

OUR NEW-FOUND LEISURE

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(The Expository Times)
Helm—Have you not been happy here?
Narah—No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but I was never really so.
Helm—Not—not happy?
Narah—No, only merry.
—Ibsen, The Master Builder.

The problem of leisure, like the problem of wealth, has two sides to it. There is acquisition and consumption.

The fight for acquisition has been prolonged. It is more than half a century since Labour formulated its slogan:

Eight hours' work and eight hours' sleep and eight bob a day.

Now the eight hours' play is won: the difficulty is not to find each man eight hours' leisure, but to find him eight hours' work. The boom came without any special campaign of propaganda or any definite leadership. It came flooding in upon us with one of those great tidal movements of the human spirit that are irresistible and world-wide. One line of industry alone remains untouched, and it is the main industry of the world. The main industry is, after all, that of the house mother. She has her eight hours' work and overtime without stint, but the eight hours' sleep and the eight hours' play are as non-existent for her as the 'eight bob' wage. All that can be said is that she has now the vote, and in the vote she has at last the instrument to win for herself what is her due.

With this noteworthy exception then—and it is a serious exception—leisure has been won. It is enjoyment that is lacking. Merry-making there is, and dancing, and picture-going and mass-spectating of football and other sports; and gambling is said to account for over three hundred millions of the annual earnings, and drink for a sum even larger. But these things are rather the quest for joy than the finding of it. Joy is refreshment of spirit: these things exhaust it. Joy equips man for the finer issues of his manhood and citizenship, raising him in the scale of being: these things drag him down and corrode his finer qualities. Joy gives satisfaction; these things minister to the spirit of unrest and feed the deep disease of modern life. We have multiplied amusements, but not increased the joy.

It is not that Nature has bereft us of the joy-faculty. The font of joy is born again in every human child. The children whom Laurence Binyon saw dancing round the hurdy-gurdy in the main streets of Bloomsbury found life full of joy. But the joy of life's morning fades into the light of common day as we grow older. It is the great failure of our modern civilization. If we seek to apportion the blame, probably the school must bear its share, for it is long since John Ruskin told us that the school should teach not only to know the right things and do them, but almost put one's finger on the place in our educational system where the school belongs to fall in this function. In the kindergarten and the junior classes this spirit of joy is paramount; it is when the exactions of the examination system begin to cast their shadows before them that the work ceases to be spontaneous and begins to be foolish and dull. But we cannot make a scapegoat of the school, for it is only a small proportion of the population that is affected by the great examining mills which grind our human nature down into the academic moulds. The examination system is only part of the mechanization of our life which has been slowly strangling the spontaneity of human nature ever since James Watt invented the steam engine.

Take, for instance, music. Time was when every occupation had its special songs. The sailors had their chanties, and a song was said to be as good as two men on a rope. Wordsworth's Highland lass sang as she bent over the sickle, and the reaper, the mower, the harvest-homers had their traditional songs; there are the songs of the spinning-wheel and the weaver's loom; the rowers had their songs and so had the smith; the cobbler sang over his boots and the soldier sang on the march. But in a mechanized world there is no room for song, and it is noteworthy that the Great War, though it gave us great poetry, has left us no great songs, like 'Marching through Georgia' or the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.' Sir Walter Scott used to compose his verse in the saddle, but the motor driver who followed his example would soon have his horses withdrawn. 'Work and make music,' said a familiar spirit to Socrates. In the rhythms of the old days of craft one could sweeten toil with song, but those days are no more.

Our music has become for the most part passive. It is provided for us by professionals. We sit and listen, and not infrequently it is a mechanism which purveys it. Our sport is organized for us in the same way.

We pay our shilling and look on. Twenty-two men play; ten thousand watch and tell them and the umpire what to do. In the picture palace, in the theatre, in the music-hall, at the flat-fight we sit passively, like the bottles stacked up in rows in a chemist's shop, and learn to take our pleasure vicariously, as we have learned to make our jam and grow our vegetables by paying others to do it for us.

The serious thing is that in these days of organized machine production it is only in our leisure hours we can achieve our personality. This is true of the great mass of mankind. Some few, some happy few, there are who can find themselves in their work—artists, musicians, and professional men whose work calls into play the higher faculties of their being. To such their work is their joy, and their joy is their work. But these are the rare exceptions. For the most part we do not live in order that we may work; we work in order that we may have the wherewithal to live. And work is so highly organized and departmentalized that in the doing of it only a limited portion of our mind is called into play, and for the most part we conform to type. This is the penalty we pay for mass-production by machinery—we become ourselves machine-like.

Out of the day and night
A joy hath taken flight.

But our leisure is our own. In it we can choose what we shall do and what we shall become. If the difficulties in the way of joy are greater than hitherto, our resources also are infinitely enlarged. Eight hours a day, even if we deduct three hours for meals and other necessities, and leave out of account our holiday week and our Sundays, give us one thousand five hundred and sixty-five hours per annum. With that time at his disposal and the vast opportunities opened up by our free libraries, art galleries and museums, and by our various forms of University extensions, a man may give himself a master in any branch of learning or science which he chooses, or make himself an adept on any musical instrument.

Vaguely we are becoming conscious of these things, and the minister to the spirit of unrest and feed the deep disease of modern life. We have multiplied amusements, but not increased the joy.

The great extension of the co-operative holiday and the summer school is a move in the same direction. The crude, primitive idea of a holiday is what is generally known in the North as the 'bust.' The scene is tripper-town, the pace is the fastest your saved-up earnings will allow. You go down, like the nigger in the Campton races, 'with a pocket full of tin'; you come back home like the same gentleman, 'with your hat caved in.' It is a catharsis of the feelings by means of intense, concentrated, and highly spiced sensations. But the educated person who has passed out of the torpid into the perceptive state has seen through the emptiness of tripper-town. He wants to see something of the broad world, to find a bigger world to think in, and a score of agencies place Switzerland, France, Holland, and Belgium within his reach. He wants to escape from the din of noisy nothings into the golden realms of thought, and a summer school brings him into touch with the finest minds of the University. He feels the call of the wild, and the Co-operative Holiday Association or the Holiday Fellowship or some camping venture takes him out to the moors, to the mountains, and the glen, or to some portion of our seacoast not yet transmuted into a promenade and a performing ground of pierrots.

There are those who regard the degradation of our leisure as though it were inevitable. Why vex one's righteous soul? For those who like this sort of thing, this is of course the sort of thing they like. Such is the language of the poltroon, the man who has lost his faith in humanity. But these movements—and they do not stand alone—prove that the community is waking up to the urgency of the problem, and the insistence of man's deeper nature on something more than beer and charabancs for the satisfaction of its nobler cravings. At Ruhlben, when some thousands of our fellow-countrymen found themselves cooped up together on a race-course with the prospect of infinite leisure, they realized at once the alternative which confronted them. They saw instinctively that they must think out their problems in view of all the resources at their disposal, and provide for wholesome exercise of mind and body and aesthetic faculty, or else they would soon degenerate into a mental asylum. At once they took stock of all their several abilities. One could play, another sing, another could give lessons in language, another in literature, another in science, another in art or craft; others could act, and, being British, each man had his favourite sport. They took stock also of the various forms of demand, and they found that the supply was adequate to the demand; each man could give, and each in turn receive. They made the discovery that their common life could not only be redeemed from boredom; it could be made, in ways more numerous than could have been imagined, serviceable for the building up of the higher life in which all shared. They did not wait till evil made its appearance; they forestalled it. This is just what our society needs to-day, and if we mean anything by our unceasing talk of reconstruction, this is the first thing we should take in hand. We have lived through a fever, we are now convalescent, and we have a chance such as we never had before of building up a new social health. We cannot be content to go back to the old status quo ante. Some new principle of life, some new desire to grow, to become more creative, to gain a fuller measure of life, has been taking root in the minds and souls of men. And it is in our margin of leisure, an ampler margin than we ever had before, that this new principle must work itself out.

In this question, as in all social questions, housing is fundamental. We have received from our ancestors a sorry inheritance. But if there is one sure and certain sign of the times, it is that in spite of the expense we are determined to make good now where our ancestors failed. We demand houses, and houses which shall never degenerate into slums. This is a fact which each successive administration since the War has had to face. It is recognized that in this vital matter private enterprise has broken down and public bodies, whether socialist or not, have been forced to take it in hand. Already London has provided for one hundred and twenty thousand people, and when she has carried out her schemes now in hand will have provided accommodation for a quarter of a million. Speaking rationally, the next ten years ought to see one-eighth part of our population re-housed. This gives us now a chance such as will never recur to cleanse our social life and take measures which shall raise it to a higher level. There is no question now so deeply affects the young life as this, and none which would be more properly their concern, on which they should insist in season and out of season.

The enemies of all social hygiene are wide awake. The Garden City of Letchworth is the pioneer in the movement for re-housing the people. No less than six times in the last eighteen years the Drink Trade has endeavoured to capture Letchworth—in 1907, 1908, 1912, 1915, 1920, and again in 1924. Each time it has been foiled, but each time the contest has been severe, and it has only been through active and well-organized co-operation of all the upward forces of the community that disaster has been averted.

Can there be any doubt that the same assault will be made, and made again and again, on every new residential district which is springing up in the outskirts of our big towns? There is nothing which the Temperance Associations should watch so jealously as this. Every woman's organization should be alive to the danger and mobilized to meet it. The first Garden City had the right, which every democratic community should possess, of determining for itself whether there should be liquor shops or not in their midst. The other newly built districts have no such power. Licensing magistrates are not proverbial for the gift of social vision. The financial interests of 'The Trade' are gigantic, and wonderfully well organized. The liquor club is even a more insidious peril than the public-house, and much more difficult to control and to eliminate when once it is established. Here is an issue which should not only unite the efforts of all schools of Temperance activity, but secure for them a large support from that moderate opinion which rejects against any suggestion of Puritanism. Above all, it is a question of social righteousness which should secure the whole-hearted and unanimous support of all Christian churches.

But even when this battle is won, we have not cleared the site, we have not reared a new structure. The way to mend a bad world is to make a good world. The great problem is to find social joy, and, even when drink is done away, that problem will still confront us. And there are not wanting signs of the lines on which we are essaying to find the solution.

The healthiest form of recreation, which is at the same time the soundest form of social hygiene, is sport. We are told by the croakers that English sport is on the down-grade because other nations are beating us in tennis and our own children are beating us at football and cricket. The croaking fraternity is all wrong. There is an enormous increase in the number of our young people taking part in games. The growth of tennis is phenomenal, but there is not any summer game which has not felt the fillip given by the adoption of 'summer time.' The manufacturers of sports equipment of every sort testify to the increased demand. And such movements as the Girl Guides, the increase of secondary schools, the Playground movement in the cities, and the new policy of our Parks Committees are all helping to encourage sporting activities. It has become quite common nowadays to find a sports field in connexion with a church.

The accomplishment of dancing was described by Emerson as a ticket of admission to a dress circle of mankind. But now the virtue for dancing has spread to all classes of the population, and the late Mr. Cecil Sharp has recaptured for us some of the grace and beauty and variety of the dancing in Merry England of old. The theatre is said to have been killed by the cinema—and perhaps we need not shed many tears over the demise, if out of the ashes of the old we can see the growth of a drama that is better than the old. And the signs are not wanting. If the playhouses in the towns have been converted into picture-houses, the Arts and Crafts League players have been doing about the village folk far better work for the drama than the old theatre did in the towns. The acting profession is badly hit, but never were amateurs so active and never were they attempting such high-class work as now. Near Lake Okanagan in British Columbia I came across a venture which seemed to me full of suggestion. The building stood among the orchards for which the district is famous. The lower storey was used for the sorting and packing of fruit. But the upper part, which was approached by a separate staircase, was fitted up, simply but quite adequately as a theatre. The proprietor, who was a large fruit-grower, had erected the theatre that his pickers during the season, many of them University students, might not only enjoy drama themselves, but give a chance to the neighbourhood to share their joy. And the proprietor, himself a good Methodist (or at any rate he was until the Methodist body was merged in the United Church of Canada), not only organized and helped to train his troupe, but occasionally wrote plays for them himself and encouraged them to do the same. I need not have come as far as Canada to find an exemplification of the new spirit that is at work, but unhappily I cannot speak from personal experience of the fine work which Miss Alice Buckton is doing at Glasbury, and others of the 'eager heart' in other country places.

Again, among our kinsfolk on the other side of the Atlantic, I have found a village school of craft which reproduced in a new form the work which the late Canon Rawnsley and Mrs. Rawnsley started among the boatmen of Keswick. Here, too, in New Brunswick the place was a popular holiday resort, and the folk who were busy in the summer catering for the visitors were occupying the long winter evenings, which would otherwise have been vacant, idle and tedious, in original craft work.

Here and there good work is going on—more, probably, than we suspect. Like all the most hopeful activities in social betterment, such work springs up here and there spontaneously, without any grants from an education committee, or official initiative. But nothing would be more helpful to our new national life at the present time than for our magazines to tell us of these ventures.

The minds of men everywhere are full of inarticulate longings, of which we neither know the meaning nor the right expression. And we are straitened until we find some one who has found that for which we blindly grope. To find contract with such a one is to find the way to our own larger self. The new times are full of impulses of deeper birth. Here and there among us these impulses

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THE SHOE MEN

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are taking shape as realities. When the higher appears, the lower will perish. The springs of joy are from within.

All grease should be drained from the cooking pan before making the gravy which accompanies the meat.

The canary enjoys a bit of green food about twice a week. Apple, lettuce, dandelion or chic-weed will be holding them out the bathroom window.

Toilet sponges can be delightfully altered by putting them on a string and hanging them out the bathroom window.

SNOODLES

SANTA'S SACK MAY LOOK TOO SMALL TO HOLD ALL THE TOYS AND LANDY THAT HE HAS IN STORE FOR GOOD CHILDREN BUT—WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY!

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TOY SHUTE

SANTA'S SACK 1925

There's Always Room For One More

By CY HUNGERFORD

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