

About "An Apology for Idlers"

Barbara J. Fisher

I AM IN complete agreement with Robert Louis Stevenson in his essay *An Apology for Idlers*. However, I cannot help wishing he were here today, so that he could tell me how to accomplish the nearly insurmountable task of being a successful idler. Granted, one can be a successful idler today if one is a recluse, but being of the social nature, I can think of nothing worse than isolating myself from this society no matter how hectic it may be. Therefore, I have a stone wall in front of me, since the task of existing in today's society is a full-time occupation and leaves little room for the glorious freedom of idleness. Surely Mr. Stevenson would have to modify his plan a bit for the world of here and now.

I can think of any number of times I have managed a little philosophical thinking and luxurious idleness in this speeding world. Of course I had to do it while standing on a subway, while standing on a street corner or while being jostled on a bus stuffed with people. Nevertheless I do consider it idleness, because I derived much pleasure from those minutes. As an example one evening I came off a bus in front of a white building, just in time to hear, "Times, pay-pah!" being called in a thin, childish voice. Immediately I forgot I was in a hurry and searched for the voice. In front of the white building stood a little colored boy, so little he looked like a doll. All I could see was his wooly head above the big paper he clutched in front of him. Again he called his wares in his reed-like voice, but as I watched him I realized he would not appreciate my solicitude for his size and age. He was a straight sprout and one could see that he was

unafraid of the stream of humanity flowing around him. As I watched the passing people, I realized that very few of them even saw him. Even those who bought a paper from him read the headlines on the paper as they handed him their money. I doubt that they knew he said thank you. Suddenly I realized I was standing still when I should have been rushing to get another bus, so I charged on toward the bus station, forgetting momentarily the little newsboy. Needless to state, I missed the bus.

Occasionally I have a whole day for idleness, and these days I never forget. These are the days that renew my faith and strengthen my belief in this life. These are the days I love. I started one of these days with a trip in an airplane. The sky was a threatening gray as the plane took off, and I anticipated a choppy flight. However, as the ship gained altitude, it broke through and above a cloud layer, and we were in heaven. What can be more inspiring and uplifting than this—floating above a carpet of iridescent white clouds and surrounded by a breathless blue sky.

Mr. Stevenson mentions the fact, in his essay, that some friends are not always as trustworthy as would be desired, but they are still friends because they can erase a frown with a smile. A smiling countenance lifts a shadow from more than one brow each day. Those who find a smile easier than a frown are usually those who find time to absorb the beauty of a sunset.

What have I done! I have found a hole in the stone wall. Perhaps I cannot loll in idleness by a stream while thinking profound thoughts, but I can derive much from my minutes of idleness. As a matter of fact, I have derived enough from these moments to know that I am not "indispensable." My ego has become moth-eaten, but my backbone is getting stronger. What a glorious sensation of freedom I have when I speak as I believe rather than as a puppet controlled by strings.
