

## INDEPENDENCE AND THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT

It has become a common saying that "man is a social being," but like many other truisms it is not the whole truth about man. There are times when solitude is essential to his spiritual well-being, and there are other times when he needs the cheering and stimulating company of his fellows. Community life enables a man to grow in mind and achievement because it is in and through the community that he finds expression.

But what is called community spirit may, in certain circumstances, resolve itself simply into the gregariousness of the herd, with the herd instinct uppermost. The herd requires conformity to its ideas and standards. It is jealous of the unusual and liable to attack it. There is danger to the individual either in falling below the standard of the herd or in rising above it. There is safety in conformity.

The true community spirit is that which identifies itself with the needs and aspirations of the people, which never shirks responsibility and is prepared to give of substance and ability to the effort to raise community life to a higher level. But along with this there is need to preserve an independence of mind, a spiritual integrity, which is prepared, if need be, to challenge the standards of the average.

As social beings we are linked with the lives of others, and we cannot hope successfully to evade the conditions which govern our lives. Whilst seeking to strengthen the community spirit, however, we are not to be subject to it. Man's allegiance must first be to God, or that highest law which is within himself.

History testifies to the truth that the community can only make progress, morally, intellectually and spiritually, because some members of the community stand for higher values of thought and life. There are times when we must stand alone. It is given to few to have the vision and courage which Jesus exhibited when brought before the priests and the Roman Procurator, but we may be inspired by his example, and avail ourselves of the same Source of Strength upon which he relied.

One of the needful and practical ways of raising the standards of the community is by the association of men and women in a common effort to understand life's problems. What is called group thinking is not meant to be thinking alike, but the bringing to the group the honest and independent thinking of its members with a view to mutual understanding. Such groups are not meant to be ends in themselves, but a means of education and understanding so that individual members may be better qualified to enter into the life of the community.

"Quest" will be glad to learn of the formation of study groups on these lines.

—W. BOTTOMLEY.

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