

Recreation.

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Nineteenth Century 19

RECREATION.

THE kinds of recreation are so many, and their relations to health, to business, and to pleasure are so numerous, that it would be impossible to write briefly of them all. I shall limit myself to the influences of active recreations on our power and will for work, and to the methods by which it may be believed that those influences are usually exercised. I shall not include among the effects of recreations the promotion of the general health, though it may be counted as one of the most frequent and most important; neither shall I speak of the mere pleasure which they give, or of their relations to our social life, or of their utility to any except really working people; but amongst these I shall have in mind people of all ranks and all ages who work hard, whether of necessity or of choice. Happily for us, the working classes are not nearly all in one social group.

In the general meaning of active recreation we include two chief things: namely, the cessation of the regular work of our lives, and the active occupation, whether of body or mind or both, in something different in which we find pleasure. From both alike we expect and may obtain refreshment, that is, renewed fitness for our regular work. In the former of these parts of recreation, speaking generally, the structures of our body which have been at work are left at rest or are exercised in a different manner; in the latter, those which have not been at work are brought into activity.

These two parts of recreation may be said to be adjusted to two different necessities of our economy. It is a rule, with very few exceptions, that for any structure of our bodies to be kept in fitness for its office it must be sometimes exercised; and it is a rule, without exception, that in every exercise there is waste or alteration of structure, however immeasurably small, which must be repaired during rest. In all active recreations justly so-called both these necessities are complied with, but in different proportions; and, for the repair which is to be accomplished during rest, recreation is not enough. This must be achieved in sleep. Recreation and sleep, together, give the complete refreshment of which, however dimly, we can be conscious in the feeling of fitness for renewed activity in the work at which we may have been fatigued. It is not always mere slang when

a man, after recreation and sleep, says that he feels very fit. He is so: As in some previous weariness and fatigue he was dimly conscious of the waste or impairment of structures which made him unfit or unwilling to continue at work, so, now, he becomes conscious, however dimly, of their restoration; and this may increase to a consciousness not only of their fitness for activity but of their need of it, and then to a desire which can hardly be restrained. He may feel that he must do something, even though there be no necessity for him to resume his regular work.

I said that I should speak of only active recreations, but it may be held that there is some measure of activity even in such rest as comes short of profound sleep. And many people seem content with recreation of this least active kind. They like the mere sitting-by and doing nothing; the letting their minds wander anywhere with no more use or meaning than in a dream: or they are content with the mere gossip and the easy talk of society; and, if they were really capable of considering, they would probably decide that they find in these things sufficient recreation. Others, much better than these, are content with quietude in their peaceful homes; they feel refreshed enough in the common events of a happy domestic life, and in the Sunday's rest with all the tranquillity that it may bring; and some of them ask, 'Are not these things enough for recreation? Need we do more than finish our assigned day's work and then be quiet, and then sleep, and be just fit for the same work to-morrow?'

It may be enough for some; and some measure of quietude, especially in home-life, some time daily spent in neither work nor play, some time in silence and reflection and in that which may best come after them: all these and the quietude and gentle occupation of the Sunday are, indeed, excellent recreations and helps to the next day's work. None should altogether neglect them. But for real working 17 and women, ~~men~~ whether they be rich or poor, and whatever be their occupation, these are not enough. To give but one evidence of their insufficiency, the customs of the most vigorous people in the most vigorous nations of the world are against being content with them; and these customs, which have grown up naturally, show the just conviction that when we have finished a day's or, it may be, nearly a whole year's work, it is good to have some other active occupation of mind or body, or of both together, even though it be more fatiguing than the work itself was.

There is scarcely a greater contrast between men and the lower animals than in this matter of recreation. Young animals may play, springing or running hither and thither, evidently enjoying the exercise of both their muscles and their minds; but the elder, who may be compared with men, even with very young men, rarely show such signs of mere spontaneous activity. Those that work for us work and then rest; those that are free, seek their food and obey

the instincts and other necessities of life and then they, too, rest. Man alone refreshes himself by changing his method of activity ; man alone has habitual active recreations. And it may be generally observed, among the several races of men, that those which are the most highly cultivated, and whose occupations are the most various, strong and intellectual, have the most numerous and most active recreations.

A story has often been told of an Oriental who watched some English gentlemen playing cricket, and who said, when he was asked his opinion of the game, that he thought it a very good one, but could not see why the rich men did not pay poor ones to play it for them, while they might sit-by and watch it. He had not learned the happiness of a willing great activity, or its use in restoring fitness for work. Englishmen, more than any, seem to have learned this ; and it may surely be observed, among the nations of Europe, that those which are most laborious and successful in enterprise, most business-like, most vigorous in commerce and in intellectual culture, are those in which the most active recreations of mind and body are most prevalent. I say of mind and body ; for there are recreations of which the best part is that they require for their full enjoyment the most steadfast direction of the mind while the body is at rest. Such are those in which music and the fine arts are intensely enjoyed by some whose days are passed in the routine of any very different mental occupation or in muscular work. It would be as unreasonable to call these mental recreations inactive as it would be to attribute idleness to the profoundest thinker or to the most watchful judge, who sits for hours listening attentively and arranging in due order in his mind all the confusing evidence and contrary arguments which he hears. If we could have one estimate of all active efforts it might be in the amount of will employed in each of them ; and mental attention, whether in business or in recreation, may involve at least as strong and as long an act of the will as any muscular exercise.

What, then, are the chief constituents of active recreation : of this retirement from work that fatigues, and this occupation in other things that refresh, even though, after another manner, they may fatigue ? The chief and the essential thing is the change ; and the love of recreation is among the examples of the enormous motive-power exerted in the world by the desire for change. It is often spoken of as a mere infirmity, a foolishness, that should be resisted ; and so it often is and with some people may be always so : but with those who are honest and hard-working it is no folly. The desire for change is as much a part of our very nature as is the desire for sleep or for food ; it is, as an instinct, to be scrupulously, however cautiously, obeyed ; and one of the best methods of obedience is in well-chosen recreations after business.

Can we, then, in all the varieties of recreation pursued by the

people of this country find any characters possessed by all, or which it is desirable that they should have? Crowds every year return from vacations of all kinds after all kinds of work: some have been shooting, some fishing, some climbing, some sailing; some studying pictures, some architecture; and, though many have done this or that only because it is a fashion among their friends, yet, doubtless, many more have chosen the recreation which they love best. And far more numerous than these who have come back from their vacations are the crowds, the thousands, who every night are seeking recreation, after their various day's work, in theatres and clubs, in card-playing, music, singing, and a hundred more amusements. All these are seeking change from the daily work; all are seeking pleasure; many will not find it, and many will not feel fitter for their work ~~to-morrow~~; but many will, having chosen recreations well suited to them, even though they may not have been conscious of any good reasons for the choice and have only obeyed some natural inclination.

Now, I think that if we look for the characteristics which may be found in all good active recreations, and on which their utility chiefly depends, we shall find that they all include one or more of these three things: namely, uncertainties, wonders, and opportunities for the exercise of skill in something different from the regular work. And the appropriateness of these three things seems to be, especially, in that they provide pleasant changes which are in strong contrast with the ordinary occupations of most working lives, and that they give opportunity for the exercise of powers and good dispositions which, being too little used in the daily business of life, would become feeble or be lost.

In their daily work—speaking generally and roughly—most people become tired of routine and sameness; they know their business, and there is in it little to surprise them; they can reckon on what is coming; they know how and when each day's work will end. They get tired of all this, and wish for something very unlike it; and so they long for uncertainties; they enjoy to watch something they are not sure of, to see the settlement of a doubt, the unveiling of a mystery.

Herein is a great part of the refreshing change, the recreation, found in games of chance. The toss of a halfpenny brings refreshment to the routine of the schoolboy or the errand-boy in that every time he tosses he creates an uncertainty, enjoys it for a moment, and then decides it. To the elder man the deal at whist and every hand he plays bring similar pleasure in uncertainties; and the counting of the tricks decides them; and the pleasures and uncertainties accumulate to the end of the rubber or of the whole evening's play. Other pleasures mingle with these; the exercise of skill, the reckoning of chances, and many more, including, perhaps, the winning of

money or repute; but with them all and under them is the occupation in uncertainties, and its pleasure is the more refreshing the more it is in contrast with sameness in the daily work.

Doubtless there is much of the same pleasure in all sports; in fishing, shooting, and the like. Will the fish bite? Will the bird fall? There is the uncertainty; and then comes the decision; and in any case, hitting or missing, the mind which has been wearied in a dull routine is refreshed. It is the same in cricket and lawn-tennis and all the like popular games. Mingling with the other pleasures that they give, and the other good they do, there is the refreshing pleasure of a continuous succession of uncertainties and decisions, a pleasure which seems to reach its acme in some of the amusements that are attended with frequent risks of limbs or even of life. The contrast with the ordinary occupations of vast crowds of all ranks and ages and occupations is complete; and from this contrast comes a great part of the true recreation, the re-fitting for the work. Doubtless, some of the refreshment of reading novels and romances, whether real or in fiction, is of the same kind. Else, why should nearly every one who reads them feel that his pleasure is marred by hearing what the end of the story is, and by thus having his uncertainty prematurely settled?

These may be examples enough. I believe that if anyone will think over the whole class of what are fairly called active recreations, he will find that a chief part of nearly everyone is of this kind: the unveiling of a mystery, the issue of some chance, the settlement of an uncertainty. Every one who works enough to need or deserve refreshment should see that some of his recreations have in them this element; and let him observe that of all the recreations of this kind those are the best which, together with the element of uncertainty or chance, offer the largest proportion of that other element of which I spoke—the opportunity of exercising skill. In all games and sports the more the results depend on chance, and the less they depend on the skill of the players, the more is the gambling. Duly guarded, the love of recreation among uncertainties may lead to the promotion of admirable skill whether of mind or limbs; and if, on the one side, it may make itself vile by gambling, on the other it may ennoble itself by strengthening the mental disposition which moves men to experiments in science, and even to the highest methods of research. In all these a great part of the happiness is in the watching and decision of uncertainties, in the unveiling of hidden truth: and all whose work gives them too little opportunity for such happiness should have it in their play.

Next to uncertainties as parts of recreations I named wonders, meaning to include the objects of all forms and degrees of wonder, from quiet admiration to utter astonishment or awe. Of course the issue of a chance or of a game of skill may excite wonder; and its use

for recreation may be thus enhanced ; but we may think of the recreation due to wonders as something distinct. Their fitness for recreation is as evident as that of uncertainties, and similar. Whatever most men's daily work may be, or wherever they may pursue it, they become so accustomed to it, so familiar with all around them, that they may cease to wonder at anything within their range. They may have their work in the midst of glorious scenery, among mountains, or by the sea, or in their own rooms among marvellous beauties of art, but they observe little or nothing of all this : or they may be working at any of the applications of the wonderful discoveries of recent times, but they have long ago ceased to be astonished at them. Some of us may, indeed, upon reflection or in calm thinking, be moved by the wonders among which we have been living : they are very happy times when we can so meditate ~~on them~~ ; but usually and habitually we are seldom conscious of any stirring wonders in our customary work. The finding and observing of them elsewhere is, therefore, a real recreation, and a chief part of a very large number of the mental refreshments which we most earnestly seek and most thoroughly enjoy. And happily it is so : for the contemplation of wonders may give occupation and, thereby, strength to one of the noblest parts of our minds ; the part which not only, as Aristotle pointed out, first leads to studious research, but that which is exercised in the highest admiration and reverence and which acts, together with the imagination, in the forming of the highest ideals towards which we can ever strive.

It is easy to find instances in which the greatest charm of recreations is in the wonder to which they move us. I watched one in myself some weeks ago when I went over the electric-lighthouse on the Lizard Point, enjoying and feeling refreshed by all the wonders that I saw there : the wonders of the burners that would give the light of many thousand candles ; and of the multiplied reflectors and lenses by which, of all this light, none might be wasted, but all sent right out to shine for miles over the sea ; the admirable cleverness and precaution by which, if the electric light were, by any accident, hindered, a huge paraffin lamp, with its concentric wicks, would instantly take its place ; and then the wonders of the fog-horn with its great reservoir of air so condensed by steam-pressure that, being let go, it would blow a blast upon the horn which should be heard out at sea miles beyond the distance at which in the dense fog the light could be seen.

I wondered at all this and was refreshed ; and I wonder still as often as I think of it, and thus constantly renew my recreation. And I think, too, of the contrast between myself and the keeper of the lighthouse who showed it me. He was an admirably intelligent workman, complete in his knowledge of the machinery ; as complete in his knowledge as I was in my ignorance ; proud, too, of the work in

which he was engaged and happy, I think, in its utility. But to him it was no wonder; he showed it with all the quietude of routine, and spoke rather wearily of the hours spent in watching it. To him there was no recreation in it all; it was the object of his daily work.

The same charm of wonder and the same kind of contrast may be found in a thousand other instances. We enjoy the surprises of conjuring tricks, which to the conjuror himself, I suppose, give no stirring pleasure; and of fireworks, and the stories and actings of perilous adventures. More worthily, we may enjoy and be refreshed by the marvels of skill in art, in music, or in singing. When we listen to a long-sustained high note—such as Albani can sing or Joachim can play—we are refreshed not only by the beauty of the sound, but by the wonder that it can be produced; and it is this which most refreshes us when, long afterwards, we can recall the sound. It is after the same manner that we are refreshed by glorious scenery, the grandeur of mountains, of cataracts, of floods of light at sunset: they move us to wonder, and we enjoy them and they refresh our minds, though those who live among them may be unmoved. And so it is when we leave home and find recreation in the strange sights and customs of other cities; and foreigners come here and are as happy in their wonder at the things which we are tired of looking at. What would not one give to be able to come to London as a stranger and be surprised at the sights that, unless in careful thinking, we now care nothing for?

I named a third chief element in recreations: the opportunities which they give for the exercise of skill in something which is different from our regular work. This may be in either mental or muscular work or both. One who has been all day busy in reading may refresh himself in composition; another turns from teaching to learning, and enjoys it the more for the contrast; another, most wisely, from the routine of business to some difficult research in science or in history; another from literature to music or the fine arts, whether in the practice or in the critical study of them. All these changes are the daily recreations of large numbers of the more cultivated classes: and they are matched in the instances of those who turn from their day's manual work, or the routine of life in offices or shops, to the mental work offered to them in colleges and evening classes. The labour of their study may be greater than that of their work; it may increase their fatigue; yet after sleep they may be conscious of an increased fitness for the business of their lives by reason not only of the knowledge they have acquired, but of their mental recreation.

But the most obvious examples of this part or method of recreation are in muscular exercises: in athletics; in the acquirement and exercise of skill in cricket or lawn-tennis, or on cycles of whatever wheels, or in the finer manual skill at billiards or in music. Any of

these may be studied as patterns of active recreation; for they include all the three chief conditions for refreshment. Think, for example, of the delight and power of a game of cricket after a day's work, for one employed at a desk, or in reporting, or bricklaying, or mere buying or selling at fixed prices. There is the new activity with muscles wanting freer and more willing movements; the conscious acquirement or exercise of skill; there is the decision of an uncertainty at every ball, at every run; the wonder at some dashing hit, at some strange result of the whole game.

Or, for another example, think of the recreation when one who has spent months in writing, or reading, or in Parliament, or in city business, climbs some high mountain: the uncertainty as to the difficulties he will meet with; the decision when, with each effort, so unlike those of his old daily work, he surmounts them one by one; the marvels of the ever-changing scenery; the decisive skill of the last climb, the final certainty, the awful beauty of the scene. Here is complete contrast with the routine life of the past months. He may never before have been so thoroughly tired, but next day he may be conscious that he never before was so thoroughly refreshed in both mind and body. After a vacation spent in pleasures such as these, he may come home and rightly call himself 'very fit' for the old work; he may even be so conscious of his fitness that he may enjoy the showing of it, and may love the work that he hated.

It would be easy, if it were not for their number, to show in how many of the most popular active recreations the three things which I have indicated are, in different proportions, combined. They may be overlooked or forgotten in the mere enjoyment of change, or of pleasure, or of a partial freedom from responsibility; but there they are, and I believe that the happiness and utility of recreations may be nearly estimated by their amount: there are lives in the monotony of which they alone may sustain a good spirit of enterprise, of reverence, and of willing effort.

But, even if this be admitted, the question yet remains as to what it is that makes different groups of persons choose especially one or other of all the recreations in which these three things are combined. Why should there be any choice? Why, for example, in a long vacation or on a Bank-holiday, do some prefer to travel by sea and some by land? Why do some prefer hunting or fishing; and some seek the treasures of art and some of literature? Why do some fell trees and some only walk and wander like tramps and vagabonds, and some, or at least two of whom I have heard, leave their comfortable houses that they may break stones by the roadside? It is, perhaps, impossible to tell; because in this, as in everything in our social life, the influences of education, fashion and custom are incalculable, and are commonly more potent than our natural inclinations. But it seems at least not improbable that the devotion of

many of us to some of the most active recreations and our choices among them are determined by inherited natural dispositions, and by the survival in us of instincts which, in our distant ancestors, were appropriate to the first necessities of life. They had to hunt and fish and entrap their food; they migrated and wandered and rested where they could; they cleared forests and made paths; and these things they did with instincts which were parts of their very nature, and which with the rest of their nature they transmitted. We have inherited them; they are variously distributed amongst us, in various combinations and proportions; and now that they cannot be satisfied in our ordinary work, we may become, at times, restless till they can be satisfied in our recreations. And so, I suppose, according to their several principal inheritances, one chooses one pursuit, another chooses another; and thus the pursuits that were the necessities of the uncivilised life, the hunting and fishing, the tree-cutting and vagrancy, become the almost unconsciously chosen pleasures of the civilised. Many, indeed, seem indifferent to them, as if the inheritance had died out; and these find their recreations among other and comparatively modern and more tranquil methods of activity. Here, too, it is hard to say, or even to guess, what determines choice when choice is made, not guided or compelled. But probably it is in these, also, determined by inborn dispositions. For, as the occupations of men increase in number and variety, so do their natural appropriate powers and dispositions; and such of these as are not fully exercised in the business or chosen duties of life may find their satisfaction in the chosen recreations.

But, whatever be the natural disposition, there are some rules regarding active recreations which it is well for all to observe: for all, at least, who must work or who wish to work as well as play.¹

First, recreations should not only be compatible with the business or duty of life but absolutely and far subordinate; and this, not only in kind but in number and quantity. Their utility and, sometimes, even their only justification is that they may increase the power and readiness for work; beyond this they should not be allowed to pass.

Then, they should chiefly exercise the powers which are least used in the work; and this, not only for pleasure but for utility. For there are few daily occupations which provide sufficient opportunities for the training of all the powers and dispositions which may be usefully employed in them and of which the full use, though not necessary for an average fitness, may be essential to excellence in the business of life. They, therefore, that work chiefly with their minds should refresh themselves chiefly with the exercise of their muscles; manual workers should rather rest and have some study, or practise some gentle art or strive to invent; or, for one more

¹ The substance of this essay and these rules were given in an Address at the opening of the session of the Working Men's College, Great Ormond Street.

example, they whose days are spent in money speculations and excitement had better try to be happy in passionless thinking, in listening to sweet sounds, in quiet reading, or in slowly smoking; and so on.

It adds to the utility of every recreation if its events can be often thought of with pleasure; so that the mind may be sometimes occupied with them not only in careful thinking, but in those gaps or casual intervals of time in which, both during and after work, it is apt to wander uselessly. Especially is this true of mental recreations; they may thus prolong their happiness and their utility from day to day or year to year; as often as they are remembered the mind may be refreshed far more than it is in the mere vacancy of thought. And there may be as much refreshment in looking forward; as, for example, in planning a good holiday or, at the best, in trying, by the light of either faith or science, to anticipate the final decision of the doubts which now beset us, or the wonders that will be revealed, or the new powers that will be exercised in the far distant future.

It is an excellence in recreations if they lead us to occupy ourselves in pursuits which give opportunities of gaining honest repute and personal success. Competition is good in all virtuous pleasures as well as in all work: the habit of being in earnest and of doing one's best may be strengthened in recreations and then employed in its still better use in work.

And in agreement with this it is a great addition to the happiness and utility of a recreation if it enables us to do or to acquire something which we may call our own. In this is a part of the advantage which any one may find in giving part of his spare time to some study, some branch of art, some invention or research which may be recognised, at least among his friends, as being, in some sense, his own. The study itself must be the first and chief refreshment, but its pleasure is enhanced if with the knowledge or the skill which it attains there is mingled some consciousness of personal property.

Similarly, and for a like reason, the happiness of a recreation is increased if it leads us to collect anything: books, sketches, shells, autographs, or whatever may be associated with the studies or the active exercises of spare times or even with those of business. I think that none who have not tried it can imagine how great is the refreshment of collecting and of thinking, at odd moments, of one's specimens and arranging and displaying them. There are few good recreations, few daily occupations with which something of the kind may not be usefully mingled.

In recommending these which may seem selfish things one is reminded of what Pascal says: 'On ne voyageroit pas sur la mer pour ne jamais en rien dire, et pour le seul plaisir de voir, sans espérance de s'entretenir avec personne;' ² and I suppose that in most of our re-

² *Pensées*, 1^{re} partie, art. v.

creations we are conscious of increased pleasure if we are on the way towards anything which we may talk of afterwards or which we may show with some kind of self-applause. But the desire of self-satisfaction is not always or altogether evil in either business or pleasure. In both alike it may be turned to the happiness of others as well as of one's self; and it is so in many of the active recreations of games in which sides are taken, as especially in cricket-matches, rowing-matches, football, and the like. They are admirable in all the chief constituent qualities of recreations; but, besides this, they may exercise a moral influence of great value in business or in any daily work. For without any inducement of a common interest in money, without any low motive, they bring boys and men to work together; they teach them to be colleagues in good causes with all who will work fairly and well with them; they teach that power of working with others which is among the best powers for success in every condition of life. And by custom, if not of their very nature, they teach fairness: foul play in any of them, however sharp may be the competition, is by consent of all disgraceful; and they who have a habit of playing fair will be the more ready to deal fair. A high standard of honesty in their recreations will help to make people despise many things which are far within the limits of the law.

And, for one more general rule, it is an excellent quality in recreations if they will continue good even in old age. Talleyrand is reported to have said to one who told him that he did not care to learn whist: 'My friend, you do not know how unhappy an old age you are preparing for yourself.' I think the experience of men of my calling would confirm this by the instances they see of unhappy rich old men who have retired from business and have no habitual recreations. None seem so unhappy as do some of these. They used to enjoy the excitement of uncertainty in their business; now, everything is safe and dull: then, mere rest after fatigue was happiness; now, there is no fatigue, but there is restlessness in monotony; they used to delight in the exercise of skill and in the counting of its gains; now, the only thing in which they had any skill is gone: they have no work to do, and they do not know how either to play or to rest.

It is well, therefore, that all should prepare for the decline of power in recreations, as well as in much graver things. There are many that do not lose their charm or their utility as we grow older. Talleyrand named one of the best; and whist ~~is~~ may be deemed representative of them in that it provides that the mental activity of each hand is followed by the quietude of each deal. Another is in the refreshment of collections; for there are many whose value constantly increases as they become older, and with all of them the pleasure is enhanced the further we can look back in the memory of the events associated with each specimen, and can recollect ~~the~~ the difficulty of

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obtaining it, and the joy of first possession. Or, there may be a change of active recreations; the elderly cricketer may take to golf and become sure that it is in every way the better of the two; the old hunting man may ride to cover more cautiously. Or, with less activity, there may be the happiness of reading or meditation, of music or any of the fine arts; these, if they have been prudently cultivated, do not become wearisome in old age. If these and other like things fail, it may be a sign that it is time to leave off work; but so long as a man can work, so long will he be right if he will spend some of his leisure times, wisely and actively, in recreations; they may make him both more fit to do his work and, at the last, more fit to leave it, and become sure that it is in every way the better of the two; but even golf may become too much for him, and then it may be well if he can refresh himself with reading, or with meditation, with music or any of the fine arts. For so long as a man can work, so long he may do his work the better if, in the intervals, he will wisely and not idly occupy himself in something very different from it.

JAMES PAGET.

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