

# Happiness

JUST about this time of year is when good resolutions are made and broken, and storekeepers and wholesalers, carried away by the prevailing spirit, ladle out with reckless, open-handed generosity in printed notices to their "friends and patrons," hearty wishes for prosperity and happiness. In doing this, they know they can't go far wrong, as it is the desire for happiness or to avoid pain, that is the leading motive and constant demand of all living creatures. Yes, even when a mother plunges into a burning house to save her child and thereby sacrifices her own life, she is obeying her instinct to do what, above all, gives her most pleasure. However, it is such examples as this that make one characterise Kropotkin's description of the master motive as "the lust for pleasure" in the words of old Polonius, as "an ill phrase, a vile phrase." So it seems there are several degrees and kinds of pleasure, but all sorts and conditions of men and women "obey that impulse." Even the evenly-balanced and unemotional Anglo-Saxons have their proverb: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," which is quite in keeping with the genius of a race that, above all others, is devoted to sport as their ideal vehicle of happiness—too often to the exclusion of what will achieve lasting well-being.

A Presbyterian minister who, along with a number of others in the "public" eye, was asked by the usual "able editor" to weigh in with a speil on Optimism via a New Year message to a hopelessly bankrupt farming community, stated that he preferred the word joy to that of happiness. Joy, said he, springs from within; happiness originally meant the result of happenings—haphazard, depending more or less on luck or chance. But, he continued, no matter what the external circumstances are, we may still have joy; because it is a result of our attitude to life; a result of our faith; our trust; our religion—it is a bliss, not of condition, but of character. Quite a characteristically clerical and Coe-istic-New Thought utterance this, as it avoids the awkward consequences of tampering (as it is scientifically necessary to do) with the material bases of health and welfare. Seeing that, as Marx points out in connection with another branch of the Church, it will more willingly endure attacks upon 38-39ths of its principles than upon 1-39th of its income; "able editors" and ministers are all in the same box—neither can afford to offend their best customers and principal sources of revenue. As for delving into word derivations to explain facts, this was just what made Engels jump on Feuerbach. Trace back the evil word villain to its origin and we arrive at nothing worse than a simple, uneducated farm or estate slave, serf or villein.

If all reports turn out to be true, there is one bunch, at any rate, who believe something more than unaided joy-thoughts is necessary, and that is the Vancouver Mounted Police dope traffickers. Material dope for the addicts and hard cash for the alleged traders, are the tangible, solid bases of their joy! Which reminds one that January, too, is the month when the Children of the Heather invariably resuscitate and celebrate "the immortal memory" of one who, in his time, was no slouch in both seeking and making joy for himself—let alone others! Of course, the reference is to the famous Scottish poet, Robert Burns. But, so far as his experience went, he was inclined to affirm that:

" . . . pleasures are like poppies spread—  
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
Or like the snowfall in the river,  
A moment white—then melts forever;  
Or like the Borealis race,  
That flit ere you can point their place;  
Or like the rainbow's lovely form  
Evanishing amid the storm."

However, a study of Burns' career reveals how powerful in making or marring existence, are the material influences. Right at the start of his life,

the blight of evil conditions surrounded him; for, as Lord Rosebery said, he was a peasant, born in a cottage that no modern sanitary inspector would for a moment tolerate. All his life he fought with poverty or the fear of it, and finally died, as he himself foresaw—a pauper, and his struggles constantly reflect themselves in his poetry and other writings. In one of his rhymed letters, he writes in view of a probable helpless old age, that "the last o't, is only but to beg." He often alludes to the fear of being reduced to this dire strait.

In our analytical, scientific times, few estimates of personality are complete, that do not take into account the hereditary, physical condition and character of their subjects. Burns, then, as he himself said, inherited a deep, incurable taint of melancholia that poisoned his existence and was torn by passions that carried him to the point of insanity. This was to be expected from the Celtic elements in him and from the fact that he was, as regards complexion and hair, very swarthy; for, as our modern psychologists of salesmanship aver, this overtendency towards pessimism is one of the characteristic drawbacks of the dark-hued members of the race. He was also subject to rheumatic complaints, a condition that had been aggravated by the laborious toil and privations of his youth and, in later life, by the exposure and fatigue of his long horseback rides as an exciseman.

Further consideration of the economic phases of Burns' life, shows that when, finally, he was compelled to look forward to this none too suitable or noble a job of exciseman, for a sensitive poet like himself, as an escape from poverty, he wrote political epistles on the subject to different men begging their political influence on his behalf. In one of these, whilst taking into account the possible failure of securing the "boon" he requested, he says that—his farming life still remaining open to him—"on eighteen pence a week I've lived before"—a happy experience and prospect indeed, to "live" on 36 cents a week, even in those days.

Just as in our day, so also in the poet's, there was the same stimulating atmosphere of "hard times," for, writing to a lady, he says, "We have had a brilliant theatre here this season; only, as all other business does, it experiences a stagnation of trade from the epidemical complaint of the country—want of cash."

When, finally, he did get his gauger's job, he was compelled to vegetate on a salary about one-third of what he looked forward to receiving, and, indeed, he just, and no more, escaped dismissal altogether, and all because of the openly-expressed rebel political opinions. Consequently, he was a disappointed man and like many others of his artistic temperament, he became, in later life, a victim to alcoholism and the pleasures of unregulated social life; the more so, as Rosebery remarks, because his own home life could not have been very exhilarating. Hence, one winter's evening too many spent midst the warmth and joviality of the Globe inn, followed by exposure to cold, on leaving, by sleeping out on the stable steps, and he had signed his own death warrant, to be duly executed about five months thereafter.

Such, with all our boasted command over Nature, is the life that, for centuries, the most advanced sections of the human race have been living! No wonder the Art of Happiness is so feebly mastered. The fact is, the masses exist in a hunted, fear-tortured condition of barbarism, with, as their dominant principle, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow—we may be out of a job!" We hear of tribes that eat, when a good kill results after a long hunt, till they gorge themselves and have to lie and sleep off the effects, and the same applies to us. In Scotland (and doubtless something similar in other countries) the children repeat a mock grace, which runs like this:

"Adam and Eve,  
Cain and Abel,  
Bless us a'  
About the table;  
Eat yer fill  
An' POOCH NANE,  
Halleluiah, Amen!"

From the myths, folk-lore, songs and sayings of a people, we gain an insight into their past life. So this childish bit of ribaldry is eloquent about economic conditions; for "pooch nane" (pocket nothing), implies so usual a state of semi-starvation that, when opportunity for a real feed presents itself, there is a constant danger by greedily secreting food, that the laws of "good breeding and restraint" would be broken. Even here, it is common, in a "stag" boarding-house, to see the crowd just before meals, waiting for the dining-room door to be opened, so that they might make one wild tumultuous scramble for their seats at the table!

Indeed, our eating customs are as much in need of revolutionising as are any of the other functions of the capitalist world. The small, private household meals, and means of providing and cooking the same, do not offer the highest in freedom, health and efficiency. There, much of the "take it or leave it" element obtains. Nor may one eat when most convenient, for, doing this involves the terrible offence, because a hardship to the poor house-slave, of not turning up to meals at the set hours. Hence, so many become wretched "slaves of the meal hour!" because we do not like to make, as Burns says, a "sulky, sullen dame, gathering her brows like gathering storm, nursing her wrath to keep it warm."

So it is in the larger restaurant life—a form of communal eating—that we get a hint of what the future communal house-life will be, because, within limits, one can eat when and what is most suitable. But what interferes with the efficiency of both hotel and restaurant life, is the commercial and profit-seeking elements; as, if one does not eat, drink and be merry in a sufficient degree, and irrespective of the effects on oneself, to pay the proprietors, one is an "undesirable." Therefore, only under a non-production for profit system, that is, under Communism, will healthful eating and drinking customs be possible. Meantime, in vivid contrast to this in Germany, the Capitalist-caused famine compels the people to rake the garbage cans for food! "The damned human race," as Mark Twain in late life kept on irritatingly repeating!

Given the practically certain prospect of calmly and leisurely enjoying a long life of completely satisfied desires, the present feverish and unhealthy endeavors to achieve Happiness would die as natural a death as will the Capitalist "Stage." Under such conditions, it has truly been affirmed, and with a shorter work-day too, it would be possible to muster out the wealth-producers at the age of 42, as veterans in the only kind of war that would then be necessary—the War against Want, and so free them either for a justly-earned leisure, or to engage in any sort of private or semi-public occupation their own fancy might dictate.

But it is Communism alone that will make the above possible and such is the present condition of the civilized world that Communism is now an immediate, pressing and stern necessity. But if its opponents will persist in describing it as a mere dream, does not the following quotation from a current newspaper, represent a hideous nightmare?:

"The prairie provinces, with less than two millions population, produced enough wheat and meat this summer to feed about fifty million people, yet thousands of families are very poor, their children cannot attend school for want of clothing, and hundreds of families on the treeless prairies, it is stated, have not sufficient money to buy coal. Why, with such great production are there so many in want?"

And as regards "school," in many parts of the country the children "cannot attend" it because such districts cannot afford to keep the schools open at all!

PROGRESS.