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CHARACTER

Character is the greatest force in the world. The young man or woman who starts out with a resolution to make capital out of his character, and to pledge his whole manhood or womanhood for every obligation into which he enters, will not be a failure, though he wins neither fame nor fortune. No person ever really does a great thing and loses his character in the process.

Character as your capital is greatly underestimated by a large majority of our young people. They seem to put more emphasis upon smartness, shrewdness, than upon downright honesty and integrity of character. Boys—girls—no substitute has ever been discovered for honesty. Multitudes of people have come to grief and trouble trying to find one. Our jails are full of people who have attempted to substitute something else for it. The principles by which the problems of real success are solved are right and justice, honesty and integrity, qualities which characterize all of our really big men and women. And just in proportion as a person, old or young, deviates from these principles he falls short of solving his problems.

Every one of our young people ought to feel that there is that in them that bribery of any kind—bribery for a good time, bribery to influence them to take or handle that which is not theirs—cannot touch; something which is not for sale; something they would not sacrifice or tamper with for any price; something for which they would give their lives, if necessary, and that is honesty and integrity of character. Young people, just as soon as it is found out that you always stand for the right, that your influence is on the side of good, you assume importance and become a power in your own little world.

Not one of you can really believe in yourself if you occupy a false position. The consciousness of not being genuine, not being what others think you are, robs you of power, honeycombs your character, and destroys self-confidence. Doing dishonest things, no matter what may be the inducement, will land you on the rocks if you yield to the temptation. It is demoralizing to your mental faculties and paralyzing to your character.

Upon everything you do, boys and girls, put thereon the trademark of your manhood and womanhood.

You cannot afford to sell the best and greatest quality you have, your honor—your manhood or womanhood. Resolve that under no circumstances will you be less than a man or a woman. Resolve that whatever comes up in your life, you are going to stand for something, that you are going to be a man—a woman—first, last and all the time.

No matter what obstacles may beset your path, or how badly handicapped you may be, it is possible for you to throw such a wealth of honesty and high character about you that people will be unconsciously drawn to you. Such boys and girls are welcome in every home and are more likely to succeed than those who have abundant means and influential relations. Be ambitious in the best sense, which is equivalent to the ambition for nobility of character, for there is nothing that will make you more loved and esteemed than the expression of your best self.

So we say to you, young people, aside from the satisfaction of being an honest boy—an honest girl—it pays from every point of view to be honest. Do not lead miserable lives of regret, with thwarted ambition constantly torturing you because in a moment of weakness and discouragement you gave way to temptation, and thereby destroyed your reputation for honesty. No matter how dark the way, or how heavy the heart, how sorely you are tempted, remember that you cannot afford to make a turning point in your lives and take the down grade.

Carry on, persist in maintaining an ambition to be honest, strive to have a good reputation in all things which are synonymous with having a good character. Then you amount to something in the world and are happy. Keep your record clear; do not prostitute your ability nor gamble with your reputation.

Where, we may ask, in modern history, is there an example of a man who exerted such a power for good, who was such a living force in civilization, as was a poor backwoods boy, Abraham Lincoln? In spite of the ravages of time the reputation of Lincoln grows larger and his character means more to the world every year. It is because he kept his record clean, and never prostituted nor gambled with his reputation. What a powerful illustration of the fact that character is the greatest force in the world.