

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

By PETER McARTHUR

SPRING is the season of revolt. It is the time when every man who is worth his salt rebels against the curse of work. What the patent medicine ads. call "that tired feeling" is simply a reminder to man of that high estate from which he fell. Man was created to live in a garden, in the harvest time, when apples and all fruits were ripe. When he was turned out his nature was not changed. He retained the same luxurious tastes but was cursed with the necessity of working in order to gratify them. Don't forget that point. Work is a curse. No matter what eulogies may be pronounced on the nobility of work and the dignity of labour, work is a curse. In the beginning it was a simple curse that only applied to the need of working to secure food and shelter, but it has been developed with such devilish ingenuity that we can no longer play without working. There is an old jingle that states the matter clearly though it is invariably misinterpreted:

"The devil still finds plenty work
For idle hands to do."

There you have the whole thing in a nut-shell. Work as it afflicts us is almost wholly an invention of the devil. For fear our hands should be idle and our brains busy with profitable matters the malignant prince of darkness finds work for us so that we may waste our lives in profitless striving. There is nothing the devil hates worse than a magnificent idler, like Whitman who could loaf—and invite his soul. You men who are so busy and account it to yourself for righteousness that you are so busy, how often do you invite your soul to enjoy your work? Make no mistake about it, work is the worst enemy of man's higher nature.

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The triumph of this hideous delusion about work is reached in the current number of *Everybody's Magazine*, where a writer—a clergyman to boot—writes on modern ailments. He has discovered a new disease, Psychosthenia. The symptoms of this disease are a sense of the unreality of things and a conviction of the profitlessness of all forms of human endeavour. Is that so very new? If I have not misread the Scriptures and the sacred writings of various peoples, this new ailment is as old as the foundations of all religions. Can it be possible that the devil has succeeded so completely in enslaving his victims to work and convincing them that work is a blessing rather than a curse that those who in other ages would be hailed as prophets and liberators are now regarded as mentally ailing? Work must be endured to a certain extent—that is the result of that primal eldest curse—but when the necessities are provided for we should emulate the lilies. The trouble is that we have lost the art of being profitably

idle. "Being idle is the most difficult and most intellectual of all occupations," said a great wit who had failed tragically as an idler. To be profitably idle requires great self-control. It is true that when the average man is idle his tendency is to jingle his mental small change and imagine he is thinking, but according to Professor James we do not think at all. Thought droppeth like the gentle rain from heaven. If we are nobly idle we can profit by thought when it comes to us, but if we are eternally fussing, as is the approved way at present, it will be shed from us like water from a duck's back.

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Living is much like sleeping three in a bed. While everyone keeps quiet there is room for all but as soon as someone begins to stir there is room for no one. These people who insist on the nobility of work and the necessity of doing it have made the world so that the most philosophical of us cannot live without working. Everybody must hustle. With the successful men who are our pacemakers work is a madness and they keep us all moving so fast that life has become a harried, driven slavery. To try to point out the cruel folly of this manner of living is to be reviled as a loafer or dubbed a Psychosthenic. But this pace cannot keep on forever. Some day the last railroad will be built, the last canal will be dug, the last contract let and the last graft divided and then idleness may return to the world. If people only got time to stop and reflect they would probably see the folly of striving for what they do not need and their neighbours do need. Each man who slackens in the struggle makes it possible for several more to slacken. The man who rests himself makes it possible for others to rest. All of which may enable you to see why it is that while others laud the strenuous worker, I reserve my picked phrases and cull my choicest adjectives for the noble idler and do my best to follow his example.

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Some years ago I saw somewhere a little apologue on this question of hustle and work that has always clung to me. I do not know who was the author—probably some paragraphic serf wearing the collar of a daily paper.

"Can't you come with us to the picnic to-day, papa?" asked the beautiful girl.

"No," snapped the modern business man, "I haven't time."

"Won't you come with us to the seaside?" asked his patient wife.

"I haven't time," and he hurried away to his stuffy office to roll up a few more thousands.

"The fellows are getting up a hunting trip. Won't you make one of the party?" asked his old college chum.

"I haven't time. I haven't time!" he shrieked as he rushed back into the thick of the struggle for useless wealth.

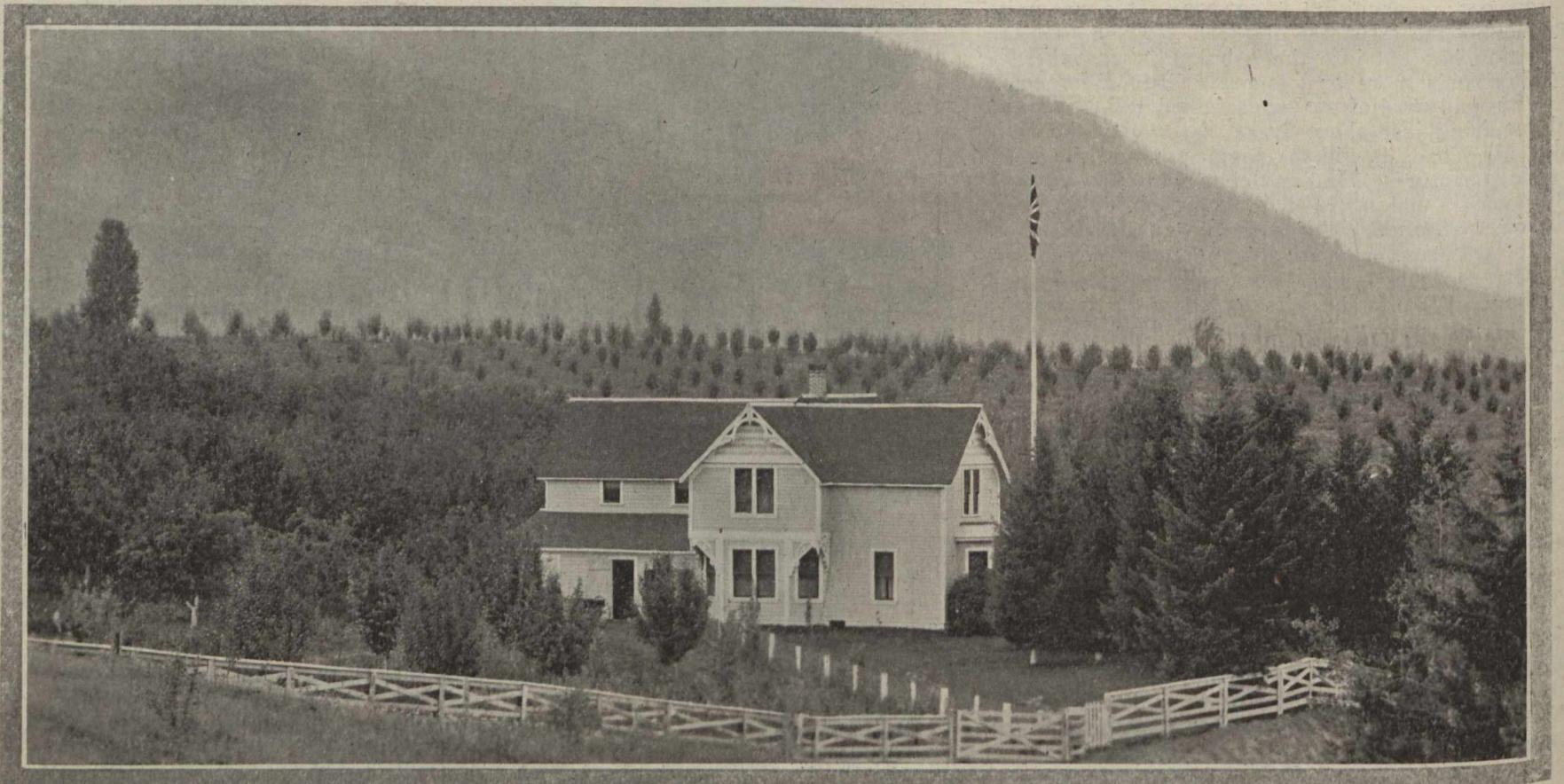
Presently when his fortune had been made many times over and he was still at work as eagerly as ever, Death touched him on the shoulder.

"Come with me," said Death.

"I haven't time," he snarled.

"O yes you have," said Death. "You have time to burn."

ONCE A SUBLIME WILDERNESS; NOW A SPLENDID GARDEN LAND



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