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How to do Right?

One would so much like to do right by one's fellow-creatures — but how does one go about it?

If you have no friends, it will be said: Well, he must be a misanthrope! If you happen to have a friend, it will be: Look, how immoral he is. If it happens that you change your friend once, the neighbours will whisper: The amount of lovers he has is really incredible! But if you stick faithfully to your one and only friend, the compassionate look in their eyes can be interpreted as: Does he really not know how utterly out-moded this Teutonic Nibelung's faithfulness is? If you only like your partner's body, you'll have it said about you what a low creature of the flesh you must be. In case you are fond of your friend's mental agility, this will only bring forth a pitiful smile. If you take an unhappy love affair seriously, it will earn you a big guffaw. But if you take things the easy way, fingers will be pointed at you: Look at that good-for-nothing! If you spend money on your lover, the moralists will be bound to say: Sheer prostitution! If, however, you spend too little money on him, the remark will promptly be made: What a miser! — If you happen to be a true Christian, you'll hear: Isn't he a pious hypocrite? Being an atheist, you'll get an arrogant quick-as-lightning look, meaning: No wonder he hasn't got any morals. If you happen to be a manual labourer, the ever-so-wise will point out how degenerated the lower classes have become. If you're an intellectual, however, this will be changed to: The intellectuals always think of themselves as being a cut above the law. If you happen to believe in pacifism, the know-betters will say: Look at those soft, effeminate types! On the other hand, if you're not a pacifist, people will say: No wonder, brutality and sex crimes always go hand in hand. — If you have your sex in the way ignorant people think we have, the intolerant answer will be: Look at those disgusting swine! If you don't do your sex the way our enemies maintain we do, half-educated people will be bound to say: He cannot possibly be «that way». If you have initiated your friend, that naturally spells seduction. But if he knew all about it before, then «their lovers pass from bed to bed».

If you mention openly your true feelings, there will always be whispers behind your back: Isn't he a cynic, he even admits it! But keeping things a secret from your neighbours will result in: As though we didn't know what's the matter with him. If you live on your own, people will draw the conclusion: It's an exception and therefore abnormal. But if you try to form a circle of friends to defend your rights, you will be treated to: Don't make such a fuss about yourselves! Passing on scientific information about us will be met by: Yes, we know all about it, sorry, we are unable to help you! If you don't try to enlighten them, they will remain stupid — and the persecution will go on.

I think I'll give up the attempt to do right by my fellow-creatures.

I shall just act as *my* nature and *my* conscience bid me to do.

Mario O. Richter, Bremen

(From: *The Circle*, 1951/V)