

AN ADDRESS TO THE STUDENT BODY AT THE MADISON SCHOOL

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Dear Friends:

I have desired to have a talk with you about a number of school problems, and especially regarding the questions of social association and courtship by students. It is a large question and one difficult to deal with in a few words; but we may be able to discern, and come to an agreement on, the principles that should govern us in this important matter.

As I visit our colleges and academies, I am frequently met with the question, "What was Sister White's teaching regarding the matter of association and courtship on the part of students in our schools?" We have read many things which she has written and we recognize that important principles underly her instruction; but it sometimes becomes difficult to apply these principles as we study them in connection with the varied circumstances under which our schools are conducted.

Some of our teachers say that there should be no courtship carried forward by students, and that students should not indulge in thoughts regarding marriage. Some refer to the statement made by Sister White to the students of the Avondale School where she says:

"We have labored hard to keep in check everything in the school like favoritism, attachments, and courting. We have told the students that we would not allow the first thread of this to be interwoven with their school work. On this point we are as firm as a rock. I told them they must dismiss all idea of forming attachments while at

school. The young ladies must keep themselves to themselves, and the young gentlemen must do the same.

"When a conference selects young men and women, and aids them in obtaining an education for the canvassing field or any other branch of the work, there should be an understanding as to what they propose to do - whether they design to engage in courtship and marriage, or to labor for the advancement of the cause of truth. It is no use to spend time and money in the education of workers who will fall in love before they complete this education, and who cannot resist the first temptation in the form of an invitation to marriage. In most cases the labor spent on such persons is wholly lost.

"To each student in the home I would say, Be true to home duties. Be faithful in the discharge of little responsibilities. Be a real living Christian in the home. Let Christian principles rule your heart and control your conduct. Heed every suggestion made by the teacher, but do not make it a necessity always to be told what to do. Discern for yourself. Notice for yourself if all things in your own room are spotless and in order, that nothing there may be an offense to God, but that when holy angels shall pass through your room, they will be led to linger, because attracted by the prevailing order and cleanliness.

"In doing your duties promptly, neatly, faithfully, you are missionaries. You are bearing witness for Christ. You are showing that the religion of Christ does not, in principle or practice, make you untidy, coarse, disrespectful to your teachers, giving little heed to their counsel or instruction. Bible religion, practised, will make you kind, thoughtful, faithful. You will not neglect the little things that should be done. Adopt as your motto the words of Christ, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much."

This seems to me to be in perfect harmony with the article in Counsels to Teachers, pages 99-1904.

On pages 101 and 102 of Counsels to Teachers, we read,

"In all our dealings with students, age and character must be taken into account. We cannot treat the young and the old just alike. There are circumstances under which men and women of sound experience and good standing may be granted some privileges not given to the younger students. The age, the conditions, and the turn of mind must be taken into consideration. We must be wisely considerate in all our work. But we must not lessen our firmness and vigilance in dealing with students of all ages, nor our strictness in forbidding the unprofitable and unwise association of young and immature students.

"In our schools in Battle Creek, Healdsburg, and Cooranbong, I have borne a straight testimony concerning these matters. There were those who thought the restraint too severe; but we told them plainly what could be and what could not be, showing them that our schools are established at great expense for a definite purpose, and that all which would hinder the accomplishment of this purpose must be put away.

"Again and again I stood before the students in the Aven-dale School with messages from the Lord regarding the deleterious influence of free and easy association between young men and young women. I told them that if they did not keep themselves to themselves, and endeavor to make the most of their time, the school would not benefit them, and those who were paying their expenses would be disappointed. I told them that if they were determined to have their own will and their own way, it would be better for them to return to their homes and to the guardianship of their parents. This they could do at any time, if they decided not to stand under the yoke of obedience; for we did not design to have a few leading spirits in wrong-doing demoralizing the other students."

Reading these two statements together, it is evident that the best interests of students calls for the rule,- Avoid courtship, and plans for marriage. As stated in Counsel to Teachers, page 100, "While at school, students should not allow their minds to become confused by thoughts of courtship. They are there to gain a fitness to work for God, and this thought is ever to be uppermost."

What then shall be said of those who are closing their school work and soon will enter the foreign fields, where man and wife can work to better acceptance than can men and women unmarried.

To them applies the statement,-

"In all our dealings with students, age and character must be taken into account. We cannot treat the young and the old just alike. There are circumstances under which men and women of sound experience and good standing may be granted some privileges not given to the younger students. The age, the conditions, and the turn of mind must be taken into consideration. We must be wisely considerate in all our work. But we must not lessen our firmness and vigilance in dealing with students of all ages, nor our strictness in forbidding the unprofitable and unwise association of young and immature students."

This answers the question, Does the forbidding of everything looking toward courtship and marriage apply to all our schools in every place and of every class? Did Sister White intend to lay down a law in making this statement which should apply to our senior colleges as well as to junior colleges and academies?

It must be borne in mind that the students of the Avondale School were, most of them, far away from their parents; and that they were in the Academic grades. If you had been present, you would have said a hearty "Amen" when Sister White said that not a particle of courtship should be allowed in the school.

Sister White has recognized that, in our senior colleges where young men and women were fitting themselves for home and foreign missionary work and were expected to be married before entering the mission field, there must be some discretion exercised on the part of the faculty in allowing them to meet together in a reasonable way for the perfecting of acquaintance and the developing of plans.

And now the perplexing question arises, Where shall the line be drawn? Can it be drawn absolutely regarding age? Can it be drawn absolutely regarding scholarship? Can it be drawn entirely regarding reputation and character? Where shall the line be drawn?

As we study this question, we see very clearly that there must be wisdom and discretion used; and by whom shall it be exercised? Shall the matter be left to the judgment of the student; or shall the decision rest with the judgment of the faculty? Evidently, with the faculty.

If the wish and judgment of students should be considered paramount, it would be but a short time before ten times as many students were claiming the right of parlor courtship than would be for their own good and the good of the school. Therefore, it is evident that the decision must rest with the faculty.

And shall we reason that because certain privileges of which we have heard are granted in certain of our schools that every other school must grant the same? Or, shall we say that because certain restrictions are enforced in certain schools, that every other school must do the same? By no means. Time and circumstances must be taken into account.

Where then shall we find the right way. Unquestionably in the decisions of the faculty. The faculty members are not working for their own pleasure or gratification in making restrictions that are hard for some students to bear. They are working for the best interests of the largest number, and in so doing they must place restrictions upon

students which are for the best good of all. We must all recognize that the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak. In other words, if there are in a school of 200, ten or fifteen persons of that solidity of character, sobriety of mind, and breadth of experience that it would appear to be perfectly safe for them to engage at reasonable intervals in a parlor courtship, may we not expect them to bear the hardships of the restrictions that are necessary for the larger number? And may we not expect our students to understand that a blessing will come to them if they that are strong cheerfully bear the burdens in behalf of the weak?

The School Agreement

When students enter school, there is in a more or less definite way a contract entered into. The faculty in response to tuition or service on the part of students agree to give instruction and to exercise such discipline as will make it safe for parents to trust their young people in the school; and the student agrees to render faithful service and obedience in consideration of this instruction.

For a teacher to enter into such an agreement and then to change his mind and refrain from giving instruction would be a decided injustice; and for a student after entering this agreement to change his mind in regard to obedience to the rules of the school, is doing the school a decided injustice.

This relationship between student and teacher is not a wild game of competition to see which shall win. It is a solid, settled, business-like agreement entered into with the honor of God and the welfare of the students in view. If the teacher decides not to teach he should withdraw from the school; so also when a student decides not to study and obey the rules of the school, he should withdraw from the school rather than to remain and become an agitator, developing discontent and disobedience.

I have been connected with schools where young men of age and influence were out of harmony with some of the rulings of the faculty. They quoted the experience of other schools. They pled religious liberty. They posed as conscientious objectors and developed quite a feeling of discontent. One looker questioned if the faculty would not be forced to change their attitude, but the principal said, "We have entered into an agreement, teachers and students, and that agreement must be regarded seriously. We cannot make the changes that these good people are asking for without opening the door for temptation to younger students. Therefore, we say to these good friends of ours, 'If you cannot abide by the rules of the school, withdraw and finish your education at some school whose rulings are more suited to your wishes.'" In some cases these individuals grew into strong workers and in later years took a different view of the questions over which they had raised controversy.

And now, what shall we do? Shall we say that the rules of the faculty are oppressive? Or shall we say that this is a business-like agreement that both parties must recognize, and when either party cannot submit to the conditions that he may be allowed to withdraw and associate himself elsewhere?

In dealing with questions of right and wrong, we must recognize that some questions are based upon great moral principles and others based upon positive precepts. My understanding of this matter is that the rulings of our schools are, some of them, based upon considerations of policy. Therefore there may be a difference in the rulings of different schools without there being an occasion for grievance.

In my conviction, the conditions of the Nashville Agricultural Normal Institute are such that much more stringent rulings are necessary to the safety of students than in some other schools where there is closer supervision on the part of preceptors and preceptresses.

Praying that God may guide us all in our understanding
as to how to relate ourselves to these principles and those plans
that will be for the best interests of the largest number of students
in the school, I am.

Yours in hope,

W. E. White