

THE NEW LEISURE

BY CORNELIA JAMES CANNON

I

WE are a nation of passionate industry. In theory, and largely in practice, work is in the saddle and rides our citizens. We have our loafers and slackers, as every generation since Adam has had, but they excite no general admiration and are not held high in public estimation. Such prophets of leisure as Thoreau and Walt Whitman, who were satisfied with the simple life and an incidental pursuit of literature, have found few imitators in our midst.

Occasionally a rich man's son has abandoned the making of money and spent his time in ways personally satisfying but commercially profitless. Such apostasy is anathema to our conscientious Babbitts. Early to arrive at the haunts of business and late to depart are the accepted habits of the God fearing and the self respecting American.

It is undeniable that strict attention to business gives results. Our steel tonnage production has become enormous, the cotton manufactured in this country could doubtless encircle the world, and travelers tell us that our automobiles rattle on every continent.

But what of it?

Suppose we are the biggest and busiest nation on earth, does it bring us any incentive save to become still bigger and busier, or offer us other reward than that of our surpassing size and activity? No one denies the essential importance of labor or its multiple values to the individual, but it is not without reason that the generations have reiterated that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". Though we are a feverish nation and make a good deal of noise, must we not admit that we are somewhat like Jack at his worst?

Circumstances are, however, conspiring against our remaining dull as a consequence of a continuing preoccupation with work. Almost unnoted, leisure is bearing down upon us from every side. The eight hour working day is rapidly spreading from industry to industry. The entire working world is fighting for a short day, and the politicians are lending helping hands. No one, laborer or idler, who is at all familiar with the type of daily job upon which the great majority of workers are engaged, could wish for anything else.

The new sources of physical energy, which are being increasingly developed, are certain to reduce still further the hours of work necessary to supply the actual needs of the community. The shortened hours and the substitution of mechanical power for that of the muscles of man will, in addition, more and more remove physical fatigue as an accompaniment of work. Men and women are beginning to return from the performance of their daily tasks, no longer so jaded as to require complete inactivity or abnormal stimulus as a counter to the exhaustion of toil, but fit to fill their leisure hours with activities of a different kind.

One other factor is certain to play an important rôle in the future. Prohibition is doubtless here to stay, and will be more effectively enforced as the will of the majority makes itself increasingly felt. That means that the chief anodyne of idle hours is being eliminated. We shall no longer be able to delude ourselves into thinking we are having a pleasant and profitable time when we are merely a little befuddled by alcohol. We shall know unmistakably when we are bored.

These large social changes are bringing about a condition of affairs for which we find ourselves unprepared. In our national recognition of the worth and dignity of labor, and in our devotion to its pursuit, we have neglected the uses and significance of leisure. Our educational system, which is a barometer registering the pressure of our enthusiasms, has for years stressed vocational training. Not only have we taught vocations in the classroom, but of late we have sent our teachers into the factories and shops to teach the worker on the job. Our commercial courses and our trade schools have been designed to feed the young people, trained to the last detail, directly into industry.

Those schoolmen who have protested against such rank utilitarianism have been denounced as old fogies, or have been mere voices crying in the wilderness. Efficiency has demanded results, and we have allowed the pay envelope of the graduate to become the criterion of a school's success.

This might be all very well if men were mechanized, or if work occupied the whole of life. But human beings have so far resisted all attempts to make them into machines, and the forty-eight hour working week, even after hours for sleep have been deducted, leaves, to be disposed of at the individual's will, sixty-four hours of freedom. The modern workingman, in the most advanced industries, has now many more hours for leisure than for work. Every effort of the community has heretofore been devoted to preparing him for efficient performance during the forty-eight hours. The use of the sixty-four hours has been largely left to exploitation by the commercial forces which profit by the idleness of resourceless humanity.

There is a challenge to our whole educational system in this development of a new leisure class. Ours has been a vocational educational system in a vocation-minded civilization. We have never been whole-heartedly in sympathy with the educational frills forced upon us by educators who would not admit that earning a living was the be-all and end-all of life. We have ignored germinating enthusiasms, we have not cultivated a love of life's diversities, and we have subordinated training in appreciation of the beauties and mysteries of the world about us to mastery of the mathematician's table, the surveyor's transit, the typewriter, the forge, and the turning lathe.

We have seen our national duty as that of developing our country and opening up its resources. Felling the trees for the clearing, organizing the mine for rapid production, rolling the steel into sheathing for ships, has kept us busy. We have tumbled into our beds, exhausted but triumphant, to sleep off the day's weariness and be fresh for the next day's strain.

Such hurried plowing and harrowing of the capacities of youth has not mellowed the soil for the seeds of leisure. We find ourselves unprepared to display the graces of an advanced civilization, which, so far in history, have not been the product of a

twelve-hour day in a foundry. Nevertheless here is leisure knocking at our door. The alarmist sees no alternative save exchanging stupidity for sin. He is confident that, when Satan finds men freed from the plow, the tool, and the ledger, he will impress their idle hands into working for his nefarious ends. We cannot quite share such pessimism, but there is a responsibility upon us to see that the new leisure means enrichment of life and not impoverishment.

II

We should like to use the word "avocation" to describe the activities which add, not to the financial gain of the individual, but to his joy and to his intellectual and spiritual betterment. But the dictionary stands like a rock in the way. Ponderously, inviting no rebuttal, it stresses the beauty of a life of vocational dedication, and gives moral sanction to the barren pursuit of the dollar by defining avocation as "that which calls one away from one's proper business". The only mollification lies in the illustrative quotation: "Heaven is his vocation, and therefore he counts earthly employments avocation." No matter how set his heart might be upon eternal salvation, he would be a rare enthusiast who could get a thrill out of regarding the selling of hardware as an avocation. We shall be forced to seek for some other word to describe what avocation is not allowed to mean.

Fortunately the dictionary compensates for its glacial definition of avocation by the genial spirit in which it expounds the meaning of hobby. A hobby is "any favorite object, pursuit, or topic, that which a person persistently pursues or dwells upon with zeal and delight".

Many persons dig ditches, or sell silk, or pour molten steel into molds, or load freight cars, or clean office buildings, or run elevators, but seldom with "zeal and delight". Few individuals lack the capacity to be stirred and refreshed by the use and exercise of such emotions, and many are the hours of leisure to be illuminated by their cultivation, and the hours of boredom to be held at bay by their help.

What better way is there for us to meet our changing social and working conditions than by cultivating hobbies, not to

escape our "proper business", but to fill our lives with new interests, and to give richer service by the aid of a refreshed and invigorated personality?

The British have much to teach us in the wise use of our leisure hours. With them the hobby is a mark of distinction. To be without a hobby is to be a sodden creature, the victim of commercialism, or an Esau who has sold his birthright for a daily job. That compendium of distinction, the British *Who's Who*, makes open recognition of the place of hobbies in British life. Unlike our American *Who's Who*, the British has a special division in which are entered the recreations of the men whose names and achievements are listed in the book. Every Englishman is interested to know how every other Englishman spends his free time. Our American roster of notables soberly omits any mention of such details, matters of negligible importance to a serious nation bent on production and efficiency. British achievements do not, however, seem to suffer by comparison with ours in spite of our single-minded devotion to accomplishment.

An Earl Grey guides the foreign policy of the British empire in the most critical months of its history, and yet he confesses to a love of birds, which leads him into the woods hours in a day and many days in the year, wandering in the haunts of the little wild creatures and listening to their songs. A commissioner on industrial poisons is an authority on stained glass windows; the passion of a professor of medicine, stationed in Cairo, is sketching; an eminent jurist combines travel and geology as his forms of recreation; the Governor of Fiji fills his free time with art photography and the amateur pursuit of architecture; Younghusband has a penchant for mastering little-known Oriental tongues, and when the expedition to Thibet is organized his hobby marks him for leadership; Sir Robert Hart softens the rigors of official life in the Orient by enthusiastic acquisition of a knowledge of Chinese embroideries and lacquers; Tyndall becomes a mountain climber, and carries his scientific point of view to the top of the highest Alps; a great financier finds music the solace of his idle hours.

Such enthusiasms suggest a very high stage of civilization. The one characteristic clearly distinguishing man from the beasts is his pursuit of the unessential, his love for the extraneous, his

passion for the genetically unimportant. Who can imagine a polar bear trying to go farthest north, or a marmot climbing to get the view from the mountain top, or a bird distinguishing trees by their annual shedding of leaves, or a monkey attempting to understand the language of the parrots, or the seals playing ball on the Pribiloff Islands? Yet every one of these creatures feverishly hunts his food, works to protect himself from the weather and from his enemies, and, like the American industrialist, dies promptly when he retires from his regular business in life.

A man may follow his faithful, plodding way through the arduous duties of the working day, but he shows that he has the divine spark of the poet and the adventurer when he spends his free time plunging through the wilderness and up the rugged mountain side to add the sight of another raven's nest to his list of happy memories. The teacher of reluctant youth will freshen his own life, and by indirection that of his students, by his search, in hushed expectancy, for new species of mushroom on remote hillsides or in wooded hollows. A ghostly coral mushroom may bring him the same enlarging thrill that came to Balboa on a peak in Darien. He can pursue the cryptogams with a "zeal and delight" seldom vouchsafed to the correction of daily exercises in algebra.

Educators have occasionally tried to illuminate daily drudgery by bringing out its social implications, or by relating it to picturesque aspects of industrial growth. Young cotton spinners have been instructed in the ways of raising cotton, its transportation, its commercial metamorphoses, its dyeing, the art of design, the romance of the cotton gin, and the dependence of the cotton industry on the law of supply and demand. But ninety-eight in every hundred spinners, though they may work contentedly and with an interest in the job during their hours in the factory, will leave at night little the richer, save in wages, for the long day's doings. Fortunate indeed is he whose daily task can be carried on with "zeal and delight". Some activity outside the dull walls of the office and the mill is needed to bring that inspiration to most of us.

How can our people be helped to sweeten their days and better their lives by the acquisition of hobbies? The schools would

find it difficult to accomplish the task unaided, for a hobby is like a disease, most readily acquired by contact with one already infected. Fortunately some teachers ride hobbies of their own, and others pursue their specialties with such "zeal and delight" that they can qualify as inspirers to hobby riding as they follow their vocations. The community has its amateur enthusiasts, sufficiently unprofessional to give courage to the timid, who must be impressed into the service, invited to speak in the schools, urged to form clubs of young people to exchange stamps, or collect rocks, or practice decorative book binding, or press weeds, or study the constellations, or make marionettes, or design book plates, or hunt for Indian remains, or draw contour maps, or learn the spider webs, or study rug patterns, or make paintings of the eggs of birds.

These potential teachers of our ill-equipped heirs of leisure are all about us. The private secretary who cultivates dahlias; the stenographer who makes fairy gardens in a flower pot; the banker who keeps bees in his attic; the minister who corrects his social theories by observations on his little glass-covered hill of ants; the salesman who raises goldfish in the back parlor and dreams of developing a new type of fantail to display at the annual fish show; the tanner who uses his daily walk to the tannery as his opportunity to learn the songs of the birds in every season of the year; the lumberman who hunts with a camera; the lawyer who collects carvings of elephants in every material and from every quarter of the globe: these are the men and women who have priceless gifts to give the children in our schools.

No one in the world is so generous with his enthusiasm as the amateur. You have to pay men to talk about their vocations, but it is hard to prevent them from talking about their hobbies. Our schools have not begun to realize the gold mine for the best kind of teaching which lies under their very doorstep. Every lover of a hobby is a potential teacher of the young. He can accomplish much with but meager pedagogical equipment. His enthusiasm surmounts the stumbling word and the material of his hobby counteracts any defect of presentation. Children can, under the inspiration of these rash adventurers upon sacred ground, develop hobbies of their own. Too long have the

specialists been allowed to preëempt the happy hunting grounds and to frown the amateur away.

Think of our allowing the artists sole suzerainty in the field of art, when each one of us should be a joyous sketcher of the changing face of nature. Why should only the musically trained be expected to sing when every man's child of us can get pleasure out of near-harmonies and a sense of rhythm? Why should wood carving be confined to the specialists, when any hand can use a tool, and every human being feels joy in seeing a purposed shape emerge from a block of wood? The enthusiast, who spent the free hours of a busy life carving models of ancient ships, gained not only the enrichment that comes with any craftsmanship, but the additional joy of studying the sailing of the Seven Seas with "zeal and delight".

The physical directors in some of our colleges, alive to the justice of the criticism aimed at an over-preoccupation with the major sports, are training students in different types of physical recreation which are not dependent upon large numbers of fellow sportsmen for their performance, and which are designed not to end with the college days. The hope is to train young men who will no longer get their exercise and their fun sitting on the bleachers, but will find rowing, cross country runs, quoits, squash and volley ball, horseback riding, tennis, swimming, skating, skiing, adapted to undergraduate needs and suitable to carry on into middle age as some of the accessory joys of life.

Golf used to be regarded as the special possession of the adult and the safe amusement of the aged, but youth has seized it for itself, occupied the links, captured the prizes, and left age but a modest part to play. They have not yet robbed their elders, however, of the privilege of gardening. Mark Twain has called the garden the perfect enthusiasm for old age, since the most frail may hope to live to see the harvest gathered or the flowers come to bloom. The grower of orchids, the transplanter of cherry trees, the lover of the primula, the specialist in salad greens, the bulb fancier, the grafter of apple trees, will not find his idle hours hang heavy on his hands, for, winter and summer, with the hoe or the catalogue, he can share his joy in growing things with all the other enthusiasts from the Azores to Australia.

Our amateur astronomers have not only found pleasure for themselves, but have made genuine contributions to the subject, particularly in the study of variable stars. They have much to give the children of their communities. The majority of young people never see the stars. Every night the great stage is set, with the gorgeous pageant of the declining sun and the quiet beauty of the emerging stars; yet one rocket on the Fourth of July will receive more attention and rouse more enthusiasm than the wide panorama of the heavens the year through. Even the poets and romancers allow the full moon to rise at midnight and the new moon to set at dawn. Our schools, mindful of vocations, teach their students the use of tools, helpful knowledge in gaining a livelihood, but if they could also teach the habit of a nightly look of recognition at the sparkling sky they might be making a richer contribution to the individual.

Nothing is more trite, or more true, than to say that man cannot live by bread alone. We must work in order to live at all, but once that minimum is ours we want to live as greatly as we can. Our work will not suffer thereby. It will probably profit by our othersidedness. The scientist who used the egg-beater on an outing found himself able to do an important piece of research because he understood the workings of that simple mechanism. The mill boss was better able to deal with a threatened strike after a Sunday spent in rambling in the bobolink's favorite marshes, and the importer scanned his foreign mail more eagerly because of his hours of rearranging his stamp collection.

We can judge whether we are a truly civilized nation, recognizing fundamental values in life and satisfying other needs than the purely material, when we are as eager as the British to know not only how our distinguished men work but how they play; when our schools place training for hobbies at least on a par with training for vocations; and when the achievement of the amateur becomes of moment to each of us, since we all desire a standing in that unexacting but joy-inducing fellowship of free explorers in a world of wonders and delights.

CORNELIA JAMES CANNON.

SONNET .

BY H. PHELPS PUTNAM

You flew the time when you were swift and clear,
A subtle innocent, a blazing truth,
Whose words shone bright when mine were sharp and sere,
Great classic angel of my mazy youth.

But now you walk, your ravished wings are furled;
We both are mortal now, and each to each,
Sharing the silly lessons of the world,
Bear candid solace out of open speech.

Or we discourse; and then the world grows pale
And drifts away and leaves us free once more,
The sun, the wind, the moon stoop for our tale,
And the old waves cry hush along the shore.

The truth is dead—we killed it solemnly,
And then the planets roared, and so did we.