

Vacation Time : Its Delights and Dangers.

Written for the Review.

Vacation time! What golden promise it holds. The very words seem to hold to for the weary toiler,—the over-burdened man of business, the over-tasked school-boy or school-girl, the busy mother, with her little appreciated load of care! How its restful hours of breezy out-door enjoyment, far from the city rush and bustle, seem to light up the dingy counting-house or office, or hot school-room, with visions of shady woods, and rippling streams or long stretches of shady beach, with the white surf of the blue ocean breaking at one's feet, and the bracing sea-breezes filling the whole being with new life! In our modern high-pressure life the vacation-time seems more specially needful to relax the overstrain, and renew the exhausted powers, to afford recreation, in the true meaning of the word, to *re-create* the whole system, physical and mental, so that work can be begun with renewed vigor.

This is the ideal aim and end of vacation-time. But, like all ideals, it too often fails of realisation, human nature seems so innately perverse, that it often cheats itself of what it seeks. We know how a certain class of jaded holiday-makers will resort in crowds to the great caravanseries of large watering-places which simply repeat the fashionable follies of city life under different surroundings. There are too many people whose idea of a summer outing seems to be only to follow the crowd, to taste, amid new scenery, their favorite pleasures and excitements or those which have the charm of novelty, to go through the same round of dressing, dancing, and possibly flirting, and go back with very little further benefit than may be derived from the mere change of scene. It may be questioned, however, whether these are really the people who need the summer vacation. If they are, it is little wonder if the jaded faculties refuse to improve in tone, and they begin to think, afterwards, that the trip did not do them much good after all. At least they are a shade better than the class of holiday-makers whose chief desire seems to be to enjoy a better "spread" and a keener appetite than they do at home, and whose requirements in this respect are one of the chief causes why we cannot have the moderate priced hotels and boarding-houses; that to people of more moderate taste, means, and simple tastes would be such a boon. Our American cousins are the leading sinners in this respect, and one is sometimes tempted to wish that we could have some sort of exclusive legislation to keep these exacting *bon vivants* out of some of our hitherto simple summer resorts.

However, happily, the taste is growing for the purer and simpler pleasures of quiet country sojourn, for the soothing influences, on over-strained nerves, of whispering woods and green meadows, and quiet waters. Among the rocky nooks and dark waters of Muskoka, amid the picturesque islands of the St. Lawrence, and amid the grand hills and rushing water-falls of the Lower St. Lawrence, as well as in many other sylvan retreats, many families wisely find their charming holiday resorts "far from the madding crowd," where, surrounded by the healthful influences of nature, old and young alike can enjoy these influences to the full, without the artificial and sophisticated accompaniments of the much advertised and fashionable health resort.

Yet, even here, the natural social impulses and the ineradicable tendency to self-indulgence introduce dangers which tend to counteract the otherwise beneficial effects of the holiday. People in general take their vacation too aimlessly, and are therefore too dependent on such factitious excitements as may turn up. Even in the quietest neighborhoods, where only a few friends are within reach, there is apt to be too much of the utter idleness, which, Dr. Watts tells us is so near to "mischief." There are the perpetual picnic parties, "to amuse the children," the endless lounging in hammocks, the boating or driving, parties, often prolonged till so late an hour that the time-honored benefits of "early to bed and early to rise" are lost sight of where they would be most beneficial, and the pure delight of the early summer morning is lost; even the dances, which, impromptu and simple as they may be, still add to the general atmosphere of self-indulgent "killing the time." Now a little of this lotus-eating life may be all very well for those whose brains and nerves have been

over-taxed to a dangerous degree, though, even for them the quietest enjoyments are the best. But there is great danger lest it go too far and only minister to the self-indulgent love of pleasure which is one of our greatest social maladies, and which will sap our true virility as a people, if not carefully guarded against. And it is, of course, the parents who can best guard against this growing evil. But in holiday time they are apt to be careless just when the most care is needed. Or they let their children go from their vigilant guardianship, without being sufficiently careful as to the sort of care under which they are placed. And yet, just because the circumstances and surroundings tend to laxity, and to a freedom not possible in the ordinary home life, the greater vigilance is needed lest the freedom go too far, and lest the safe-guards and restrictions deemed so needful at other times are not unduly relaxed when most required. Those who have watched the manners and conduct of many young people, under such circumstances, or overheard some of their own accounts of their doings, know that there is here a real danger, not enough realised by many parents. The habit of free and easy manners is too easily acquired, and not by any means so easy to check when once it is learned.

The careless freedom of the camping life which is so favorite and delightful a mode of vacation taking, but which has its dangers as well as its delights. The bow can be relaxed so far, too, by mere idleness and so-called pleasure, that it may seriously injure its power of tension afterwards. Weeks of mere lounging and novel-reading are not, on the whole, healthful for either old or young, not to speak of the waste of time that might be put to so much better use. Parents should have a watchful care of the reading of their children, even during holiday time, when they may imbibe not a little of the poison which is scattered broadcast in many a fascinating tale. To distinguish the good from the bad, they need either to have some ability to discriminate, themselves, or to apply to some friend who can give them a little direction. The best way of excluding the bad and unwholesome is to provide mental food that is at once palatable and wholesome, and this it is quite possible to do, with a little care and consultation. There are parents who carefully select the reading, whether fictitious or more substantial, which is to be the mental food of their children during vacation time. One family for instance, had regular readings aloud during meals—a different class of book being provided for different times of the day—for instance that vivid and charming book Green's "Short History of the English People," forms the accompaniment of breakfast; a book of travels supplies literary dessert at dinner, while possibly a wholesome work of fiction gives additional zest to the evening meal. These readings are much enjoyed by the whole party, and afford good material for discussion which is, of itself, a benefit, in the quiet and leisure of the country, where for want of better topics, the talk is apt to degenerate into mere gossip. Formal readings, such as these, might not suit every family, especially where there are children too young to be entertained by them, whose rights to free and pleasant interchange of ideas during mealtimes, should not be interfered with by their elders as much as is sometimes done, with the best intentions. (Of course, it is only family life which is now referred to, not the times and seasons when children should be taught that visitors, too, have rights which are to be respected). But it would be well that all children old enough to take in the simple facts of history or science, at least, should be encouraged or directed to take up some useful reading during vacation times, and should also receive encouragement from their elders in talking about what may appeal to their interest in reading it. In this way, the holidays may be made a season of real intellectual gain, by stimulating the children to read more intelligently and thoughtfully than they are apt to do when preparing mere task-work for school. Even the stories read might well be made a subject for the meal-time discussion, and not a little instruction can be imparted through such discussion, without anything like the appearance of giving it. Who does not remember how their own crude and childish ideas were modified and corrected by just such free interchange of thought and discussions with friends whose wisdom and experience made their kindly influence in free conversa-