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VADE MECUM, VOLVENTIBUS ANNIS

THE MAYANS
SAN ANTONIO,
TEXAS

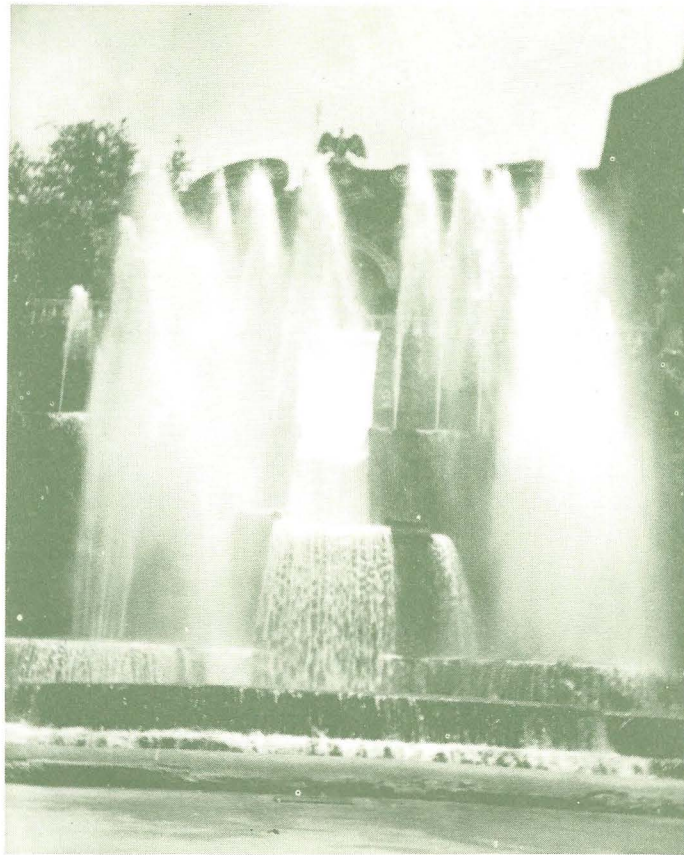
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Fountains at Tivoli, Villa d' Este
Photo by Rose Dawn

...I will give unto him that is athirst of
the fountain of the water of life freely.
Revelations: 21-6

THE MAXIMUM LIVING SERIES

Mayan Revelation Number 177

GIVE IT YOUR BEST

Capacity Effort

A Practical Difficulty

Impact

Another Practical Difficulty

To Be Specific

A Proverb

Good Company

Meditation

Beloved Centurion:

In this series entitled MAXIMUM LIVING, it is our desire to help you get the most from life. In order to obtain the utmost from life, it is necessary that we put into it our utmost.

I am sure that you have seen many people who thought they could "get by" with inferior efforts. In other words, if it were possible for them to do so, they would do their work in a slipshod manner. I can think of many homely little examples, some of which, perhaps, are familiar to you. You may often have heard a housewife say, as she was doing her work, "Oh, I'll just give this a lick and a promise. Nobody will see it anyway."

Then there is the automobile mechanic who repairs your car enroute; after it is fixed, you go on your way, probably never to return to that town again. The garage man did not do good work, saying to himself, "Oh, I'll never see those people again."

Or you may have heard of some builder or contractor who used inferior materials in his building, because, as he might say, "The owner won't know the difference anyway." I once heard of a young man who built a beautiful and costly home of inferior materials. The house was meant as a gift to him, although he did not know this at the time he was trying to save a few dishonest dollars in its construction. Then this young man was compelled to live in the house that he had built, and it soon proclaimed his dishonesty for all the world to see.

This is also true of character. We live in the character we build, and it proclaims to others what we are.

On the other hand, there are always those people who are conscientious, their character is sturdy, and they give their work the very best they know how to do. One of the purposes of this lesson is to teach you that no matter how small a job, or how unimportant it may seem, you should give it your best. Never feel that something is too unimportant to bother with doing well, for when you do this, the person who is most cheated by your lack of effort is yourself, because it shows a lack of character.

There are some people who will put everything they have into accomplishing a big undertaking, but on a small one they will assume the attitude that, "It doesn't matter, it is just a small thing."

Believe me, Companion, it does matter. The person who takes good care and puts forth the utmost effort in the small things, you can always be sure will do the big things in the very best possible way. We are building character and this is one of the important facets of character building. To do just as much as is expected of one, and no more does not show an interest in one's work. It is the person who endeavors to do the very best he possibly can in all things and in all ways, who is building character.

In my many years of being at the head of a large organization, I have come in contact with many types of workers. It has been my experience that when

one finds a person who will not do a single thing more than he or she is supposed to do, according to their "lights", that is the person who will never progress and never be important in any way to an organization.

We must give in this life in order to receive; whether we give of ourselves or what we have, whatever it may be, giving one's best is of paramount importance, all through life. Always keep in mind that the small things are just as important as the bigger things in doing our best, and there never has been a great and beautiful character which has not become so by doing well the small and ordinary offices. There are many persons who have no other possession in the world than their character, but with the possession of this they have great riches.

Even if we know we can do less than our best, without ever being discovered, we have not been true to ourselves and are putting inferior material into our character building. We certainly will not be able to enjoy MAXIMUM LIVING.

Let us endeavor today to make each job, in every department of our life, an important one, always giving it our best. We will go more deeply into this study after we repeat the words of the following prayer:

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I ask Thee to help me that whatever my hands find to do

I may do with my might.

Forbid that I should undertake anything unworthy,

Or that having undertaken any worthy thing

I should let my efforts be half-hearted.

Since my efforts and achievements constitute an expression of myself,

Help me to let them represent nothing less than my best.

Amen

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CAPACITY EFFORT

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We have been discussing ways of lifting one's self by his own bootstraps, figuratively speaking, of course. You being the person concerned, we have said that you must recognize and use all your available power from within and without in order to reach higher standards of being and doing. Now we proceed to ask what is to be accomplished by doing so? The answer is that it enables you to put your real best into what you do, which is necessary to such achievement. Capacity effort for capacity results. Maximum effort for

maximum living. This is the formula - whatever you do, give it your best.

We need to utter this word of caution at this point. What is not deserving of your best is not worth bothering about, of course. Maximum effort costs one a great deal, so the results should be worth it. So at times maximum living resolves itself into a process of elimination. To give place to what is not worthwhile takes time, strength, and other values from what is really important. Life and all its interests are strengthened by keeping to the essentials and giving them the stress and emphasis essentials alone deserve.

The reason so much of what we do and so many of its results are mediocre and poor is that not enough effort, interest, and enthusiasm were put into it. As a fountain cannot rise higher than its source, so effects cannot be of better quality than their causes. A lackadaisical attitude spells sure defeat in anything. Life seems mockingly to say, "If he cares no more about it than that, then why should I?"

You may watch a master at his work, whatever it is, and think that because he seems calm and collected about it he is not putting his best into it. But he is. The reason he is calm and collected about his work is not that he does not care, but because he knows he has put enough power and effort into it that he can be confident of the outcome. He does not need to worry about that. He knows what the requirements are and that he is meeting them.

Of course one may feel that he is doing his best, and still fail. He may have been quite honest about it, but the trouble is that he does not know what his best is. You have to know that, to know you are using it. Think about it carefully. Your best is the measure of quality you can produce today. That does not apply to yesterday, for you should now be able to do better than yesterday. Neither does it apply to tomorrow, for you should be able to do better tomorrow than you can today.

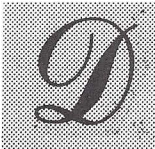
Just how much effort to invest in a given situation or task is not the question. There is only one measure to give anything worth doing, and that is your best. Less than that might carry you through, and again it might not; but nothing less than your best will produce real excellence, a work of art, a masterpiece.

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IMPACT

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 Do not be content with merely getting by. Almost anyone can do that. It takes comparatively little effort. People may be quite well satisfied with you, for as a rule they do not care much whether you make the best of yourself or not. Not too many appreciate the efforts of those who have made the exertion and gone to the trouble of meeting some obligation to their times. They regard a sense of duty as too much trouble.

But you will not be satisfied with yourself if you do not try. Remember

that you will have all eternity to contemplate how much or little there is in the temple of destiny that your labors have helped to put there. You can go through life concerned with little or nothing but your own comfort and convenience - but in the final analysis it will not pay - and you will some day be sensitive enough to regret it.

The great question is, do you care? Do you care how the life of the world goes, or what it comes to? Do you care how well your neighbor, near or far, gets on? Do you care what the future of your own land and people will be? Do you care what becomes of the sick and helpless, the poor and old, the little children? Do you care whether the Kingdom of God progresses swiftly, slowly, or not at all? Do you care what your life amounts to now, and what it will count for in the final outcome of the human struggle for right and happiness? Do you care whether what you do and accomplish is a credit to you? Do you care what the ages will think of you when all the mists have cleared? At least do you care what you can honestly think of yourself and your work? If you do not, maybe it is just because you have not yet got into the game. If you do, this is what to do about it - put your best into everything you do.

We sometimes say that it is the finish of a task that counts, and in the immediate sense that is true. Just the same, though, the finish is often made possible by the start. It is true that the last lap determines the race, but it is also true that the first lap may give the start that makes the last one victorious.

The outcome is the important thing, but we must realize that the outcome usually starts with the impact. If you are knocking down a wall, you must put sufficient impact into the stroke. If, on the other hand, you are building up a wall it is a different kind of impact that is required, but the spirit in which you make the start is the beginning of your success or failure just the same. Either way the secret is to put into the effort the best you have.

In military operations they say that offense is better than defense, and that the most important phase of offense is attack. In concerted music you are constantly told to watch your attack, to hit your first note well. The same applies in speaking and writing. The start helps to establish your pace. A sluggish start may not improve, but if you start with your best you feel like keeping on the same way. Let the world know something is happening from the first moment. Outward show will not make you a top-notch, but sincere, capable and honest effort will.

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TO BE SPECIFIC

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REMEMBER that giving life your best does not mean doing so only at the so-called upper levels, nor assuming that the idea is only for so-called important people and ordinary people doing unusual things. It is applicable to all kinds of people undertaking all kinds of good and worthy things. Each item of the work of life is important, whether it is

spectacular or not. Each person is important, because he represents the supreme value in the world - life. All this means you.

Never think of putting your best efforts and abilities into the spectacular things and neglecting the obscure ones. Never think of taking a do-nothing attitude because the duties at hand do not seem spectacular. In building a house it may be even more important to use care in driving an obscure nail than in placing a showy piece of hardware in a prominent place. Any bricklayer knows that the bats are as important as the bricks, and that the foundations are even more important than the towers. Everything slighted is a piece of shoddy work woven into the day.

If you are doing a piece of work, take pride in it and go out of your way to produce something of real quality. No matter what the task is, when completed it will be a picture of your real self - ability, effort, integrity, and all.

You will have plenty of competition, for many people are trying to do beautiful, clever, useful things. The trouble is that too many of them are following the gleam only in a professional way and do not try to carry it into every phase of living. In this at least you can surpass them from the start. Quality living is as essential as quality work, and quality work is as important in ordinary tasks as it is in doing things for hire or making things for sale. These are not many paths and byways, but one unified line of action.

If you have a letter to write, put effort into it and try to make it one that would do you credit if it were dug up and read a thousand years from now. If you have a conversation to conduct, whether with a friend or a stranger, try to make it one that will be an agreeable experience and a pleasant memory for that person. It is really something to be a good conversationalist, one part of which is to be a good listener.

If you have something to do that seems important, you will of course try to do your best and be sure that it is your best. If you have something to do that seems unimportant, give it your best anyway, for it may turn out to be much more important than you think. Have you not noticed how in history and life as well as in fiction and drama the whole outcome of the action may turn on some pivotal thing that would otherwise be scarcely observed?

There is always the day's work. That is definitely a part of your life and destiny. To give it your best is always of value, and often of much greater value than you imagine.

Whatever either the larger work or the single task may be, be a master at it. Give it your best in both planning and effort. Put interest and enthusiasm into it. Remember that the work of a master should always be a masterpiece. Aim at nothing less than that. Whether it is a new discovery, a work of leadership, or a loaf of good bread, whatever you do, give it your best.

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GOOD COMPANY

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MANY years ago travelers on the western plains came across a long grave with stones heaped over it. On the rough board at its head an epitaph had been crudely cut with a knife by someone with a sense of eternal values. It read, "Here lies Bill. He done his best. The angels can do no more." That was a good epitaph as well as an informal and unusual one, and to have deserved it was a matter of high credit.

Perhaps Bill had done his best as he understood it. If so, it is an undeniable fact that the angels could have done no more. Of course an angel's best is better than a man's best, and one person's best may be better than another person's best; but the fact stands for a man or an angel that his best, his real best, is all he can do. Though constantly changing with practice and experience, each one's best at any given time is perfection - for him - at that time.

The appreciative epitaph Bill's companions accorded him reminds us of another wonderful thing, a fact that is actually staggering when one stops to realize it. It is simply that the habit of doing one's best tends to put him in a class with the angels, which is surely the best possible company.

There is nothing unfitting about that. Men and angels is not an unnatural association. We are told that man is created only a little lower than the angels anyway, so the gulf to be bridged is not very great. Certainly the angels are not concerned with things people have not taken enough interest in to do them well. Doing one's best in the living of his life and the doing of his work lessens the distance between him and the angels. On the other hand, slovenly living and workmanship tend to bring one ever nearer the standards of his own crude beginnings.

There is within us a subconsciousness of heaven and angels anyway. That is shown by Jacob's dream about them the night he slept with his head pillowed on a stone. Worthy labors tend to stimulate this subconsciousness and bring it to the conscious level. Jacob called the place of his great dream the House of God, the Gate of Heaven. We can tell by his subsequent life, though it took the experience some years longer fully to crystallize, that he carried it ever in his soul and never forgot that heaven and angels are always near. It made him a better man and one whose endeavors more and more kept him in that shining company, a man who did his best, more than which the angels cannot do.

In one way or another, and at one place or another, the way of Jacob's dream is open to all of us. It might have seemed that he wandered into it unwittingly, but probably we are all led there if we will go. There are ladders too for those who are already only a little lower than the angels.

If the way seems long ahead of you, remember how long it was for Bill and for Jacob, though heaven was not so far away from either of them as they had thought. The angels do not scorn our company, and we should not feel excluded from theirs. Good company makes us better, and giving things our best keeps us in good company.

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A PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY

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THERE are practical difficulties in the way, of course. There always are in the way to any worthwhile thing. That is one way you can know it is worthwhile. Problems are a sure sign. The easy ways lead to nothing of importance. Your success depends on whether you take a difficulty as an obstruction or a challenge.

For instance, you may say that you do not always feel up to putting your very best into whatever you have to do. You are tired, or sleepy, or not feeling too well just then. We all know that these conditions occur, and it is plain that they are destructive of the spirit and effort to do things at a high level of excellence. If we let them have their way with us the usual effect is only still more lethargy and unconcern. That carries us backward instead of forward.

Have you not noticed that really trying to do a fine piece of work, whether it is an empire or a whistle, the very effort of it has a wonderful way of waking and alerting one till the color returns to his face, the light to his eyes, and eagerness to his motions, as his mind and enthusiasm are quickened? This is why getting at something and putting real interest and effort into it ordinarily makes one feel better and often actually improves his condition.

A friend of mine was once called aside by his physician and told that the signs indicated that his wife might pass away at any time, and that perhaps she should be tactfully told that she would do well to arrange any matters needing final attention. The husband broke the word to her as tenderly and diplomatically as he could. Her reply was, "Nonsense. Where is the evening paper?" That was quite a number of years ago. In the meantime the husband himself has passed on at a ripe old age, while the wife still survives and probably still calls for the evening paper.

Spirit and attitude have much to do with these things. It is still true, as in Bible times, that one is likely to be in health according as his soul prospers. Undoubtedly many people are in better health, and some are actually alive today, because they never let themselves lose interest making the most of living and gave themselves the pleasure of making a fine art of something.

The fact that taking pride in doing one's best at something is good for the mind as well as for the body is shown by what anyone may see going on in the occupational therapy departments now operated by most hospitals for mental ailments. In one such place in a single afternoon the writer found a young man making and painting beautiful toys for children, a woman weaving rugs that compared well with many of the smaller ones woven by the Navaho Indian women in the Southwest, various others doing various things well.

One old gentleman was reading Astronomy on the side, and stopped to talk about it. Just then he was especially interested in the star Betelgeuse, that vast luminary in the constellation Orion, a single star so large that if it occupied the place of our sun the position of the earth would be far inside it, more than two hundred million miles, in fact. At home the writer checked his facts

and figures, and found them correct.

The point is that an interest at which one works and in which he takes pride is an excellent tonic. These people were doing their best at something, and it was benefiting them. It will make you feel better too.

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ANOTHER PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY

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HERE is another thing that sometimes gets in the way. You may say that many of your tasks are humdrum, and unimportant, and not worth doing one's best at. You are mistaken there, and you may be seriously and tragically mistaken. Here are some of the reasons for guarding against such an attitude. They are very common ones. We all meet them and are threatened by them.

First, you are undertaking to be the judge of what is more and what is less important. When you do that you are clear out of role you were cast to play on the stage of life. That is a choice of which you are not capable. No one is, not even the wisest and most experienced person. The importance or unimportance of a thing depends on the possibilities hidden within it like seeds in a product of the garden or orchard.

That is something no one can see, but we can always assume that it is there. An acorn is a very small object, but it has an oak tree wrapped up inside of it, maybe an oak tree that will some day fill a very important place in the world. It could be the same way with the small, obscure duty or opportunity that now looks so unimportant to you. Who can tell?

Second, you have set out to make excellence a program and not an occasional effort or an accident. You are now undertaking to develop the habit of doing your best. It will never become a habit if you are going to pick and choose on what efforts you will do your best, or even assume that you are going to do your best with anything less than all of them. A habit has to be inclusive, or it is no habit. It demands that one shall do his best with small matters as well as great ones, provided there are any small matters, which is doubtful.

Third, we learn to do great things by practice, and so-called small matters are just as good to practice on as so-called great ones are. This is work in the laboratory of life, and laboratory work usually starts with small specimens and experiments. But there they are not regarded as unimportant, and some great men spend their lives working with them. Remember too that one of the greatest things anyone can do is to find something great centering in something small, and that sometimes happens. If you do that you will be working very near the methods of God, and everything you touch will be the better for it.

Fourth, on the level of what is needful and good the word small is a misnomer anyway. We deal with some duties in a small way, but there is no small

duty. Each has its own place in the general pattern of "that one far-off, divine event toward which the whole creation moves." Do not dishonor it by considering it unimportant.


Fifth, the so-called little things are the ones of which to make a special point. They are the ones at which to do your best, for they are the easiest ones to neglect. The seemingly big things attract us because they carry their own glamour and challenge. The less spectacular ones are the more strengthening because they require special effort.

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A PROVERB

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 An old Spanish proverb declares that the good is the enemy of the best. The meaning is, of course, that many people never attain the best because they let themselves be content with the good. They are so impressed with it that they think they have done very well to get that far. Indeed they have, but that is no reason for stopping there.

Think this proverb over, then look about you and see how widely it applies among people you know and have known. Can it even be true in any measure in your own case. Have you been content with the attainment of something good when you could just as well have gone on to something better? One who does that today deprives himself of anything to do tomorrow, and one who does that soon begins to find his powers failing for lack of use.

Many people have discovered that life is just as willing to help them to reach the best as the good. One has to travel that road more carefully, and perhaps try a little harder and longer, but swings on hinges just as easy.

An elderly man once said to your instructor, "I have spent my life contenting myself with less than I might just as well have had, less well than I might just as well have done. I learned only in later years that the doors to the best opportunities, attainments, and rewards, open just as easily as do those to lesser things. If I had it to do over again, I would not go to the easiest gate, reach for the lowest apple, and try for the less desirable thing. I would, and in what time I have left I will, honor myself by reaching for the best. I will do this in the quest for character, worth, attainment, and their natural results."

Doubtless there are many in the same position. They too have learned this, but too late to make the most of it. In the store the better values cost a premium only the wealthy can pay, but in the field of life it is different. There the better values cost a premium too, but one any seeker can pay who will.

We are all distressed that the world is not better, and we all ponder the question how it can be made better. "Overcome evil with good", runs a New Testament formula. That is good therapeutic theory, and carrying it out is good corrective practice. If an organism has disease in it, we can overcome the

disease if we can introduce enough health to replace it, otherwise not.

We have to go about the process of making our own lives and that of the world healthy in the same way. There are destructive forces working in the world life and in many individual lives. They have to be outbalanced with constructive ones. When they become equal, that is the crisis. When one surpasses the other in strength, the battle is over.


If the good is not strong enough to overcome the evil, we must introduce the better. If that is not strong enough, we must introduce the best. Now, why not eliminate delay and do away with all uncertainty, and introduce the best at once? Have a care. Do not think of the good as a goal, but only as a guidepost on the way to the best. It is a way station, not a destination.

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MEDITATION

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 I CAN see that we often fail to accomplish something because we do not put enough into the effort. I will guard against that tendency. Having once decided to do a thing, I will give it my best. I will do this from the start, so the effort will not fail through being long drawn out and uncertain.