

Memorandum

The Use of Leisure Time.

In discussing the use of leisure time it may not be inappropriate to recall at the outset that leisure time has until fairly recently been a possession of the few who by reason of political or economic power could free themselves from the necessity of work which gripped all other members of the group. It may also be noted that both the few who had leisure and the many who could snatch only brief respites from toil always turned to some form of escape from life and its exactions. That is to say, for leisure and diversion from toil, people have almost always turned to some form of the arts wherein boredom or the weariness of life could be forgotten or the crudities of life could be mitigated. Thus we find art, religion and the academic pursuits, notably philosophy, as the outstanding use of leisure time whenever <sup>that</sup> most diverting of enterprises, war, was lacking for mankind's enjoyment. Among the humbler folk dances and song and the simple festivals have played a large role.

This is merely to point out that people have almost always sought escape from life, or leisure for that escape, and that in large measure the desire for escape may be found in most of our leisure time activities of today as notably in books, the theatre, movies and so on. When we consider the lives that people have had to lead and are leading today it is not difficult to understand how they come to seek this type of leisure time activity, for men must desire compensation for the hardships of life and release from their own disordered personality. If the term recreation is to mean anything similar to its origin, namely, the building

up and renewal of the personality, then it may be questioned how far do the traditional leisure time activities of the escape character contribute to a person's recreation. It is undoubtedly true that many forms of art, particularly music, do contribute to the upbuilding of the individual and it is equally true that many forms of the arts reinforce and augment the personality defects of the individual, by providing a further stimulant to what may be called paranoid tendency.

It is not intended to suggest any dogmatic statement of this situation, nor is it believed that the foregoing is all-embracing and inclusive, but it does seem clear that in the past and today people turn in their leisure time to amusements and diversions which will take them out of themselves and make them forget their work and their lives elsewhere. This is a condition neither to be condemned nor praised, but to be recognized as one of the large factors to be faced in discussing the use of leisure time. And it is clear that the leisure time of people generally will continue to grow so that the question of leisure time activities must become more and more important. There are a number of possible new factors which may tend to modify the use of leisure time from the traditional patterns of escape. For one thing it is clear that we can look forward with a fair degree of certainty to a considerable mitigation of the hardships of life for the mass of people. To the extent that life becomes easier and the traditional sorrows and burdens are removed there will be a diminution in the urgency in the desire for escape. Again in so far as we learn to avoid that warping of the personality which plays so large a role in man's choice of leisure time activities, probably many of the cruder forms of anodyne will fall into disuse. It is quite probable, however, that even after we have solved these two difficulties men will still seek escape in some form in the sense that he must find some occupation wherein

he will find a way of passing the time not by making or producing something but more probably by satisfying what might be called an "idle curiosity". This suggests the possibility that in science, particularly in biology, we may find a program for leisure time activities which is at once an escape, since it takes man out of himself, and at the same time a means to his recreation since it will lead him out into wholesome outdoor activity.

The use of science or the study of Nature Lore as a leisure time activity may be commended not only for the wholesome activity it fosters but equally for the habits of mind which it engenders. It is fairly clear that the scientific movement of the past three or four hundred years has scarcely affected the ideas, conceptions and habits of thought of people generally. For the most part they are living in a world wherein science, except in so far as its instrumentalities, tools, machines and processes minister to their comfort, has not entered. Now it will be seen that sooner or later the minds of people generally must be brought to an understanding of and sympathy with scientific method and scientific research, since so many of our social difficulties arise from the failure of this understanding and the lack of this sympathy. Nature study or nature lore offers itself therefore both as a means to recreation and as a vehicle for the modernization of the human mind. For if an increasing number of persons could be led into the study of natural science it is probable that those prejudices and superstitions which stand in the way of a better social life would begin to disappear. In this connection it may be pointed out that the development of the radio since the war as an instrument of popular amusement and entertainment, particularly among those who build and maintain their own instruments, has been truly amazing. For here we find men of all occupations and walks of life turning eagerly to study and experimentation in what is essentially the most



711  
 difficult field of scientific work and finding in it an occupation and a recreation which is extremely engrossing. The number of those who turn to radio for the content of the broadcasting programs is relatively small compared with those who find in the building of radio sets and the improvement of their "hook-ups" an absorbing activity.

Where and how the Memorial might participate in the promotion of wholesome recreation are questions which may be difficult to answer generally. There are a number of pressing needs in the field of recreation as for example the training of leaders, which, however, can be met successfully only in so far as it is possible to say where and how the recreation movement is to develop. Thus to illustrate, the training of leaders might take the form of producing leaders and directors of physical education and calisthenics or leaders of scouting and similar pursuits wherein the physical training work is subordinated to the scouting, woodcraft, nature lore and so on. Again it is clear that the direction of the Memorial's activities in this field will be considerably influenced by its ability to discern the trends in some of the social moods of the day; to illustrate, the movement to obtain playgrounds in the large cities may or may not be a desirable activity depending upon whether the large congested city as a living place will continue and with it the need for the playgrounds, or whether the playgrounds is merely an attempt to save the city from an inevitable obsolescence. Once more it may be suggested that much of our present recreational program is of a remedial character designed to build up and rehabilitate those whose health has been neglected. It is obvious that sooner or later the urgency of this type of work must decrease and that it does not offer a basis for a permanent program. By way of conclusion it may be suggested that the promotion of a recreation program should occur in our educational institutions since it is obvious that

whatever else education does to a person it should provide him with a means for passing the time.

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