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EC5513 The Worst Trait of Human Nature

Newton W. Gaines

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U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

Extension
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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
THE WORST TRAIT OF HUMAN NATURE
Newton W. Gaines

Were the power given me to choose and blot out the one worst sin in the world, I would need to think very carefully before carrying out the privilege. I would recall the curse of drink, the crime of murder, theft, kidnapping and a score of others. But, taking these as nationwide wrongs, any one of them influences a comparatively small percentage of the population. I would want to eliminate a sin that is harming the largest number of the people and as I consider all the wrong tendencies of human nature I come back every time to the sin of selfishness as being the worst of all universal wrongs. No one is exempt from its influence. It harms everybody, if not directly, then indirectly.

You know some very unselfish folks, who always think of others. But scores of their friends and untold numbers of their acquaintances inconvenience and hurt and harm them thru selfishness.

There are the people who haven't very much in common with us, but who drop in for Sunday dinner unannounced or who stay for supper at the least mention of such a thing. Or it may be a husband who right at dinner time takes a casual acquaintance home with him unbeknown to his wife. Or maybe another husband does not dare ask an occasional friend home with him on account of his wife's aversion to such a thing and when a condition makes such an invitation necessary, he may suffer real anguish lest a selfish wife humiliate him and his friends by inhospitable actions in the home. Then there's the dread of a scene after the people are gone. Why can't husband and wife understand each other a little better? Why can't we manifest a little more give and take spirit? There is a fair ground of reasonableness half way between either one thoughtlessly committing the above mentioned mistakes. There are certain unpleasant visitors who must be occasionally cared for in every home. Let's get together, husband and wife, on a sympathetic understanding relative to these things and we may get a little mutual pleasure or, if not that, then a little better understanding out of performing the not-any-too-joyous task, each sympathizing with the other.

Husband and wife, why not analyze ourselves just a little along the lines of our selfishness toward each other? How many things do we give up just for the other? How many times do we trample upon the other's rights, or, to put it gruffly, butt in on what is altogether the other's rights?

There's the hardboiled husband who doesn't want the children to joke at the table or laugh aloud while he reads or to play games or tap dance or sing when he's around. Well, when the children draw such a father, he's generally too stubborn to change and maybe it's best to devote all effort to sympathy for the children. But it is too bad that such a parent can't see how brutal such an attitude in the home is. True at times Mother has the headache or Dad has some work that must be done and at such times the children should be taught thoughtfulness in keeping quiet to help somebody else. But generally such an attitude is just pure unadulterated selfish bigheadedness. Fathers, let us just question our various attitudes in the home. It's as natural for a child to play as it is for a bird to sing on the branch

of a tree in June. Maybe we can't play with them, but it's terrible for us to put fear in their hearts every time they think of play. Such suppression spoils their dispositions and some day they may be as selfish as we and it may come at a time when we need, really need their sympathy and help.

Why can't husband and wife just sit down at the table and talk all these things over - not yell them back and forth at each other - but just talk them over and find a common ground of mutual interest? Yes and even draw the children into the discussion on such things. Oh, how children do like to have their ideas considered once in a while in the home.

Then there's the selfish fellow who is always trying to make a hit by telling a joke at somebody's else expense or that is of such a nature that it not only humiliates the one on whom the joke is told, but those to whom it is told as well. On such occasions all listeners should remember "silence is golden" and keep lips sealed from word or laugh unless in some way the joke can be mildly turned on the joker. We might ask ourselves the question, "Am I guilty of trying to get a laugh at somebody's else expense?" Following closely in the wake of the above named fellow is the one who never goes out of his way to praise anybody else, but who is always singing his own praises. The old negro had such a one just right when, after listening for some time to a politician making a speech, upon being asked who the speaker was he replied, "I don't know who the gentleman is, but he sure do give hisself a mighty good recommendation". Such a one always regales you with incidents and happenings to himself. He never listens to anything only long enough to have it remind him of something that happened to him or that he did or that he told someone and then away he goes telling you all about it. He generally imagines himself to be the all-important fellow at home. When out in company he ignores his wife, bullies his kids and bores everybody. He isn't mean; he's just a general nuisance.

Sometimes we find a person who, himself, holds a good position or owns a good farm, maybe by accident or perchance thru merit, and considers himself superior to those not so fortunate; or it may be the fellow who has plenty of honor heaped upon him and who is called upon to do a lot of things that are an honor or maybe he has one of many chances to go as a delegate to some meeting, things which he might occasionally pass down to some worthy fellow below him in status and who would consider it the thrill of a life time and who could do it creditably well, and yet the selfish one cops the honor to himself, makes the trip or takes the credit, not because he wants to be selfish, but because he is selfish and never considers the other fellow as his equal in ability and he may be his superior in reality.

It might be well for all of us to question ourselves a little along these and other lines. How often do I keep myself in the background to give someone else a chance? How thotful am I of other people's feelings? Do I get mad or provoked or suspicious and hurt them without real cause? Can I see and recognize good in the person I like the least? Can I be just to my worst enemy, if I am so terribly unfortunate as to have an enemy? How much of a slave to selfishness am I? Do I spend too much time thinking bad thots about people and things in general?

As I talk over this radio material now, I know, if you are tuned in, you are getting my message. Yet the human mind is the greatest radio sending station in all the universe, but we give it very little thot. Leading up to that idea don't you know folks whose very presence suppresses you and makes you feel blue and downcast? And don't you know others who just lift you up and cheer you

on? I don't mean the fellow who is the "life of the party" - that hilarious fellow who really has misinterpreted hilarity for happiness. He's generally selfish and is hilarious just because it attracts attention. But I mean the one who just makes his presence so helpful that you feel uplifted and peaceful and confident and free and easy and sure of yourself. Such a one is God's chosen ambassador. It's all a matter of right thinking. If I think selfish mean thots about you, I'm broadcasting that kind of thots to others and I'll always grow even meaner myself the longer I think mean suspicious things of you. We always take upon ourselves the very characteristics we are looking for in the other person and I'll gradually build up an air about me so charged with suspicion and envy and mean ideas that these will create so much static interference that nobody gets any messages from me but disagreeable ones and they'll try to tune off every time I broadcast my presence.

We should try to think thots that have the foundations of truth, the granite of courage, the cement of sympathy, and then our presence will become a veritable fountain of inspiration to all within the field of our influence. Verily as a man thinketh in his heart - so is he.

We teach our children, when they are bad, to beware of bears, goblins and such. It would be much better if we would teach them to beware of evil thots which are in the air and all about them and which can only get hold of them when they are thinking and saying bad things. And it's not imaginary - it's true - oh, how true, because when they think and act badly the mind just becomes a magnet that draws bad to it just like a steel magnet draws steel. That's why people who live unselfish lives grow old so happily - all the turmoil of discontent and selfishness goes right past them - doesn't register because their receiving set is only tuned in on the better things. When we grow a little older we'll either be centers of good or maelstroms of evil. The country is right now trying to emerge from the holocaust of hell known as depression and we are beginning to see the light, but it would come faster if there weren't so many partisan politicians, both Democratic and Republican, spreading so much publicity of doubt and fear. We're on the way up, and, if they don't rock too violently the boat of suspicion, we'll weather the gale. We are already, I say, on the way up, but it will take all our cooperation to come on out of it - standing together with the sunshine of faith, the showers of confidence, the spirit of hope and the bulwark of loyalty.

Talk about Hell - the fellow who lives in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion and hatred and envy all the time doesn't have to wait for a future Hell - he has a whole flock of them all around him. Folks, it doesn't pay. That's one of the tragedies of the hard times we've gone thru. It's blasted so many hopes and withered so many ideals and seered so many consciences, and the battle for some has been too great for even the most valiant. But now things are better. Let's grab in, hold on, push forward, stand together, help each other. That "help each other" idea is one for those who are in trouble themselves. If we see someone in need of assistance and we go to their rescue, we'll momentarily forget our own trouble - and that's some help.

When a feller ain't got a cent,
And he's feelin' kinda blue
And the clouds hang dark and heavy
And won't let the sunshine thru,
It's a great thing - oh my brother
For a feller just to lay
His hand upon your shoulder
In a friendly sort of way.

We might also question the selfishness of our appetite. Do I eat things which I know do not agree with me just because I like them? Do I balance my starches and meats up with plenty of fruits and vegetables? Maybe I like meat and starches (potatoes, bread, etc.) better and farmers are interested in people consuming these, but he who wants to keep healthy must learn that starches and meats alone are not a wise diet. In old age, if not in time of youth, it may bring aches and pains, unless balanced with fruits and vegetables. When one balances the diet and lives actively he can eat starches and meats to his heart's content - until he's past middle age - then - better - slow down.

Do I do things for my community, that is, for the whole community, or am I just interested in my own family?

I want to be elected to a certain job or to a certain office in the club or lodge and somebody else gets it. Can I say, well, he'll make a good officer and I'm going to help him to make good?

Who is the most successful man in your community? Does it happen to be the one who has made the most money or has he been too busy just making money? Everybody should aim to make money, but when money gets to be the center of one's interests - well, that one will become unhappily selfish and is very liable to become unlikably bigoted also. And such a one is miserable company for himself when he grows old.

I know a man who has made more money than any other man in his community and I am quite sure more than any other man in the county. In his methods of farming he is also the outstanding man in his part of the state. With all this he has had time to lead a Boys' and Girls' club, to act as president of his County Farm Bureau and his wife always has time to be an active member of the Home Demonstration Project club. When they grow old they'll have so many interests in the community that time will never hang heavily on their hands. Their children are settling on farms right around the old folks. Oh, what a joyous old age faces these people!

Another man in the same county owns one of the finest farms in the country. His work is always up. He knows how to get the most work out of his boys and there's always too much for the wife and girls to do. They go very few places. He sneers at the idea of his children belonging to a Boys' and Girls' club. He belongs to no farm organization of any kind. He feels superior to his neighbors just because he can beat them at making money. Old age will find him a slave to his work and unhappy because he can't keep at it as he always has done all his life. Measuring his whole life up he is a colossal failure. He has never possessed a sense of real values.

Let us figure out just how little real joy selfishness can get for us now and where it is leading us when the present has become the distant past. "The echoes of kind words and good deeds roll from soul to soul and they grow forever and forever". But the highest motive in life is a desire to help humanity to leave the world a little better because we lived in it no matter how humble our lives may have been.

"If I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain.
If I can ease one life that's aching
Or cool one pain
Or help one fainting robin into its nest again,
I shall not have lived in vain."

Think Right

Think smiles, and smiles shall be;
Think doubt, and hope will flee,
Think love, and love will grow;
Think hate, and hate you'll know.
Think good, and good is here;
Think vice - its jaws appear!
Think joy, and joy ne'er ends;
Think gloom, and dusk descends.
Think faith, and faith's at hand;
Think ill, it stalks the land.
Think peace, sublime and sweet;
And you that peace will meet.
Think fear, with brooding mind,
And failure's close behind.
Think this: "I'm going to win!"
Think not on what has been.
Think Vict'ry; "Think I can!"
Then you're a "winning man."

- David V. Bush

It's All in the State of Mind

If you think you are beaten, you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't;
If you think you'd like to win, but you can't;
It's almost a "cinch" you won't;
If you think you'll lose, you've lost,
For out in the world you'll find
Success begins with a fellow's will -
It's all in the state of mind.

Full many a race is lost
Ere even a race is run,
And many a coward fails
Ere even his work's begun.
Think big, and your deeds will
grow,
Think small and you fall behind.
Think that you can, and you will;
It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you are outclassed, you are;
You've got to think high to rise;
You've got to be sure of yourself before
You can ever win a prize.
Life's battle doesn't always go
To the stronger or faster man;
But sooner or later, the man who wins
Is the fellow who thinks he can.

(Author unknown).