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ON THE ROAD

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Beloved Centurion:

We have called this lesson that has been prepared for you "On the Road". You, in the advanced class, I am sure know that we refer to the Road of Life. You have come a long way in your studies and, as you know, the time is drawing close when you will be at a place in the road where you will be entitled to and will receive your initiation into the Tenth Degree. You have learned many things about the Road of Life, and how to travel it with more ease and more safety and the ability to get more out of life. You have learned that the road you have traveled is but a memory, and the road that you will travel tomorrow is the road filled with hope - Memory and Hope.

There are some who do not appreciate life, the wonders and the beauty of it. A lady of my acquaintance recently lost her husband and her continuous cry is, "I have nothing to live for. Life holds nothing for me now." This dear soul is a nurse and has so much to live for, really - so many people who need her help, so many people whose lives she could change from sadness to gladness through her knowledge of nursing or other attributes that she has - but right now she can think only of self and her loneliness.

The best cure in the world for loneliness is to give of ourselves to others. It is the surest cure for sadness, loneliness, and many other of life's hurts. And when we complain that life has no joys, when there is a single person we can relieve by our generosity, whom we can assist by our advice, or cheer up by our companionship, we should never lament the loss of anything we have had. It is very much like complaining of being hungry when there is food before us, or thirsty when there is a cup of water at our elbow.

There are so many places in this life where we are needed, and there is no greater joy than giving of ourselves. There is always something to live for, something good and worthwhile - if we will just recognize it.

There are many people who consider themselves true Christians, who think of the world as "a veil of tears and sadness". They would be more like my idea of what a Christian should be if they would look upon this life as a happy place. I believe God is more pleased with this attitude than He is with the attitude of some who are always pessimistic and think nothing is right, who can see no worthwhile thing on any side.

Although there are, of course, disappointments and errors and heartbreaks at times, there are so many thousand joys that it would be ingratitude and unfair to call this life and the road we travel a place of torment and unhappiness. I know that there are times when heartaches that come to us seem almost too much to bear. During my many years of service to humanity, many thousands of people have brought me their disappointments and difficulties. Their lives had become a tangled skein that they were not able to unravel and restore to order without help. I do know your problems. Life is not all sunshine - but it is wonderful and glorious and soul satisfying when we understand how to accept these things and are able to keep on the road, looking forward to better things to come.

Life is a tapestry made up of so many colors and designs. If you will think about it, you will see in your mind's eye the bright colors that denote the bright things in life. You will also see the grey, or more monotonous, tones that denote depressed moods in our lives, and the tones of dark purples and black that represent the times when we are sunk in the depths of despair. These occurrences in life all follow a pattern, but you will notice that the tapestry is beautiful and is harmonious in spite of what seems to be discordant colors at the time they occur. They all eventually form something beautiful.

This is the way life was meant to be; and when we do not know the important rules of traveling on the road, how to conduct ourselves, which way to go, what companions to choose, we can get off the main road very easily. The important thing is to keep on the straight road, for life is a journey - it is not a home; it is a road - and not just a city where we live; and the enjoyment of the blessings that we have are but little stops on the roadside of life where we can be refreshed for a little while in order to go forward.

And with this thought in mind, let us ask for guidance as we continue on the road that we call Life's Highway.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Thou hast sent me on a journey,
not over the miles but through the years. Help
me to travel bravely and to attain a worthy goal.
Amen.



Travelers

In this lesson let us think about the well-known fact that we are all travelers, with a little way to go on a road that stretches far back through the years, on to the place to which we have started, and then far on ahead through the days of other generations. On most roads we may start, stop, and start and stop again and again, traveling energetically, listlessly, or as we will; but on this road we travel at a standard rate of speed and never stop till, either at our station or some other, we finish this journey and go on to another road.

There is something cumulative about this procession of the generations. The remote past and the recent yesterday both still live in the journeying of today, and the steps we are taking now are building something that will live far beyond the period of our departure. We are traveling on a road the past has built for us, and carrying material that will be built into the road of the future ahead of us. But the past is done, and the future will take care of itself. Our concern here is only our own time and our part in it.

We had no choice concerning the time we should begin this journey, and we shall have no more than temporary control over the time when we shall complete it. Our generation was chosen for us, not merely by our ancestors, but by the Power that rules the ages. The warp of the fabric was already on the loom, but the weft we must weave into it from our own shuttle. Thus both God and we will have something to do with the design. Yesterday belonged to our fathers. Tomorrow will belong to our children. But today belongs to us.

Even so, that portion of our progress that is in our hands is still affected by three things - the lives of others, the influence of events, and the over-control of God which we sometimes call Destiny. These are like turns we have to make, hills we have to cross, rough or smooth places we have to traverse, and various kinds of scenery we have to pass. The road has plenty of variety, and we can choose whether to think of it as a trouble and a problem or as the spice of life. Human existence consists, however, of unity in variety, and it must be good or the Creator would not have willed it so. At any rate, under these features of our journey we determine what we shall make of it and what our sharing of it is to mean to others.

We have records of a part of the past, and relics of more of it; but still more of it is mystery with a little light shed on it here and there by our assumptions. The present we partly know and understand, but even it holds much of mystery and is subject to miscalculation. As to the future, we have no map of that at all. In such sources as the prophets we have occasional mystic glimpses, but in the main we have to move into it by faith. From what we know of the past, which once was an unknown future, we can assume that the road will be passable.

We also know, judging by the past and our experience thus far in the present, that we can make every part of the journey mean much, and that we will find the going good, if we are good travelers. Hence the few suggestions in this lesson.



Our Fellow Travelers

One fact about the road we take is that it is not a lonely one. Traveling through life is not a solitary process. We can always depend on having plenty of fellow travelers. In fact, it is beginning to be a little crowded, according to the statisticians. This, as we have already hinted, is something of which we have to take account and that will affect our going whether we do or not. The impact of human lives, personalities, actions, and thoughts, on each other is something that affects the history of the world every day and hour. This is a hint to be careful of our own in our generation.

One can be lonely, however, even in a crowd if he so chooses; but it is not necessary unless he is alone in a desert or on the sea. It is better to be conscious of others because we have an inevitable relationship with them and duty to them. If we evade that responsibility we will come to the end of our journey with our work by that much undone, and no one can imagine what the total result of that will be through the ages to come. We are parts of the world life of our time, and our influence reaches everywhere and touches everyone too. Not only does it take all kinds of people to make a world, but it takes a great many of each kind. We have a game to play, and we are therefore members of a team.

One interesting thing about this road we travel is that while there is only the one road, not everyone on it is going to the same place. You might ask any group along the way, and there might not be any two who are trying to reach the same goal. On this journey our goals are not places but purposes. The wise person chooses a good one and chooses it early. If he ever changes his mind he changes it in favor of something better. He can depend on it too that some others will choose the same one because they have confidence in his judgment. That should make any one of us have a care.

We all vary. It is ordered so. In fact, no two of us are exactly alike. But people who are different in makeup and nature can still be living for the same values, just as you can reach the same spot with the aid of almost any kind of a vehicle. We must choose well our effects on others and theirs on us. The fact that we all vary and differ may add to the value of this interchange because of its variety. Certainly the associations we have along the way need never be dull.

This makes the road of life a kind of traveling school in which we learn by experience how to live collectively, a school of brotherhood we might say, and brotherhood is something we have to attain before the world life comes right. Until and unless we learn that lesson the journey is a failure, because that is what makes the world a home and us a family under the divine fatherhood and care.

Each of all our companions is contributing something to the interest of the journey - a word, a thought, an act, a song, a pleasant hour. That is what makes it a world life. Mutual help is the bond welded between and among us.



The Road Varies

Not only do the people on the road vary, but the road itself varies also. Here it is smooth and there rough. It makes sudden turns and crosses rugged hills. Its variety has its problems, but if we face them normally they are interesting, and we must remember that they, as well as the easy stretches, are bringing us toward our goals. The only value of a straight road is that it gets one there sooner, but this is a journey we do not need to hurry. We would not reach the end of it any sooner, and not many are anxious to be through with it anyway. The important thing is to make each step not only a progress but a meaningful and valuable one, and that is not usually done in a hurry.

We have a duty to the road of life itself. We should make it smoother for any others who come that way as others before us have done for us. Look at the traces of vanished civilizations. They tell us what kind of people passed that way. Sad to say, most of these traces are ruins and many of them are not very creditable. We should leave evidences that we have learned better how to do and build than the Romans or the Babylonians knew. While we are living we are building traditions. Everyone who makes anything or writes anything should consider the person who in future ages will dig it up and read it.

Many of the finest roads began as foot-trails or cowpaths. They were developed by succeeding generations into what we see today. There is on the West Coast a beautiful highway that was developed from a ratty mud road by the agitation of one or two men who had once needed fast transportation there and did not have it, and it took more than forty years to bring it about; but they did something for all the future and especially for people who have emergencies to meet there.

This is a hint that shows us how God is building the future through us. As Lowell has written, "Through the ages one unceasing purpose runs". It is an unfolding purpose too. We cannot now realize its wonder and value, but we know we have to build our part of it in our day. There is no question about that. The most important thing in it to each of us is the quality of the part he plays.

The road brings variation of experience as well as of nature, and that adds interest to the journey if we have the spirit of adventure and are not afraid of change. Though we are always engaged in the same thing, getting where Life designed we should go and making the best we can of the journey, it adds something of zest to discover that there is always something new and different. Life is a little like watching the unfolding of a rosebud or the growth of a field of grain. It is good to watch for what is coming next, and to know that it all counts toward progress. Even if now and then the road runs over a crag that looks a little threatening or through a glen that looks a little narrow, it is good to know we have the courage and the ability to get past.

Even the hills, turns, and rough places, are part of our progress. They lead on to fulfillment even more truly than the easy stretches, because they test our ability to get on, and the exercise of getting over them gives us strength and watchful judgment that are of value. As Cardinal Newman wrote, "I do not ask to see the distant scene. One step enough for me". That is the way we have to go, and it is well.

The Scenery

One of the chief interests along any road is the scenery. It changes with place and season, but also changes with person and mood. The landmarks were there before we came, and they will be there after we have passed; but we bring something of the scenery too. Much of what any person sees in anything comes from within himself. It may be a reaction of his usual nature, or it may be the coloring of a temporary mood. He may wear rose-colored spectacles or blue goggles, or he may just see things as they are.

This is especially true of the road from yesterday to tomorrow. A number of people may look at the same thing at the same time, and each one sees something different. If a single bird is singing in a tree a naturalist may see it as a laboratory specimen, a small boy as a target for his arrow, a sad person as something with a song of hope and peace, and a nature lover as something beautiful to admire and classify. It depends not only on the object, but on the viewpoint.

That is because these people are all seeing themselves in what is before them. Life is a mirror. Since we see ourselves in things, we have something by which to judge our status and measure any improvement we can make in it. The world and the things and people in it will at any given moment look as attractive or as drab as the attitude and viewpoint of the beholder, and the more we look the more permanent the image becomes.

The way to enjoy traveling on a road is to be alert and interested in looking for the lovely and the good, for they are there. There is an old story of a husband and wife who had grown old at hard work, earning, and saving, and decided to take an ocean voyage. As the boat sailed out into the bay the old lady went into an ecstasy about the beauty of the scene, and the husband replied that it certainly was impressive for money could undoubtedly be made from digging clams there.

A creative imagination can even see the possible beauty on an unattractive road. When we come to a flowerless spot we can, if we will, think how lovely it could be made by planting some flowers there. We might, especially if it is the road of life, plant a few there. The people who have done most for the way of life have been those who could visualize things not merely as they are but as they might be. That was what the Master did with people, and those of us who do the same are the ones who really help to make a better world.

Any road is beautiful if we travel it with a good purpose and in search of a good place. A road can be just a road leading to nowhere or anywhere, a road to travel listlessly and without purpose; or it can be a road of heart's desire, which is always lovely, for what heart cherishes a desire that is not so? We have only to be careful that the desires of our hearts are beautiful. Then we shall not lack for scenery that is good to look at. If your road seems drab today you have the power to change it, for it runs right through your heart.

Memory and Hope

Every road, to the traveler, has two ever-changing parts, the road behind and the road ahead, the road already traversed and that yet to go. Every single step makes the one longer and the other shorter. How can life get dull and drab for us when it is constantly changing, taking new forms, and presenting new aspects? It is a wonderful thing to live, and the better job we make of it the better it is. All the ability, artistry, ingenuity, and originality one has he can put into the process of living, and find it rewarding. That is because of the two wonderful things these two sections of the road afford us - memory and hope. The road behind is for remembering, and the road ahead for such hoping and achieving that it too will be good to remember.

You have your treasured memories of things, places, and events you have seen and experienced. The faces of the people you have met there rise now and then before you. With the perspective of time you see new meanings in those happenings, experiences, and contacts. You have gone far enough to see how and where they fitted into the pattern. Take good care of these memories. They are parts of the fabric of your life, and they are precious. Even those that did not seem so pleasant at the time turn out to have a value for you.

The road ahead is, of course, the road of hope. Its scenery is painted by fancy and desire, but they wield their brushes at the bidding of destiny. In the impulses and urges that come to us is the foreshadowing of a plan. We refer now not to the passing foolish impulses about unimportant things, but to the deep, sure reachings of the heart to that which it wishes to accomplish and attain. Some of the road may not be quite so attractive as hope has pictured, but other parts of it may be better, so the account balances.

Treasure your hopes, even as you treasure your memories. Keep them beautiful and good, for they are the measures of your life. They are the pattern destiny is cutting out and by which she means to shape the garment you will wear. Hope is the craving of the inner life just as hunger is the craving of the body. Each is a demand for nourishment, an urge to turn your steps in the direction of its satisfaction. The most important purpose of feeding the body is to give it strength to seek the feeding of aspiration.

The great difference between your memories and your hopes is that the first are accomplished, and the second are yet to achieve. Much futility and failure results from assuming that all this is automatic, that somehow it does itself. No greater mistake can be made. If your memories are chance ones they are not as good as they would be if they were accomplished ones. We have said that hope is a pattern. You are the weaver. It is a plan, you are the builder. It is far better so, because then you can know that you too played a necessary part.

As you accomplish your worthwhile aspirations, or fail to, you are building memories that will always give you satisfaction or regret, and that you can

never change. All we can do about our failures is to try not to repeat them, but even that is of incalculable value and importance. Every day the change is taking place and the price being paid. Tomorrow this day will be a memory. Work with hope to make it one you will be glad to keep.



Become a Seasoned Traveler

When you started on this road you were a novice, a beginner. Today you are an experienced traveler, beginning to be a seasoned one if you are not one already. You learned by experience. You have the memories, and perhaps a few scars, to prove it; but you have more. You have the selfhood you have attained and the fruits you have gathered from your efforts.

But this will become truer and truer to the very end of this lap of the journey. There is always something to do, something to learn, and the opportunity to profit by it. The imaginative stories of wonder and opportunity pale into insignificance in comparison with the real ones you find all the way along the road of life. It has significance, wonder, and challenge, beyond anything conceived by the most active imagination. Do not fail to see and make the most of them, for this road is the school of your spirit, the school that will not merely add to your knowledge but will make you wise.

On ordinary roads we grow footsore, but in the long run that toughens us for the rest of the journey. On this road one may at times grow heartsore, but that too has its value. It is a measure of the experience already gained. It is also a sign that one is making progress. Inaction leaves both feet and hearts at ease, but so much poorer!

We cannot expect a journey not to involve some problems and some setbacks. These are not defeats. Never accept them as such. Your victory is getting on, and these things are signs that you are doing so. Oddly enough this is true even of the ordinary setback. By our own faults we can slip back to the bottom of the hill, but most of our setbacks are only a little way. The important thing is not to let them equal the measure of our climb. As long as they do not we are approaching the goal, and only having the same problems everyone else has had who made the journey.

The seasoned traveler has gained understanding as he has proceeded on his way, and much of it comes from the problems and setbacks he has had. He knows better how to find the road as he moves on into new territory. He knows better what to look for, how to face the difficulties, and how to make the best of what he meets. This can only come from real experience, like expertness in a guide, a scout, or a pilot. The one who has been there or somewhere like it is the one who knows.

For one thing the seasoned traveler will not let himself be deflected onto side roads leading him afield, losing his time, and perhaps directing him to

failure. The first thing is to keep to the main traveled road. There is no novelty in getting off it in search of new trails. The novelty is in moving ahead. Everything is new with each step forward one takes. That is the way to be a real modern. The seasoned traveler is one who has somewhere to go and is always going there. His life has purpose, and he is achieving that purpose.



Be a Good Companion

All our generation travels together, with the addition of some younger ones coming on and some older ones who still linger. This fellowship of ages too is good, for all need help and all have help to give. We have always to keep our integrity as individuals, but at the same time we have to play our parts as companions on the way. There is an interplay of personalities, ideas, influences, viewpoints, and wills. When we learn to keep unified and harmonize with others and make pleasant progress in this interplay we have learned something invaluable. In other words, we must manage to be good companions.

At this point we will ultimately succeed or fail, for even in good things we have to give and obtain cooperation.— One against the crowd may save himself, but he will not save the situation. We may achieve our personal destinies alone, but together we build the history and progress of the age. Without having learned cooperation, and how to influence others for good without giving offense, we find ourselves checkmated and checkmating others. That is why good will is so necessary to the new age.

If so great a company is to travel together on the world's greatest road toward such a goal, those in it must be friends along the way. Hence one of life's greatest and most important by-products, friendship. Our lives are all related and interdependent in this world, even if we do not know it and even if we do not know each other. We are built together like a machine or a vast structure. We are not so many individuals, but an organization. We can make this a very happy and fortunate fact by being friends and companions. Therefore we must be concerned and help one another, and work not for one or a few but for all.

If divisions of feeling, interest, and purpose, develop among the members of this fellowship, the progress of all of us is slowed down, parts of it may be stopped, and even that of our whole generation may be halted if the strife is sufficient, as in a great war for instance. That is the chief reason why we must always work toward the realization of the nativity anthem about peace on earth and good will among men. Neither progress nor happiness will come where there is no peace.

It is our high privilege to have the joy and advantage of having many helpers as we live our lives, and it is scarcely a lesser privilege to be helpers to many and to enjoy all the congeniality we can develop as we go. We have enough common interests that we certainly should be able to be congenial, not with a selected few but with all of like desires. We should make the most of that.

Onward we go, then. That word "onward" suggests a very great deal. It indicates the meaning of life, and shows that it is not static but dynamic, and that its dynamic nature is more or less according to our teamwork; the measure in which we have each other's help and encouragement. There are dark and lonely detours we can take, but the main road is not dark and lonely. The harder stretches of it are not so hard, and the brighter stretches are easier still, because we have companions, and we have companions by being companions ourselves.

When a journey is over, among its most pleasant memories are those of traveling companions we met along the way. At the end of the road there are two inevitable questions: "did we play our parts well?", and "were we good companions?"

AFFIRMATION

Each evening finds me at a new point on the road of life, and each morning I must make a new start. In my hours of rest I plan new and better progress.

Blessings,

YOUR INSTRUCTOR.