding, frankness, honesty and fidelity should characterize the relations of husband and wife. There should be no basis in fact for jealousies. When these desirable conditions endure, a great deal of happiness may come
from wisely chosen social contacts. It will be an especially fortunate situation if contact can be made with persons who are friends of both. In all associations, to be sure, conditions must be avoided so far as possible that invite irregularity and infidelity. It is a thoroughly despicable character who deliberately comes between husband and wife. It does not help his case to claim that he has found his “soul-mate,” or something like that, and that he must have her; such talk is simply an attempt to defend himself for conduct that is really indefensible.

The Inner Circle Should Be Selected with Care

Friendship—whether of men with men, women with women, or men with women—does not imply the same degree of intimacy between an individual and all his acquaintances. It is normal and proper that there should be only a small group of persons with whom one is willing to discuss freely some of the more personal affairs of one’s life. Among friends it is expected that there will be an inner circle. On the selection of the inner circle much of a person’s future depends. These are the ones who may be expected to influence him most and to be closest to him when he is in greatest need.

This is a point to which attention needs to be given in connection with high school and college associations. At times the bringing together of persons from all sorts of backgrounds results in a lowering of standards on the part of superior characters. Intimate friendships are sometimes made with persons who are unworthy of that intimacy. Attracted, it may be, by some particu-
larly favorable trait—for example, personal beauty or athletic prowess—a person allows himself or herself to be led into a closeness of friendship quite unwise in the light of other qualities which the individual possesses. It is not surprising that parents sometimes wish to protect their sons and daughters against these mistakes by restricting their associations. Some way ought to be found, however, for promoting wide friendships and at the same time protecting a youth from unwise choice of intimate friends and life-mates. Clearly, young people should develop standards for judging individual worth and for choosing this inner circle of associates if democracy is to mean more than a tendency, biologically and socially, toward mediocrity.

To Make Friends, Be Friendly

The preceding discussion has dealt with the significance of friendship and occasions for development. It now remains to give some directions for developing friendships. The formula is simple enough: Be yourself friendly and make yourself worthy of friends.

The difficulty with many persons who feel that they have few friends is that they themselves have waited for others to take the initiative. It is easy to accuse others of inattention and at the same time be most guilty one’s self. The time that is spent in self-pity because of the apparent neglect of persons who presumably should be more friendly may be spent to much greater advantage and with much greater satisfaction in doing something of a friendly nature. Ordinarily, one’s fellows will be responsive to friendly advances, and some worthy per-
sons, at least, will be found who will be friendly in turn. Human nature is admirably shown in the case of a child to whom an adult makes friendly overtures. The child will watch, somewhat hesitant at first, apparently to discover the real intent of the adult; and if the situation develops favorably, the child also will show a friendly attitude.

How to Be Friendly

The suggestion that a person should show himself friendly may be overdone. It does not imply that a person should be a busybody in other persons’ affairs. Sometimes the most friendly advance is one that is made with a great deal of reserve. A person must not mistakenly presume that he is entitled to the familiarity which is permitted only to an inner circle of friends. Sometimes—not always—it is the best policy to maintain a certain aloofness, even though the impulse is to rush in to give some help, waiting attentively for some sign at least that the proffered help will be welcome. Being helpful and not becoming more or less of a nuisance requires a certain sensitiveness to the attitude of the other person, even when his attitude is not expressed in words.

It is worthy of notice, also, that being friendly does not always mean the offering of assistance; it may mean simply showing concern and sympathy, or it may mean accepting proffered help or sympathy. It is well known that one way to get the friendship of a child is to have him do something for the one who is striving to gain his friendship. To allow a person to contribute something which he wishes to offer is to give him occasion
for feeling his worth and to make both giver and recipient participants in a common cause.

The second part of the twofold basis for gaining friends—making one's self worthy of friendship—emphasizes the traits of personality that go with upright and helpful conduct. It means that one will give as well as take. It means honesty, fairness, sincerity, charity and unselfishness. It means that if criticisms are in order, they will be kind and constructive; friendship does not license a person to be rude and inconsiderate. It means genuine concern for the other fellow.