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# IF I WERE TWENTY-ONE

By C. BERNARD COCKETT, M.A., D.D.



In the Old Testament the Psalmist prays, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The Book of Ecclesiastes gives, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," and the prophet Joel, "Young men see visions," while in the New Testament the *Call of Christ* to youth is simple and sublime: "Follow Me." Some look backwards and others look forward to wonder what they would do and be if they were 21.

(1) *If I were 21*—I should do the next thing, not waiting for the ideal position or dreaming away the present, while longing for the future, but doing the nearest duty. Saul went out to seek his father's asses, and found a Kingdom. Lord Reading first saw India as a cabin boy, but returned as Viceroy.

In the country a girl with the reputation of a good voice was asked to sing at a concert while on her holidays, but she contemptuously refused. Another was asked and accepted. After the concert she was approached by a lady—a prima donna on holidays, who had heard that a girl with a good voice would sing, and so she attended the concert—who offered to train her in singing. She gained a wonderful chance, which the first girl missed.

Lord Nuffield once told the Earl of Birkenhead that he used to clean his bicycle at Cambridge, but William Morris advanced step by step from bicycles to motor cars, and onward to great philanthropies, and also to the peerage.

I should not only do the nearest duty, but I should seek what I really wanted, and go all out for it, bending my energies and abilities to achieve my heart's desire.

(2) I should be friendly, for if you shut others out, you shut yourself in. You can't be exclusive without being excluded. I should try and harmonise my personality with others, keeping my personality, but losing my angularity, and not imagining, like the Scotsman's mother, that every one was out of step but "oor Jock."

I'd never be a snob, one who licks the boots of the one above him on the ladder of life, and wipes his boots on the head of the one beneath him, but pay my debts of privilege by carrying out my responsibilities and helping lame dogs over stiles.

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(3) I should take care of my body, with no over-work and no under-work. The cult of cold water and the towel, with the gymnasium and games and sports, are all Christian exercises, but organised public games are not for Sunday.

If you would succeed, preserve health first. Some have succeeded even against ill-health, but it is a very great handicap. Over the bridge of the body the next generation must travel to enter life, so we must surely keep it strong and clean. Use, but do not abuse or misuse, the physical powers, otherwise exhaustion or satiation is the penalty.

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(4) I should train my mind until it became like a steel spring. Knowledge is power, and also feeling. Marconi sought the knowledge of wireless. Tolstoi felt brotherhood with a beggar, and President Garfield willed himself to swallow a raw egg. Know, feel and will!

Many of our Australian political leaders have developed their powers by concentrated and systematic effort. The present Acting Prime Minister began in Rockhampton at the bottom rung of the political ladder, and made a pilgrim's progress.

A healthy mind in a healthy body is splendid: a Christian mind in a consecrated body is divine. I'd love books, and the best book, or library of books, is the Bible, so I should feed my mind on it daily and so follow King George V, who promised his mother so to do. Reading the Bible through is necessary for education, and reading it regularly, for inspiration. The practice of prayer is the secret of sincerity and spiritual power.

I'd enjoy music and the drama and all the arts, as well as sciences, for the true, the good and the beautiful are all the

gifts of God. I'd like to travel and see the world, for travel can be an education in itself. If I'd been given a good education I should be grateful, but if not, I should determine to earn and achieve one.

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(5) I'd study the art of pleasing, and acquire good habits and proper manners, with a care for personal appearance, clear and clean speech, without the Australian adjective, which denotes a poor vocabulary. I'd try to be punctual, courteous and considerate. I am told they had courtesy cops on English pre-war roads to teach manners to motorists. "Move up and be nice," said a tram conductor on a wet day to a crowded Newcastle-on-Tyne tram car, and he set the glum faces smiling. "I thought there was more than one young gentleman in here," said the old lady to the young lady who gave her a seat in the car. "Manners makyth man" is the motto of Winchester School. If you have manners in your mind the soul shines through in the gentleman and the gentlewoman.

I'd study the art of conversation, and adjust myself to relatives, elders, friends and workmates, learning to discuss and not bicker or quarrel—agreeing to differ. I've been told not to give people a piece of my mind for I can't spare it, and to keep my temper, for no one else wants it, for it is a good servant but a bad master. Quickly remove misunderstanding and learn to apologise and forgive.

In the Alps two goats met on a narrow mountain track—one going up and the other going down. They stood and glared: then the one coming up knelt right down and the other just jumped over it, and both were able to continue on their way. People should be as sensible as those goats.

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(6) I should be happy, for life is very short and the longest life is only a span. Plain living and high thinking would help, and happiness is the accompaniment of a disinterested activity with service before self, like the Rotarians, and doing a good deed whenever possible like the Scout. Diogenes in his tub taught the Greeks that a contented mind is a continual feast.

Outside a hospital was a sign—If you can't smile, stop outside. A hearty laugh doeth good like a medicine, and it's more pleasant than most medicines. The cult of the smile has a mighty ministry and there is magic in the glad eye. If we polish our boots and shoes, surely we should polish our soul

with cheer, and then our faces could shine with joy, that heavenly spark of the Godhead.

I'd remember that God is Sovereign, evil is punished, and that Nemesis comes to nations as well as persons, for justice and judgment are the habitations of the Throne of God.

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(7) I'd study life. Over the Greek Temple was written: "Man, know thyself." I should like to find my soul, and not lose it, and have my purpose in tune with the Infinite, my Destiny directed by the Eternal. You can be good without being goody-goody, and obey your conscience and keep it in training by going to church regularly. There are meals for the body and means of grace for the spirit. If a body can die, a soul can wither. Jesus at 12 went to Jerusalem to the Temple, and, according to His custom, He attended the Synagogue on the Sabbath Day, growing in grace. If He needed to, I certainly do.

I'd keep Sunday as the Lord's Day, for re-creation rather recreation. Sunday is a necessity for my soul, and society, for peace and power in body and mind, and I dislike imposing Sunday serfdom on people who must slave for other people's pleasures, and are unable to worship God. I'd enjoy and contribute to the wonders of worship in the House of God, and give what service I can to the Church and the causes of Christ. A strong body, a clean mind, a pure spirit, with real culture, love of wholesome fun and true courage might reopen the Gates of Paradise and take us out of the wilderness into God's Garden of Eden.

Oh, yes, and I should join my Union or Association to help things forward and pull my weight in the boat. And I must never forget those who died to give me a free life, for they, without us, cannot be made perfect. We will remember—*them*.

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(8) I'd save money. Money is power, so I'd labour to become a capitalist and yet remain liberal—earning, spending and enjoying, giving and saving for the rainy day. I'd give regularly to the Church, for one-tenth of income used to be devoted to the work of God, and some still tithe their income. I'd pay my debts promptly and live within my means. Outside of exceptional things (like buying a house), if I couldn't afford anything I'd wait for it until I could. Of course, if I had an

assured income and good assets I'd like to get things like a piano and a refrigerator, and perhaps a small motor car, even before I could pay for them completely, for some things should be enjoyed when you are young.

I'd get my life insured for death, and take out an endowment policy for an age, 60, 65 or 70. It's a religious duty to make wise provision for the future and your dependents. I'd make a will and keep it up to date. I'd cultivate a hobby and so make preparation for retirement and old age. I'd sign the pledge against alcoholic liquors as beverages. I think you are better without tobacco, but if you use it do so moderately; it won't cause you to beat your wife or starve your children, but cleanliness is next to godliness, so apply the proverb to your teeth and fingers if you use tobacco. I'm not keen on women smoking, for their lips were meant for better things.

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(9) *I'd rise superior to circumstances*, like Demosthenes, who rolled pebbles in his mouth and spoke against the sounding of the seas to become the greatest orator of ancient Greece, like Disraeli, the Jew, who became Britain's Prime Minister, like Mr. W. M. Hughes, umbrella mender, who became the King's guest at Buckingham Palace. It is the busy bee that makes honey. They can, who think they can. Faith moves mountains, and so David disposed of Goliath. Dreams can become deeds. Plod with pluck and perseverance to success. The will to win will enable the man at the back some day to be first in breaking the tape in the race of life. When you are down in the mouth remember Jonah, who came out all right.

Don't be a quitter, nor have your wishbone where your backbone ought to be. Keep on keeping on like a thoroughbred, like a sticker. Stand up to life, for we conquer by continuing. Lincoln was a failure until he was 50, and Winston Churchill thought his political career was ended at 48. Carry on, and now and then recite Kipling's "If"—to yourself—if you haven't heard it too often already. Failure is only an intimation to seek further and try harder, and most of the best things are on the other side of failure. So turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones, for "beyond the Cross is the Crown" was the discovery of a young Hero Who died at 33 and is alive for evermore.

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(10) I should wear my own shoes. I'd know myself and be myself. A teacher looked at some boys in a row and

shouted, "Johnny Smith, get into line." One boy shuffled and then replied sullenly, "I can't. I've got my father's boots on." I'd wear my own boots, even if I loved my father. I'd give my best always in the spirit of the utmost for the highest, for if young men see visions, then as old men they can dream dreams. Every life can be a great life divinely planned. Every personality is unique and can have a divine destiny. No one else can do in the world what God wants me to do, so I pray that God will enable me to do it. Know thyself, and be your self—Your Best Self. I'd honour my father and mother, be proud of being a Britisher and a Christian, heir of the world-wide British Commonwealth, and, as a joint heir with Christ, and heir of all the ages, I should prepare not only to carry on, but to pass it on.

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(11) I should prepare for marriage. I'd work and save money and life. I'd prepare for my mate a spiritual trousseau, not a love dissipated and made stale through many flippant flirtations, and certainly not through sexual dissipations which make marriage a mockery and rob the virgin joys of wedded bliss of their beauty, radiance and romance. I should not prostitute my affections and sexual powers, but give my mate the gem of a pure, passionate and perfect love. Those who wish to marry a virgin have the duty, right and privilege to come to the altar of marriage a virgin, and this applies to all young men and young women. Only the pure are given the raptures of perfect love. The impure suffer disillusionment, disease and satiation by killing love, and the things they might have loved. Keep your love and your life (and your lips) for your real lover. Hollywood morals point towards Hell and not Heaven, for sex is not only a sensation, it should also be a sacrament.

Marriage includes not only physical and emotional attraction, but social comradeship and spiritual affinity, a union of loving hearts in mutual service to the home and family, the community and to the Kingdom of God.

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(12) I should receive a vote, and be obliged to consider the challenge of life as a citizen in a Christian community. I'd interest myself in politics, and if opportunity came or ability developed, I'd like to serve on a Municipal Council or in Parliament. At any rate, I'd train in public speaking.

But there is a *greater Call*. When Peter was leaving Rome in the time of persecution, he saw a Vision of Christ on the Appian Way and said, "Whither goest Thou, O Lord?" "As thou art deserting My people I go to Rome to be crucified a second time." Peter returned to martyrdom and glory, and the Church of St. Peter is the heart of Rome. Peter is the Rock Man on which to build the Church, for those who confess Christ on earth are confessed by Christ in Heaven.

Andrew brought Peter to Jesus. They were called by the Lake and followed the Gleam, and Peter became the preacher at Pentecost. Stephen died with a face like that of an angel, and Saul met Christ on the way to Damascus. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision and went to Europe, for Christ was his life and death was his gain.

Telemachus stopped the gladiatorial games, and Luther began the Protestant Reformation. Knox—Bunyan—Wesley—Booth—Dr. Barnardo—David Livingstone, buried in Westminster Abbey—Florence Nightingale, the Lady with the Lamp—Spurgeon and Parker—Lincoln, who set the Negroes free—John Williams in the South Seas and Grenfell in Labrador—were in the apostolic succession. Am I? They acted for God; they attuned themselves to the Eternal and had great lives divinely planned. Shall I? They followed Christ, and if you keep your eye on the Eternal your intellect will grow.

Christ taught the value of one life and the power of one life to move the world—like Moses, to whom God said, "Go and certainly I will be with thee," and he set the people free. Can I?

Judas was a lost soul, and the Samaritan village that refused Christ lost its opportunity. Could I?

Jesus of Nazareth passes by and He wants to enter the open door of my heart at 21. D. L. Moody said that God was waiting to show the world what He could do with one consecrated layman, and he resolved to be that man. Shall I?

When Christ returned to Heaven, Gabriel asked what provision He had made for carrying on His work and He said I have left 11 men. Christ depended on them. Christ depends on me at 21, the Young Prince of Glory Who died at 33.

"Men of England who inherit Rights that cost your sires their blood!"

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