

The Luxury of Idleness

Catherine Cowan

LIVING HAS ALMOST become a lost art. The ancient Chinese knew how to live and developed the art to a degree no other people have since. Their philosophy was deeply introspective and intuitive; it never attempted to explain God or the universe but only tried to show men how to live contentedly. Chinese art was not pretentious and awe-inspiring, but it was sensitive and restrained. There were dainty carvings in ivory and exquisite bowls and vases of china. The Chinese had already reached a high degree of culture while most of our ancestors in the wilds of Europe were still crude people, barely making a beginning in civilized ways and thoughts. Did the Oriental possess a higher aesthetic sense than other races? Perhaps the secret was the fact that they had the time—or took the time—to think and to be alone. The Chinese might wander to some quiet grove. Perhaps there would be a waterfall here with forested peaks beyond. He would contemplate the scene, muse upon its beauty, and absorb the serenity of the landscape. Nature and the contemplative life gave him understanding and peace of mind. But what was the result of such a way of life? It kept the country from making swift changes in modern times and kept many of China's intellectuals in the bondage of tradition at a time when they might have been studying modern problems and using modern ideas.

We think of the small, American village of our forefathers as being neighborly and kind. Food was cheap; there was no night life; the family unit was strong; and moral standards were high. As someone has said, "There was nothing to do except live." Keeping one's word was taken for granted; honesty and kindness were more important than wealth. Age was more simple, and there was time to practice the art of living; there was time for thinking. The early pioneer did not carry his appointment book conveniently in his vest pocket. Certain basic tasks had to be done, but when those tasks were completed, one's time was his own.

Idleness is fast becoming a luxury we can hardly afford. There is a job to be done, a home to be maintained, children to be educated. As citizens we are urged to participate in patriotic efforts; as church members we are expected to give of our time and support. Other

organizations, too, make their demands. The modern individual's life has become so complicated and even materialistic that we can hardly censure the man who seemingly is rushed all the time. He is the product of our age. However, we may still well wonder if all this activity is necessary; or if, as Mr. Stevenson says, there are not some individuals who "have not one thought to rub against another," and this affords them a reasonable excuse.

A little act of kindness, an unexpected encouragement, some expression of affection—these are the things we remember. How much enjoyment we are missing because it is actually the little things of life that count. Peace of mind is something that cannot be purchased. To some, it has become a luxury sacrificed in favor of things, material things. Matthew Arnold says, "We would have inward peace, but will not look within. . . ." It must be that our understanding and growth are not all in the things we do, but in the moments of quietness when we let nature speak to us. In the relentless race for economic success, is the result worth the price? Or will we borrow a page from history and let idleness cease to be a luxury.

Idler Meets Mr. Machine-Man

Paul Ross

IDLER PAUSED to brush the beads of sweat, worry, from his forehead. He watched as the droplets fell to the dusty road of Life, landing in the footprint of the traveler several yards ahead of him. He studied the footprints, concluding that they were made by a person in great haste. This realization caused a cloud of gloom to pass over Idler's face, for he hated to see anyone in such a predicament. No person in this world can be enjoying himself when he has imbibed that destructive potion, Hurry, as this poor soul has evidently done, he decided.

Lengthening his stride, he was able to overtake his fellow traveler. Coming abreast of him, Idler recognized the man.

"Why, hello, Mr. Machine-Man."

Mr. Machine-Man turned, still maintaining his steady swift pace, and mumbled a word of greeting.

"What is your destination, sir?" Idler inquired.

"The city of Daily Living, you Lazybones," was the gruff reply.

"I resent your epithet, for truly I am not as you say."

"No matter. I am too busy to spend time bothering with trifles."