

POPULAR RECREATION AND PUBLIC MORALITY

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The things we do, when we do what we please, are vitally related not only to health, but also to morality and the whole development of the finer self. The forms of our pleasure-seeking disclose what we really are. Those nations which devoted their leisure to re-creating health and building up beautiful bodies have tended to survive, while those which turned, in the marginal hours, to dissipation have written for us the history of national downfall. A daily life in which there is no time for recreation may be fraught with as much evil as a leisure given over to a futile frittering away of energy. Greece became famous because four-fifths of her people were slaves and thus one-fifth had opportunity for culture.

The work which human muscle used to do is now being done by engines of various sorts, so that we have leisure again. Not only the few, but the mass have a margin beyond the working hours; the time that is left after the eight-hour day. The world has never seen such equality of opportunity before and the possibilities latent in this fact are stupendous. If it required only a small fraction of the people to immortalize Greece what marvels may not be done by us moderns now that all of us have a little time each day to devote to the expression of our real selves.

But we Americans, as yet, think only of work. Work is important, but it is only *one* of the important things. It secures food, shelter and clothing for us. Necessary things, to be sure, but belonging to that part of our lives which does not signify. In respect to these economic things—the things we work for—we are all pretty much alike. It is in the higher life of the spirit where we differ. If we would be *individuals*, stand out from the multitude, our spirits must have a life of their own. In truth, he has not really lived who has secured for himself nothing more than food, clothing and a shelter for his body.

When I speak of the “higher life of the spirit,” do not appre-

hend that we are drifting into a religious discussion. A higher *liveliness* of the spirit would have expressed my thought even more adequately. The "play of the spirit" is not an empty phrase. It is always the spirit that plays. Our bodies only work. The spirit at play is what I mean by the higher life.

Play is the pursuit of ideals. When released from the daily work, the mill we have to tread in order to live, then we strive to become what we would be if we could. When we are free we pursue those ideals which indicate and create character. If they lead us toward wholesome things—literature, music, art, debate, golf, tennis, horseback riding and all of the other things that are wholesome and good, then our lives are rounded out, balanced and significant.

If education is "equipping for life," then it ought to be divided into two parts, equipment for work and equipment for play. If education is bound to provide us with the luxuries of the body it ought also at least to furnish us with the necessities of the soul. It must tell us not only how to get the most out of the working hours, but also how to spend most profitably and joyously the hours that remain.

We do not, however, need to be instructed upon the importance of *having* a leisure time. That need is instinctive. I am confident that one of the chief sources of social unrest is the envy, not of the food the over-rich eat, the clothes they wear or the character of the roofs over their heads, but of the sure and ample hours in which they can do what they like. The problem of a happy and wholesome use of the leisure time in the cities involves us in difficulties which have never been encountered before, but they are being met with courage and success.

We shall confine ourselves to the city side of the problem because, while the conditions of play and recreation in the country are not unimportant, we are fast becoming a city people, and it is inevitable that in the city the problem will be of primary importance.

You cannot drive people out of the city. We experiment by exporting them. But while driving them out of one slum they return to another, and to stay. The great human abhorrence of loneliness is unconquerable. We like each other *so* much—at least that is one reason why we refuse to be rusticated.

Statistics tell, even more convincingly, the increasing urbaniza-

tion of our population. In 1790 3.3 per cent. of the people in the United States lived in towns and cities of 8000 and upward, while to-day over 33 per cent. live in the cities of the same class. It means not only that the cities are growing with phenomenal rapidity, but that the total population growth in our country during the past three censuses has been almost entirely an urban growth. In Illinois I was recently told that within a single generation the average country school had shrunk from thirty-eight to twenty-eight pupils.

I do not, however, view this rush to the cities with the apprehension that is felt by many. The city is meeting its own problems successfully. Take, for example, the testimony of the death-rate, which represents the sum total of the influences that bear upon life. During the past three decades the country death-rate has remained practically stationary, while in the cities it has been going straight down from decade to decade. The truth is that cities have a purer water supply than the average farm. They dispose of their sewage more effectually than the country. Besides that, they have a more varied food supply. Recall for a moment the vacations when you have gone to the country dreaming of wondrous table delights and found them in reality coming out of tin cans.

There are, however, conditions peculiar to the city which give the problem of recreation there an added pertinence. It has to be admitted that the occupations of the city are woefully one-sided. We function so much of the time with only a particular part of our body or mind, or both, leaving the other parts to deteriorate through disuse, that there is an aggravated need of a leisure time in which to build out the all-around individual. The conditions of city life are so complex and new, so many of us are conscious of a lack of resources, that it is indeed a problem so to employ the margin of the day that it shall make for wholesomeness and rest, health and quietness, and helpful social contacts.

This is indeed the problem of the city, a problem surrounded with many difficulties, but one, nevertheless, whose solution is more clearly visible at the present time than the recreation problems of the country. Strange as it may seem, the greater tractability of the urban problem resides in the very condition to which people are wont to attribute most of the city's ills—I mean the density of the population. But before developing this idea let us take a

glance at a few of the present city recreations which exhibit unwholesome aspects.

There are at the present writing in New York City 200 moving-picture shows with an average daily attendance for each of 1000 persons. That makes 200,000 persons per day taking part in this one form of public amusement. On Sundays these shows have an average attendance of 500,000. While usually unobjectionable from the moral standpoint, the amusement which these exhibitions afford is sedentary and has no value as a bodily exercise. Generally, also, the ventilation in the moving-picture hall is so inadequate that a couple of hours presence in one of them, with all the attendant risks of exposure to contagious diseases, is a positive menace to the health.

New York has also about 200 dance halls, nearly all of them connected with saloons. Now, dancing in itself is a thoroughly wholesome form of recreation and exercise. But the moral environment of these places of amusement is such that it is not pleasant to think that a large proportion of the future mothers of American children has to resort to them in order to satisfy perfectly wholesome and natural cravings for play and companionship.

It is not necessary to mention the saloons and other resorts in our large cities which, under the guise of affording amusement, are also inflicting evil upon our young people. But I dare say few realize to what an extent some of our national institutions have become sources of bodily harm because of our inexcusable way of letting things do themselves and of failing to unite and give them the intelligent direction which they require and which would not only rob them of their capacity to injure, but vastly enhance their ability to do us good. Take, for example, the customary celebration of our national July festival.

It is reported from apparently trustworthy sources that more persons have been sacrificed in celebrating the Fourth of July than were fatally injured in the War of Independence itself. The following table taken from the *Chicago Tribune's* record of the last ten years is significant :

	Dead.	Injured.
1908	72	2,736
1907	58	3,897
1906	51	3,551
1905	59	3,169
1904	58	3,049
1903	52	3,665
1902	31	2,796
1901	35	1,803
1900	59	2,767
1899	33	1,742

And, again, quoting from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, we have the following table of cases of lockjaw that have lately resulted:

	Cases.	Deaths.
1907	4,249	164
1906	5,308	158
1905	2,992	182
1904	3,986	183
1903	3,983	182

In the solution of these recreation problems the individual is helpless. Not long ago Dr. Woods Hutchinson met me on the street. Said he:

"Where does your boy play?"

"On the street."

"So does mine. Do you think it is a good place?"

"No."

"Well," Dr. Hutchinson continued, "wouldn't it be a good thing to have a place where they could have some swings and some seesaws, and a place to dig, and where they could make a boat and do things?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Let us get one."

"All right," I said, and he took one section and I took another to find a place. Difficulty after difficulty was encountered until we gave it up.

As a matter of fact city parents cannot provide in their homes places where children may play. We are unable to give our young people the wholesome social life which the full, rounded development of their natures requires.

But if the individual can do nothing the community, acting as a community, can. This is the inestimable advantage which the city has over the country. The close association of persons with common interests which is involved in city life and the ready responsiveness of the group-mind make feasible the carrying out of constructive programs for wholesome recreation of a splendor and attractiveness almost beyond the reach of the imagination.

Beginnings of this sort have already been made here and there. Kicked into action by one of its prominent papers, Springfield, Mass., set out to have a sane and safe Fourth of July. A committee was evolved. The committee secured the coöperation of the School Board, the Mayor, the Chamber of Commerce—the movement became so contagious nearly everybody wanted to get into it. The result was that Springfield had a Fourth of July that really dedicated the day, that bound together thirteen nationalities in one wholesome enthusiasm, that gave the children more harmless fireworks, the youth more healthful athletics and the people more hopeful poetry than the life of that city had ever before witnessed. The secret of it all was that the people acted as a unit to remedy an intolerable custom instead of, as individuals, just objecting and letting the foolish firecracker slaughter of the innocents go on.

One of the pleasantest aspects of the whole city recreation problem is that its solution is to be accomplished not primarily by restrictive, but by constructive measures. In the main, both children and grown-ups like good things better than the bad. People as a whole *are* wholesome. Their children are wholesome and they respond to wholesome things. The really shameful part of the business is *we* do not give them a chance. More than half, I believe, of our American boys and girls have to secure the bulk of their recreation in the streets, much of the time under influences positively unwholesome and sometimes dangerous to life. If our boys attempt to play baseball in the streets we arrest them. The 200,000 young people who frequent the dance halls of New York, if they dance at all, are compelled to take this exhilarating exercise under conditions which are frequently vicious in their moral influence.

To free ourselves from the present indictment of neglecting to give our young people the opportunities for wholesome recreation

and to carry out those constructive plans which promise so much for the future all-round development of the individual three things must be done. First, we must find out the facts. We should have an instantaneous occupation census.

By occupation census I mean a record of the age, sex and occupation of every person in a certain district upon a given hour. It would probably not be feasible to attempt to cover a whole city. Some Saturday night at perhaps nine o'clock would be a favorable time. This census would show just how many people are at that time on the streets, how many are in saloons, how many are in billiard halls, how many in bowling alleys, how many in gymnasiums, in dance halls, etc., throughout the entire district.

We know pretty well how and where people work. We know, for example, how many people are engaged in the iron trade, how many are miners and engineers, and how many are employed on farms. But we have no reliable data as to how many people dance or how many are interested in art or philosophy. We have quite authoritative information as to what people do to earn their food, clothing and shelter. We have very little idea, on the other hand, what they do when they please themselves, when they are pursuing their own ideals. Such a census as I have described would tell us just this.

The practical uses of census information of this sort are many. To take a single illustration: A great playground movement is going on all over the country. In some of the larger cities commissions, backed by substantial appropriations, have been authorized to investigate existing playground facilities. The attendance at the playground is recorded, but nobody knows how many children in a given area, say the four blocks around the playground, are at any given time *not* there. Do the children go to the playground for brief entertainment and then return to the street for the bulk of their play? These are fundamental questions and yet we are not able to answer them. The census would give us this information.

The second thing we must do to insure the widest and wisest indulgence in recreation is to promote a full and purposeful use of the facilities we now have. All over America there are school buildings and school yards, a great many of which are locked up

at three o'clock. The balance of the day they serve absolutely no use; whereas if they were open in the evening both children and adults might find in them the means for considerable social and recreative enjoyment. There are our manual training schools with their expensive equipments. Why let them be shut up after the regular school hours? It is better for boys to be working in shops, learning to use their hands by making kites and boats, than "shooting craps" in a dark alley. Why not keep the school yards open *all* of the time so that our children will not be obliged to play in the automobile-ridden streets. These properties belong to us; why not have the fullest use of them?

Besides extending the use of our school buildings let us also *plan* the use of our parks. At present we just *allow* their use. We do not even do what every big summer hotel does for its guests—provide guides who show how the various facilities may be exploited for the enjoyment of the patrons. Modern library administration has pointed the way. Libraries do not simply store books nowadays; they push books at people. But this enterprising and aggressive adaptation of our parks and horticultural gardens to the needs of humanity does not seem as yet to have been dreamed of. There are many which are not being fully used because of a lack of intelligent direction.

We need also deliberately to study our festival occasions. They are great possessions which we are allowing to go to waste. They could be made the focal points for large streams of social life. The marching, dances and ceremonies could be made to dignify the days they celebrate and to render them educational, instead of what they now so frequently are—dissipating for adults and meaningless for the children.

The third part of the program for popular recreation which is incumbent upon us of the cities is that of formulating a comprehensive plan. Such a measure as this is necessary if we are to make sure of an equal attention to the needs of every class and avoid that overlapping of energy which always accompanies individual, unconnected efforts. Our cities are being architecturally beautified in accordance with far-seeing, harmonious municipal designs. Why should not our physical, moral and social health receive the same broad, expert and centralized treatment?

There is an especial need of comprehensive planning at the

present moment because so many states and municipalities, at last awakened to a consciousness of their obligations, are beginning to make appropriations for recreative purposes. The Massachusetts Legislature has passed a bill requiring all cities and towns having over 10,000 people to vote upon the subject of maintaining playgrounds. Only two out of forty-two towns voted "No."

Up to 1908 New York City had spent over \$15,000,000 on playgrounds. In some instances the price paid for land was enormous. One plot containing less than two acres cost the city \$1,811,000.

In the past few years Chicago has spent \$11,000,000 on playgrounds and fieldhouses. These places have become centers of social life, as did the palestra in the old Greek days and the Roman baths during their epoch—places where whole groups of people have the opportunity of doing pleasant things together.

In the far West the movement is also under way and cities are bonding themselves for the support of parks and playgrounds.

Not only must municipalities and philanthropic associations coördinate their efforts in some harmonious, comprehensive scheme, but the whole plan must be administered by experts with definite goals in view. It is not enough to give everybody the chance to play. We must also direct that play to specific as well as attractive ends.

The tendency of a recreation to be warped from its legitimate purpose, when left to private adventure, is well illustrated in the development of baseball. Our national game has produced spectators in a number far out of reasonable proportion to the number of players. In England the actual participation in cricket is much more universal.

If our boys are going to learn team play; if they are going to acquire the habit of subordinating selfish to group interests, they must learn these things through *experience* and not from books or the "bleachers" maintained by professional baseball. Such moral development comes only through activities which are pursued with spontaneous and passionate enthusiasm. The boys must not only have sufficient opportunity to take part themselves in wholesome games, but these must have that intelligent supervision which shall insure not only the highest degree of pleasure, but also the fullest moral profit.

If, then, we can get people to do these three things, learn the facts, make what we have fully useful, and unify all activities in a harmonious plan, then we shall indeed have taken a long stride toward making popular recreation the well-spring of public morality. For the relationship of recreation to good conduct is not an idle thought. That familiar proverb might well have been written, "As a man playeth, so is he."

With increasing leisure the ennobling ideals which spring from play will wax stronger in the human soul. If we can but get everybody to play their own natures will do the rest. It is a task that can only be performed by coöperation, that union of effort which is possible only in the city. This is why the Bible says that Heaven is a city.