

great effect on your life, you will find that the effect is produced not so much by the mere work itself as by the relations it brings you into with other men, the influence of your fellow workmen and those with whom you associate. This is so also with every other sphere of life. The real environment, the mighty forces that play upon life and mould character, are thus spiritual: and this is where we have power over our environment.

Because it is spiritual, we can open mind and heart to it, or we can shut the door against it. We can submit to what is evil in our environment, or we can shun it. We can also, to some extent, select the forces that act upon us. If we wilfully submit ourselves to the influence of the lower, if we choose to associate with what impoverishes true life, if we let evil intercourse do its corrupting work on us, it will pervade and pollute all life. We may think that we can play with evil influences, enter their company when it suits us and leave it as we entered; we may think that we can read defiling literature and be none the worse for it, that we can tamper with doubtful courses and keep our real life unspotted, that we can be one of evil company and yet not become as it is; but we are deceiving ourselves. The law of spiritual environment acts unerringly and unfailingly.

When we consider the tremendous force of this law, we may well wonder that we enter into relationships so casually and carelessly. A young man chooses his friendships by haphazard; or, rather, he often does not choose them at all, but lets himself drift into them. Their opinions and standards of thinking

and of practice gradually become his for good or evil; and yet how much, or how little, thought does the average young man give to this subject?

It is not a plea for a hermit life, but a plea for serious consideration of the actual conditions of social life. The consideration should be twofold—a deep sense of duty towards others in this matter, and a sense of a necessary duty towards ourselves.

First of all we must see to it that our influence in all our companionships and in all our associations with other men is for good. We shall never make anything of our lives worth making if we have not some idea of *service* in our minds. Nothing but that will ennoble our work and preserve all relations with others. It would be a poor thing if a young man thought only of how he himself might be guarded from all harm and danger. Such a motive would fail of its purpose, and, at the best, would give a mean and selfish life. We tarnish the fair name of friendship if we have no feeling of responsibility towards our friends and no desire to serve their best interests. We must use the law of environment as a force for good to others, for that is our first duty.

The second point is that we must consider our rightful duty to ourselves. We must see to it that we do not wilfully submit our lives to the degradation and contamination of evil relationships. This is a larger thing than perhaps appears at first sight. The moral environment of which we have been speaking acts insistently and remorselessly. The books read, the friendships formed, the opinions held, the