

Some of the Qualities Essential to the Most Successful School Life

by Booker T. Washington

The student who would put the most into his school life must first of all be happy. I do not believe it is possible for a student to accomplish very much, certainly not the most, while he is in school, unless he learns to be happy in all his relations in school life. If the students are unhappy there is something wrong with the institution, or with the teachers, or with the student body. The normal state of a student in a well-ordered institution is a happy one. It is impossible to get the most out of the life of any institution unless there is joy in working out the ideals of the institution. The student should make himself familiar with the purposes of the school to which he seeks admission, and having made the choice, he should be loyal to its traditions and purposes.

The Bible teaches over and over again that freedom, without which happiness is impossible, is self-imposed restraint, that to be really free we must live within the law. He who lives outside the law is a slave. The freeman is the man who lives within the law, whether that law be the physical or the divine. All life is governed by law, and the student must acquire freedom by obedience to law. The students in any institution are divided into two classes: the happy, contented, ambitious, hopeful ones, who have faith in the institution and respect for its traditions, and the miserable, discontented, grumbling class. One class live not only within the letter but in the spirit of the law, and are consequently happy. The second class are miserable, discontented and hopeless because they try to live outside the law. No student can get much out of any institution who does not enter whole-heartedly into its spirit, its traditions and its ideals.

The ability to do hard methodical work is one of the prizes which every school worthy of the name offers to its students. The years at school not infrequently give bent to the whole life. The student who does slipshod work at school is more than likely to lack direction in his subsequent career. But mental strength comes not as a bequest. It is a prize that must be contended for right earnestly, and dictionary, cyclopaedia, text-book and shop are tools which instructors place in the hands of students to help them win the prize. The proper use of these tools must depend finally upon the individual student. No one gets much out of life who does not make his education a real, vital part of himself. Many people have education very much as a parrot has at his command a certain number of words or sentences. The words and sentences that the parrot utters are no real part of him. They are merely something tacked on to the parrot, and foreign to his real natural make-up. Some people use education as they use their "Sunday clothes," on extra occasions only. They bring their education into play when they are in the company of others, commit a few quotations and use big words which have no working place in their vocabulary. To try to make education a real part of one's self is the way to get most out of one's school life. Just as the food a man eats becomes a part of his blood and bone, so should education become a vital part of him. Education must be digested and assimilated in order to make it significant.

The student who leaves undone immediate duties because of bodily laziness is leaving happiness far behind him. Sins of commission and sins of omission alike tend to weakness. Our ability to make the world better depends entirely upon our ability to use every opportunity to make ourselves better. A largeness of life, a variety of interests and breadth of view are among the prizes which a school offers to its students. These qualities the ignorant man does not possess. Largeness of life and breadth of vision give faith in the future; that largeness makes one person take the long view when the other is taking the short view; that largeness lifts the educated person far above the temptation to gossip about little things, above the temptation to get down into the mud and slime with which weaker

individuals are smeared.

To be loyal and obedient to the legislation of an institution, to make thrifty use of text-book and shop and farm and every part of the school equipment, is to attain that mental strength that makes for largeness of life and breadth of view. These qualities come not by observation, but they do come by conscientious work in season and out of season. They are all within the reach of the student who is willing to work for them, and they are all essential to real happiness.

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