

The Acceleration of American Life

Alice Aldrich

TODAY AMERICA MOVES with a rapid pace. Airplanes fly incredibly fast, messages can be sent quickly across oceans, industry turns out hundreds of products daily; in every activity of life there is an accent on speed. The time saver is the man of the hour. Manufacturers pay high salaries to efficiency experts who devise methods of "speeding up production." Gadgets which save time for the house wife are very much in demand. A cleanser manufacturer is exultantly advertising that his product "saves up to two and one-half minutes in cleaning a bathtub!"

Whether at his job or in his home, the average American is never free from the feeling that he must hurry. One must keep pace or be eliminated. Leisure time has all but ceased to exist.

The constant necessity of being alert and attentive keeps men in such mental tension that a form of mental tiredness must result.

This lack of leisure time and this mental fatigue may be in part responsible for what people of other countries refer to as the American disinterest in intellectual matters. For our few leisure moments, we Americans seldom choose amusements which require much mental effort. No one reads merely for the pleasure of reading, unless the material is light, short, and makes little or no demand upon the reader's mind. Few people discuss questions of philosophy or theology, because they enjoy thinking about the subjects. Perhaps more people would become acquainted with classical music and good literature if they could find time, but they are always busy. In the hurry of life, culture is being forgotten. We are becoming "lopsided" as individuals and as a nation.

Perhaps a worse result of our accelerated way of living is the growing passiveness toward religion—a passiveness most apparent among church-members. We are not concerned with what we believe or why we believe it. We are not even concerned with the application of our beliefs to our actions. After five or six days of worry and nervous tension, we gather at church to be soothed by soft music and familiar Bible stories.

Of course, nothing disturbing or thought-provoking is presented in these services, or church members would seek relaxation elsewhere. The church has very little direct influence upon the lives of its members. Religion has become almost synonymous with ritual.

As a result of the rapid pace of our lives, our religious and cultural progress has not equaled our economic advancement. We are becoming freaks, much like those animals whose bodies developed strangely, one part suddenly growing much faster than the rest. Most of these animals soon became extinct.