

## THE USES OF LEISURE

by Shelagh Tyrrell

TO most of us, leisure means simply "what we do with our spare time," and immediately, we are up against the problem of what really is "spare time." Leisure can therefore have as wide a meaning as work itself.

Aristotle claimed that leisure represents the "satisfaction of the truly disinterested interest, the achievement of understanding, which is man's highest goal." So the artist working at his painting, or the academic at his research, like the professional man or woman pursuing his chosen subject for interest as well as livelihood, has, in effect, constant leisure in the Aristotelian sense to devote himself to his subject. Indeed, for some, work is leisure, and leisure is work devoted to the pursuit of the gravy train.

### Three purposes

But for most of us, leisure activities can serve three purposes. The first is a rest from work, and preparation for more. The second is stimulation or "play," and the third is a preparing for solitude. To many, the first has been the only form of leisure which they have known, with Sunday as a day of rest to stretch the moral fibre for the temptations of the week ahead.

This has been true in the past, and still is true among people who work long hours or choose overtime for the financial help it gives. There is less stress here on moral stiffening, and more on "have fun, it's later than you think." The efforts of people such as these have made possible the existence of a "leisured class" among others, and here the adjective has a slightly derogatory ring, suggesting shooting sticks and Ladies Bountiful. Much of the great art of the world owes its existence to people who wielded silver spoons instead of shovels. This does not imply any genetic superiority in the leisured, but merely that leisure itself, or the freedom from anxiety and economic drive, is an important incentive to creative work.

This brings me to the second aspect of leisure or "play." Not everyone agrees that this is necessary. Listen to the words of an American trade union leader in 1926, though it is unlikely in the extreme that any of his successors in the States today would reiterate this view:—"I regard the 5-day week as an unworthy ideal. More work and better work is a more inspiring and worthier motto than less work and more pay . . . it is better not to trifle with God's laws."

More recently, a survey was carried out in the U.S. to find the opinions of husbands and wives on the subject of a 4-day week. On the whole the wives were unenthusiastic, but the majority of husbands were emphatically against the increase in the number of "Honey-do" days. ("Honey, do this; Honey, do that!") So strongly did some of them feel on the subject, that it was even suggested that they should take a second job. This would bring in more money, with which to buy still more labour-saving devices! Yet, perhaps this would be a sensible solution to the problem of leisure.

There are many highly-rewarding jobs which are underpaid (and therefore often under-sought) for fear of attracting any but the selfless. Social workers, nurses, probation officers, prison staff, even general practitioners—all these people *ought* to feel free from economic pressure, so that each can put his highest effort into most demanding jobs. Instead, it is only the truly dedicated or those for whom virtue lies in good works who work in the shadows of society.

### Same spirit

Both the Americans with their Peace Corps, and we in England with our Voluntary Service Overseas, have shown that it is possible as well as desirable to offer help without price or patronage. Perhaps the same spirit could pervade welfare activities at home, providing recruits, both men and women, from amongst those with time on their hands,

who would be willing to listen, to learn and even to love. So much of society's apathy and failure is due to ignorance and lack of contact.

Attempts have been made to try to make work itself more interesting, and less repetitive, but they are often uneconomic. You cannot turn the clock back from the 20th century and bring back the cottage industries of the past, where life had sometimes a timeless quality. Eric Gill tried to do this, and it worked well for the few, but scarcely so successfully for their wives. People will not tolerate uneconomic ventures, for which they have to pay, unless they would have to pay anyway, as in the case of blind workshops, or settlements for disabled people. So, we are back to Bertrand Russell's ideal of "In Praise of Idleness," where he advocates a four-hour day for everyone, and the educational facilities to allow every man to use his leisure profitably.

### Variety at play

Play may vary from learning a language to dismantling a car; from making carpets to making love; from watching football to watching birds. But, most important of all, it must be something we enjoy doing, and not something we think we ought to enjoy. Maybe, as work becomes more repetitive, schools should educate for play rather than for work. There are signs that this is already happening. One local authority infant school I know, claims that all the interested children can find their way around a public library, and can use the reference index, before they transfer to the Junior School at the age of seven. Another school teaches its children to make their own slide rules.

Recently, in a children's hospital in Sweden, I found the walls decorated with murals made by the convalescent patients themselves. Also, in Stockholm, there is an exhibition hall to hold the "Wasa," the great warship which sank on her maiden voyage in 1628, and which in the last six years has been brilliantly "rediscovered" and lifted up from the sea bed. The walls of the hall, a vast prefabricated building, are

covered with drawings and paintings by children from the local schools giving their impressions of the "Wasa" disaster. Some of the children on leaving school or waiting to go to the University, act as most efficient guides to take visitors over the ship and round the exhibits. We even heard them offering any of four languages—English, German, French, Russian—when we were there. For these young people, history has stepped from the books into their own lives.

We could in fact all be the privileged few to whom I referred at the very beginning, the ones who have leisure to devote themselves to their "truly disinterested interest" by choosing ourselves a hobby which we would find sufficiently absorbing to become experts. There are many examples of people who have done just this; for instance, Michael Ventris was a young architect who studied cryptanalysis in his spare time, and it was he who "broke" the code of the ancient language, Minoan Linear B, which had puzzled scholars for years.

### Solitude

This brings me to my last use of leisure—preparing for solitude. We all have to learn how to live alone some time, whether as we grow into old age or when we are ill. If we spend our lives frantically filling in the gaps for fear of being alone, we meet our solitude unprepared and in a terror of loneliness. Our leisure activities may need to be modified as we grow older, but the interest and zest which we carry with us will itself be a way of staying young than our years. We have to learn to live with ourselves and, paradoxically, the best preparation for this may be to learn to live with other people. We all know the sort of person who makes us feel warm and welcome, who likes other people and is interested in them for themselves. As he grows older, he goes on making friends, whether of his own age or with young people, or with the bus conductors and shopkeepers he meets as he goes through the day. A "go-getter" has no time for anyone who will not prove of use to him and, why

he is old, he will have lost the art of making friends.

Solitude, if we are unprepared for it, can do strange things to our imaginations. Studies of people either experimentally or in times of political persecution, undergoing solitary confinement, show that most of them after a while develop childish emotional responses, their thinking is impaired, and many have both visual and auditory hallucinations. This may account for some traveller's tales, Loch Ness monsters, and stories told by solo flyers and long-distance drivers, as well as for

political "confessions." On a humbler level, many a housewife, spending her day alone around the house and at the sink, knows how insignificant happenings—husband delayed at work, the persistent gipsy at the door—can become menacing and meaningful. Perhaps one of the most valuable uses of our leisure should be to find for ourselves some philosophy of life that will see us into a solitude that is not lonely. For many, this will be the search for a God who is personally concerned with each one of us; for others, it will be to seek their place in a cosmic setting.

## THE FEAR OF LEISURE

by Eirlys Roberts

Sunday shows up the problem of leisure most dramatically. This is when most of us—and particularly most youngsters—have the least to do and the most time to do it. The puritans who decided that Sunday was to be a day of rest and no play, saw to it that the day was safely filled with work, although not so labelled. Now, the majority of us who no longer go to the church services or to Sunday school, are left with an empty space. Grown-ups, and country children can fill it well enough. The city teenager cannot.

Public schools, and Oxford and Cambridge, have always understood that adolescents have superabundant physical energy, and are expensively organised to provide outlets for it. State schools are not. In a way, this is understandable. If state schools had spent as much time on organised games as public schools, middle-class taxpayers would have protested that their money was being wasted. Now, perhaps, we can persuade them to see that organised games are as necessary a part of education as history, for other people's children as well as their own, and can build them deliberately into the state system.

But organised games at school are only a beginning. As soon as one has left school, it becomes difficult to find enough other people who want to play the same game as oneself, at the same time. Clubs are the obvious solution, but, in a large city, they tend to be far

**P**ERSONALLY, I shall begin to worry seriously about the problems of leisure when I see some signs of the leisure. For as long as I can remember, politicians and sociologists have been concerned about what is going to happen as machines do more and more of the work and there is—theoretically—less and less left for us to do. So far, nearly all the women I know work harder than their mothers did. Their children do as much school work in three days as we did in a week. And the average working week for a manual worker in this country is actually an hour longer than it was ten years ago. So there seems to be no cause for alarm just yet. But any alarm for the future is useful if it obliges us to think about the present.

Ten years ago, I saw a photograph of a cobbled street, in the rain, with small grey houses on each side and a small boy kicking a tin can down the middle of it. According to the caption, it was Sunday afternoon in a northern city. Three years ago, driving through Wiltshire early on a Sunday evening, we stopped in a county town and found one café open. It was uncomfortable, served abominable coffee but had a juke-box. "No dancing," said a notice on the wall. "No singing." Last month, attempting to pass half-an-hour agreeably on a Sunday morning in a new town, we found open one narrow sandwich bar with accommodation for about eight people, and comfortable room for none.