The Importance of Being Important

DURING the classic time of Greece a terrible thing happened in one of the temples. One night the statue of Zeus was mysteriously smashed and desecrated.

A tremendous uproar arose among the inhabitants. They feared the vengeance of the gods.

The town criers walked the city streets commanding the criminal to appear without delay before the Elders to receive his just punishment.

The perpetrator naturally had no desire to give himself up. In fact, a week later another statue of a god was destroyed.

Now the people suspected that a madman was loose. Guards were posted and at last their vigilance was rewarded; the culprit was caught.

He was asked,

"Do you know what fate awaits you?"

"Yes," he answered, almost cheerfully. "Death."

"Aren't you afraid to die?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then why did you commit a crime which you knew was punishable by death?"

The man swallowed hard and then answered,

"I am a nobody. All my life I've been a nobody. I've never done anything to distinguish myself and I knew I never would. I wanted to do something to make people notice me . . . and remember me."

After a moment's silence he added, "Only those people die
who are forgotten. I feel death is a small price to pay for immortality!"

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Immortality!

Yes, we all crave attention. We want to be important, immortal. We want to do things that will make people exclaim, "Isn't he wonderful?"

If we can't create something useful or beautiful . . . we shall certainly create something else: trouble, for instance.

Just think of your aunt Helen, the family gossip. (We all have one.) She causes hard feelings, suspicion, and subsequent arguments. Why does she do it? She wants to be important, of course, and if she can achieve this only by means of gossip or lying, she will not, for one moment, hesitate to gossip or lie.

The urge to be outstanding is a fundamental necessity in our lives. All of us, at all times, crave attention. Self-consciousness, even reclusiveness, springs from the desire to be important. If failure arouses compassion or pity, then failure might become an end in itself.

Take your brother-in-law Joe. He's always running after women. Why? He's a good provider, a good father, and strangely enough, a good husband. But there is something missing in his life. He is not important enough to himself, to his family, and to the world. His affairs have become the focal point of his existence. Each new conquest makes him feel more important; he feels he has accomplished something. Joe would be surprised to learn that his craving for women is a substitute for the creation of something more significant.

Motherhood is a creation. It is the beginning of immortality. Perhaps this is one of the reasons women are less inclined toward philandering than men.

The greatest injustice imposed upon a mother is when her grown up children, out of sheer love and consideration, keep their troubles from her. They make her feel unimportant.
Without exception everyone was born with creative ability. It is essential that people be given the opportunity to express themselves. If Balzac, De Maupassant, O. Henry, hadn’t learned to write, they might have become inveterate liars, instead of great writers.

Every human being needs an outlet for his inborn creative talent. If you feel you would like to write, then write. Perhaps you are afraid that lack of a higher education might retard you from real accomplishment? Forget it. Many great writers, Shakespeare, Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, to mention a few, never saw the inside of a college.

Even if you will never be a genius, your enjoyment of life can still be great.

If writing holds no lure for you, you might learn to sing, dance, or play an instrument well enough to entertain your guests. This belongs in the realm of “art” too.

Yes, we want to be noticed. We want to be remembered. We want to be important! We can achieve a degree of importance by expressing ourselves in the medium which best suits our particular talents. You never know where your avocation will lead you.

Even if you fail commercially, you might very well emerge from your experience an authority on the subject you learned so much about. You’ll be richer in experience—and if you have been kept out of mischief, that alone will be a great accomplishment.

So the gnawing hunger to be important will be satisfied at last without harm to anyone.