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VADE MECUM, VOLVENTIBUS ANNIS

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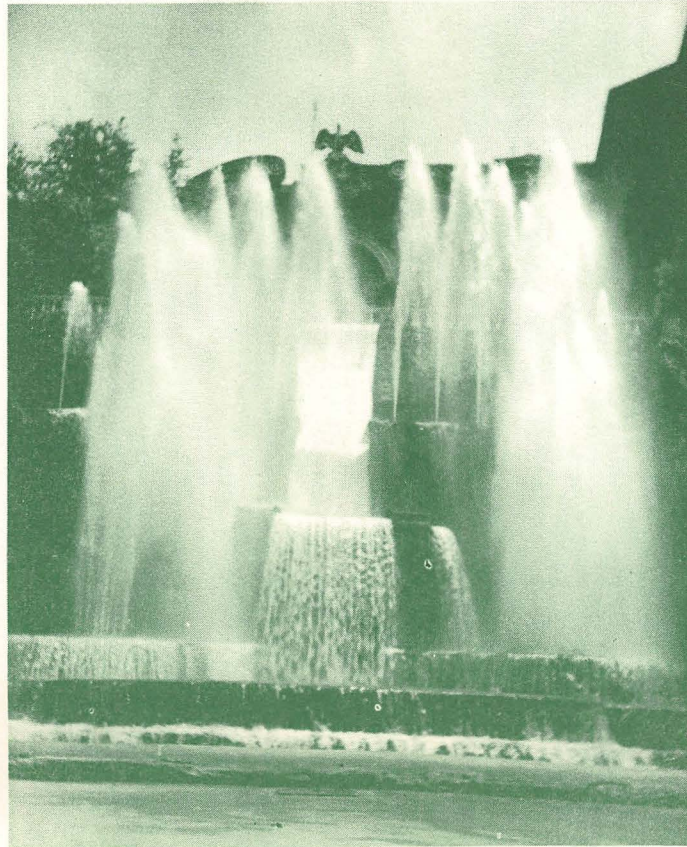
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Fountains at Tivoli, Villa d' Este
Photo by Rose Dawn

... 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 182
DO IT A LITTLE BETTER

A Matter of Grammar

Let the Play Begin

Examination Day

The Art of Living

That Extra Touch

Adieu

Looking Up the Hill

Meditation

Beloved Centurion:

I would like for you to picture yourself in your mind's eye, sitting with me in my study. I am at my large desk, and you are in a comfortable chair across the desk from me. All is quiet, for this is my private sanctum away from interruptions. We are having a little chat about life in general, talking informally before we go into the study of the lesson.

You are telling me some of the obstacles you have encountered, some of the difficulties you have had, and perhaps we are discussing your aims in life and those things which are keeping you from the success you so earnestly desire. Perhaps you are striving for perfection which is exactly what you should do; but sometimes you become disturbed because perfection seems so far away, and that is what you have come to talk with me about.

I point out to you that the reason you become discouraged is because you are seeking to attain the very highest. There are others in life who do the job at hand well enough to "get by", and perhaps it will suffice, but it is not their best; however, they are not striving to do better and, as a result, they do not become discouraged as you do. They are satisfied with just going along in a haphazard manner. By the same token, they will never experience the great thrill you will know once you have reached your goal. They have never had the ambition to begin with.

The purpose of these words that I have with you, as we are talking, is to help you overcome any feeling of discouragement, as you seek to do your very best in an effort to achieve MAXIMUM LIVING. The road to success is not an easy one. It takes effort, courage, and the ability to "keep on keeping on" when everything around you seems hopeless.

Remember, it is no disgrace to stumble on the way. Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. You will be stronger for having fallen and risen again. There has never been a man or woman who reached the pinnacle of success who hasn't suffered many heartaches of discouragement and times when they felt there was no use going on; but it is that wonderful Miracle Power within us that makes us get up when we are down and start all over again, and it makes the objective all worthwhile. There is no thrill so great as that of knowing the goal is within sight, and no greater satisfaction than when it is reached.

So I say to all of my students, as I say to those with whom I have the opportunity of a personal visit, when the way seems rough, almost too difficult to continue, be comforted in the knowledge that God works with you, and He will sustain you. Never hesitate to call on Him for help - He wants you to.

And that is what this lesson is about, as we undertake it together. It is about doing everything in all walks of life a little better, trying a little harder. Perhaps in your job, you may be able to get along by doing it in an average manner, or perhaps in your home life your family will be satisfied with just an ordinary job of home making; or perhaps you are working in your church and you do a little to help, but you could do very much more if you were

really trying to do your best.

It may be that you are going along in life in this manner, but you will never be really successful; most of all, you will never be happy with yourself. You will not have that wonderful glow that comes from the knowledge that you have given the task at hand, whatever it may be, the very best you have to give.

As you prepare your heart and mind for the lesson which is to follow, let the words of the prayer, which comes immediately, guide you as you continue on the Mayan Path toward MAXIMUM LIVING. It is my sincere belief that this prayer, uttered in earnest faith, will bring you all good things:

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we have been taught to ask largely

That we might receive largely.

Forgive me if I lean too hard on Thee,

But I am asking much.

I am asking that I may not be content even with the good,

But that by Thy grace I may be enabled always

To try to do things a little better.

Give me this dissatisfaction with ordinary standards,

And the grace to obey its promptings.


Amen

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A MATTER OF GRAMMAR

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 ONE of the most intriguing things in Grammar is the comparison of adjectives and adverbs. One can meditate long and profitably on this matter of degrees of quality, whatever that quality may be. Whether the comparison is from bad to worst or from good to best, it is beautiful to see how language can fit itself to thought.

Good is one of the most intriguing adjectives to compare, for it represents a quality all respect and most people desire. Good, better, best - that has a challenge in it. Good is always the place to start if you can. Best is the goal to keep trying to reach. Better is merely a step from the one to the

other. Here is the formula by which the transition is made - always do it a little better.

In a previous lesson we have discussed the Spanish proverb, "The good is the enemy of the best." It is fitting warning to those who might be satisfied with the good and stop there. Remember that the positive and comparative are only guideposts to the superlative - that which carries above. From the good to the best is a development, a progress. It is not accomplished at a single climb, but step by step. Try to make the good better, and the better a little better yet. That is the way to the best. The formula is as much for you as for anyone.

That is quite possible. When you finish anything and prepare to turn from it, look again and see if another effort will not improve it. Give it a little more care than is necessary. You can always do a little better. It is the extra stroke, - the added touch that makes quality in the product and ability in the doer.

If you are preparing a flower bed, see if the ground cannot be made just a little softer. If you are sweeping a floor, see if another little stroke here and there wouldn't improve the job. If you are doing a piece of work in the shop or office, give it that extra effort that makes a good piece of work superior. If you are conducting an affair of state, make it a masterpiece. Being a top-flight person in any field means doing things, even little things, in a top-flight manner.

Only the best is good enough. It is the only kind of effort that holds up and survives. The world passes by those who just try to do well enough to pass inspection, and seeks out the master craftsman and his work. It is proper that it should be so. That makes the challenge.

That was what Emerson meant when he wrote that if you write a better book, preach a better sermon, or build a better mousetrap, than your neighbor, though you dwell in the midst of a wilderness, the world will make a beaten path to your door. It will, but it will do more than that. It will be grateful that it has you to whom to come. Excellence, after all, is the magnet of the spirit.

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EXAMINATION DAY

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THE hour had come for the English examination. The students had manuscript paper spread before them, pens poised, and eyes turned to the questions on the blackboard. Most of the students then went steadily and studiously to work, some with ready pens and others with dragging minds and fingers.

One young lady went at it without even stopping to think. Her pen went racing along the moment she glanced at the first question. English was easy for her and she knew the answers and was literally throwing them onto the paper. In fifteen feverish minutes she stepped up and laid her paper on the teacher's desk.

"Don't tell me you have finished," said the teacher with a not very surprised expression.

"Yes, I have," was the reply. "I have answered all the questions."

"Now look here," said the teacher, "I am sure you have answered all the questions, but I am also sure you haven't done it as well as you can. That would not be possible in so short a time. Now go back to your seat and really take this examination. Use all the time there is. You will need it."

At the end of the period the student turned in another paper. Later the teacher called her to his desk and showed her the two papers and the grades they earned. The first was marked 76, and the second bore a grade of 98. "Which grade do you want to go into the record?" asked the teacher slyly. Your teacher ought to be able to vouch for the truth of this story. She was the student. That was the day she learned that whatever one does he can always do it a little better.

Life is a school, and the examinations are held at very frequent intervals. One is likely to be confronted with one on any phase of the subject at any moment of the day or night. Too many of us think of the old adage and let well enough alone when we should be crystallizing the purpose to do our best. We can rush through lessons, tasks, and examinations, and maybe even make passing grades; but unless a passing grade is the best one can do, it is not good enough.

We have quite a board of examiners to deal with too. They are not all like the kindly and understanding teacher in the above narrative, and they do not always deal as gently with us when we do not do our best. They demand our best, and have they not a right to?

Who are these examiners? One is the world, one is Life, one is God, and one is ourselves. The world includes both friends and foes. Life holds us to account and judges us wholly by results. God is kind and patient, but He is perfect too and He cannot be expected to deny His own nature. When you get settled on the judicial bench you yourself are likely to be the most exacting and demanding judge of all, for only God knows your work and qualities as well as you do. Keep this board of examiners in mind, and remember that if you want to win and hold their favor you must always try to do things a little better than last time, a little better than just well enough to get by, - a little better than good enough.

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THAT EXTRA TOUCH

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ONG ago a great teacher set before his hearers what might be called the doctrine of the second mile. He illustrated the idea by two suggestions. If anyone asks you for your coat, he said, give him your cloak too, and if anyone asks you to go with him a mile, go with him two miles. That

is, do everything in extra measure. Do and give more than is required.

We might also call it the doctrine of the extra touch, of going beyond what is necessary, of not making up a scanty package but a full one, of not giving underweight but overweight, of not filling the cup sparingly but to the brim, of not conducting life's affairs on the niggardly basis but the abundant one - full measure, filled to the top, pressed down, and running over. He said that was the way to live, and do, and give, and countless people have claimed to find it so.

On a journey across the continent last summer a little family group arrived one evening hot and tired at a little desert town in Nevada and stopped at a clean and inviting little motel. Between there and the Atlantic coast they had stopped at seven others. They had all been good, but none had had the home-like atmosphere of this one.

Shortly after they had gone to their rooms to prepare for dinner a man came to each door with a pitcher full of ice cubes. All evening they had an abundant supply of ice water with a little left - a bit more than necessary, you see, when the desert coolness came down carrying sleep on its silent wings. Of course we thought of what the Saviour said about a cup of cold water given in his name. None of the other seven on crowded highways and in prosperous cities, had thought of that or bothered with adding to their service a pleasant little extra touch to make the occasion memorable. Travelers who stop in that little western town will always think of the place with a tang of gratitude. The extra touch did it, doing something a little more than was necessary.

Years ago two carpenters were building stairways in a building. One put in exactly what the specifications called for, no less and certainly no more. The other did his work quite differently. Wherever he thought a support was too weak, he reinforced it. Where he thought the nails were not enough to hold for the life of the building, he put in a few more. Thirty years went by, and it was found that one of the stairways had to be rebuilt. You do not have to think long to guess which. The one a really interested and sympathetic workman had given an extra touch of quality and strength served its purpose till the building was taken down. We do not have to put that extra attention into what we do, but it is the way to maximum results not only in that one project but in the totality of life itself.

One may, if he chooses, go through life giving and doing what is strictly necessary and no more. That is all that is required of him, if he proposes only to hew to the line. He may get on in life, but he will do nothing distinctive. His work may not be very poor, but neither will it be very good. His name and place in human esteem will some time give way like the work he does. He gives the world what the law requires, and that is the measure of gratitude the world will give him. Give good measure in your living. Go the second mile. Do a bit better than you have to. Add the extra touch.

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LOOKING UP THE HILL

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ALL over the country are vast industrial plants. Few of them, especially the older ones, ever started on a large scale. The airplane industry started in a bicycle shop. One of the largest motor car enterprises started in a tool shed on the alley back of a little cottage home. One of the largest soap, perfume, and cosmetic industries was started in one rented room by a young man who had only enough capital to begin with one kettle of soap. The great vulcanized rubber industry started in a kitchen. These are only a few instances. There are plenty more.

What has made the difference between then and now? Men who have kept looking up the hill, who let the past go and pushed on. They were always trying to do better. They studied needs, methods, and techniques, struggling always to give the public a better product at less cost. As they became able they hired experts and developed great research laboratories to search for ways of producing more and better things the public could afford to buy. That is the main trend of the development of American industry, and the men who have done things deserve more credit and gratitude than they sometimes get.

Fifty years ago an old carbon lamp bulb with its comparatively dim light cost about forty cents. Today a better, brighter, longer lasting tungsten one costs about twelve cents. That has happened in many industries and with many things. It has not come about by accident. It has happened because men were spending money and brain power to bring it to pass.

You may not work in the same fields as these men have done, but you can have the same motives and use the same methods. Doing so, you will render a service to the human race, but you will also build stature to your life, strength to your character, and credit to your name. In some field of development, at least in the living of his own life, each of us must do something of the kind. How? Make it a service. Keep looking up the hill. Always be trying to do new and better things by new and better methods. When you have done well, go on and do better. That will make your work worthwhile and your life important.

This is asking nothing unreasonable or fanciful of ourselves. It is only suggesting that we manage our lives as wise and successful people conduct their business affairs. We are all slaves of something, so why not be the slave of a master who offers something in return?

Always keep your gaze turned up the hill, looking on from good to better and from better to best. No matter how promising something ordinary and low may seem, do not let its appeal divert your attention. If you aspire to the worthwhile your course lies in the other direction. There lie the deeper satisfactions and the richer rewards. One must choose what he wants, of course, but the people who have made progress for all of us have been those that kept looking up the hill.

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LET THE PLAY BEGIN

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AN inscription in the national capitol reads, "The Past is Prologue". Think about that deeply, first for the life of the nation, then for the world life itself, and third for your own life and work. It is very important to get a right valuation of the past, present, and future. Here is one that has challenge in it.

A wise man of old said, "We spend our years as a tale that is told." That is a free translation of the Hebrew, but a very significant one. Its implications are worthy of a great deal of meditation. He could have said, or the translators could have made him say, "as a play that is acted", and it would have meant the same thing. A play is simply a story in action, and it is built on the same principles as any narrative writing. So is life itself, moving as it does from situation through problem and crisis to climax and conclusion. It is the same for the life of the world as for the life of an individual.

Many stories and plays begin with actual prologues and end with a read or spoken epilogue, like the Book of Job, for instance. All the rest of the stories and plays have implied ones. A prologue, or something said before, is an approach to the action, words that pave the way for the story to begin. It creates a situation. The rest of the narrative determines what is to be done about it.

In the drama of life a prologue is what the past is, and all it is. We tend to think of the ages gone by as a long, long span; but the past is like a road that takes longer to travel than it does to think about. The world is really young. A million years or a billion years is not long in the working out of the plans of God.

It takes longer to get ready for a play to begin than the average member of the audience realizes anyway. Years of work may have gone into the play and months of preparation into preparations for it to be produced, and weeks into the training of the participants. Much of the past was spent building the stage for the human drama, the rest of it into creating the situation in which you find yourself at this point. That is prologue. Now the curtain is going up.

We are now just ready to get started really making history. The past ages have only built the setting and cleared the rubbish out of the way. During the past we have developed our powers, devised our methods, and laid our plans. You may not have recognized that the yesterdays were getting the world ready for you and you ready for it. They were not casted. They were clearing the stage for the first act.

The best books are yet to be written. The greatest discoveries are yet to be made. The finest advances are yet to be accomplished. The greatest things are yet to be achieved. We all have glorious things ahead of us if we will only not rock the boat now.

This is your age, your time and opportunity. You have advantages in

your favor you could never have had before. Do not let them lie around you unused. They are invitations to progress and achievement - tools, books, information, available help, greater understanding of life, more knowledge of how to find God and work with Him. What does the turmoil of the times matter? Find your way and walk in it. Be a new pioneer. Help to build in the world and in yourself the conditions all the ages have been getting ready for. The past is prologue. Let the play begin.

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THE ART OF LIVING

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LIFE is an art, and you are the artist commissioned to live it. That is a high Honor. Make the most of it.

You are like a painter struggling to put onto canvas the dream that is in your soul. Probably you can never quite paint it as you feel it, but you try to keep approaching the ability to do so. Or you are like a musician trying to find and record the combinations of sound that can convey to others what thrills your own heart. That too is something you are always approaching, but meanwhile you are becoming a master. Or you are like a sculptor always trying, and with increasing success, to chip away the excess stone that imprisons the image of your thought. Or you are like a writer seeking words and groupings of words that will suggest to others the vision, experience, hope, and faith, that are your true self.

Let us dwell for awhile on the idea that you are like a writer. It is hardly a figure. It is almost a literal fact. Busily, faithfully, sometimes wearily, you keep building a story. Whether you write it or not, you are living it, which amounts to the same thing so far as the story is concerned.

It is an autobiography you are writing, a story of your own life. You have been working at it ever since you can remember. Some of the sentences used to be halting, bungling, and incomplete. They are better now because you have learned much by practice. There was a time when some of the pages were pretty badly stained and blotted. You have improved in that too.

But each thing you learn about the story of your life and how to make it work out well shows you how much is yet to be learned. You wouldn't be satisfied with the way the record once ran. Some day you would not be satisfied with the way it runs now. That is the story of living, and it is a grand and wonderful thing, for it keeps you always trying to make it a little better. An old poem tells the story of most of us trying to write our compositions on life. The teacher is speaking.

"He came to my desk with a quivering lip.
The lesson was done.
'Dear teacher, I want a new leaf,' he said.
'I have spoiled this one.'

I took the page all stained and spotted,
And gave him a new one still unblotted,
And into his sad eyes smiled,
'Do better now, my child.'

Whatever shape your life takes, and whatever art it most resembles, art is exacting, but you improve with practice. You have come up a long road of effort, learning to do by doing and by trying always to do a little better.

You have taken infinite pains. You have labored unceasingly to reach such excellence as you have, and you must go on in the same way to attain more. What hours of struggle, practice, drudgery, lie behind the finished work of any artist! How many would concur in the statement that art is one-fourth inspiration and three-fourths perspiration! But keep an artist from his practice if you can. If that could be done, he would not remain an artist. He knows that perfection keeps moving on. It has to be pursued. One has to be better today to be as good as he was yesterday.

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ADIEU

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THERE is beauty of meaning in the French word adieu and the similar Spanish word adios. They both come from the same Latin words, and have the same literal translation. They do not say goodbye, or farewell, or I'll see you. These languages have other forms for that. This is a parting word which means go with God. By it the one friend commits the other to the heavenly keeping.

We come now to the close of this lesson series on making the most of life. Not everything has been said on the subject that might be said, but as much has been said as could be put into these seven - mystic number - messages. The lines on these pages mean more than they say. Try to get the implications that lie between them, and let us hope that their meaning will be rich and abundant enough to repay you.

The sum of it is about this: Let your heart have its dreams. Some will pass, but others will live, and cling, and grow till you will have to do something about making them come true. Let your intelligence and your conscience check your dreams and work them over till you know what is the gleam you must follow. There will be a heavenly vision that so fits in as to seem right for you. That is the picture of what you must be and do in the world. It is your life all plotted and charted for you. Now you know what you must achieve. Get your program under way, for "Art is long, and time is fleeting". Heed the word of Merlin, the dying magician, of Tennyson's Idylls of the King:

"Not of the sunlight,
Not of the moonlight,
Not of the starlight.
O young mariner,

Down to the haven
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And e'er it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it.
Follow the gleam."

Plan your work. Take pride in it. Put all your powers into it. Be a quality workman. Strive for mastery. Having decided what is worth doing and chosen your part in it, respect it enough to do it well. Observe the ways of the masters of the past and present. Try to do your part as well as they did theirs, but do not be a mere imitator. See if you can work out approaches and methods of your own, superior ones perhaps. Keep your gaze turned up the hill where your goal is. Keep at it. As you come to each detail try to do it better than the ones before. Try to make the total effect better even than you have dreamed.

Only two more things remain to be said. The first is, do it and do not be content just to dream about it. The most perfect plan is worthless unless it is followed. The loftiest purpose is futile unless it is achieved. The grandest dream is lost if it is not made to come true. Whatever upward way you seek starts with drudgery. Whenever and wherever you start you have to begin by making friends with it, and being strong enough not to be dismayed by workaday things. The master dare not fear long hours, sacrificed pleasures, tired muscles, and a weary mind. Between an easy life and a victorious one he must choose. Self indulgence creates no masterpieces. The other word is - Adieu.

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MEDITATION

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THROUGHOUT this lesson I have more and more clearly seen two pictures of myself - one as I am, the other as I might be. I rejoice to think that the possibilities of that second picture are all within my reach. I now claim them and undertake to realize them. With the humility of a beginner I now set out on the way to where I shall presently be something more than a beginner.

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