

THE OMAHA SUNDAY BEE MAGAZINE PAGE

Importance of Play and Relaxation in Producing Health and Geniuses

The Need of Recreation and Amusement in Our Busy American Life Demonstrated by Science from the Frolics of Animals, the Garden of Eden Ideal, the Games of Ancient Greece, the Beer Gardens of Germany and the Lives of Huxley and Darwin.

From a Lecture
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AMONG the primitive instincts of all animal life are those of self-preservation, of the desire for food and the perpetuation of species.

Claiming a very close relationship to these essential and insistent vital motives is the desire to play. We find this instinct manifested in practically every grade of animal life from the insect up to mankind. The playfulness of the kitten, the games of birds and even those of reptiles are matters of the most commonplace and certain scientific observation. The frolics of puppies, of colts, of young calves and all manner of our wild friends, but most beautiful of all the pranks of our own babies, are so commonplace and so much a part and parcel of life in its happier aspects that I need but to recall them to you to induce you to accept with me that play is indeed an essential and primitive part of all animal life.

It is also readily shown that in most instances the play of youth under natural conditions and in all grades of the scale of evolution are largely preparatory for the sterner obligations of adult life. The higher we ascend in the ladder of mental and nervous developments the more marked and evident does this instinct of play become and the greater its necessity. You are then, I hope, prepared to accept with me the axiom that play and relaxation are a part of life itself, and since we find no such general instinct in nature, without a deep and important purpose, we must assume that in some way play is a necessary part of life and that as life becomes more complicated the necessity for it becomes the greater.

Man's recognition of this fact goes back as far as history, and the very earliest of history tells us that Adam and Eve were given one everlasting holiday, and had it not been for that very unfortunate vegetarian fad of our first militant ancestor, it is quite probable that we all should be this very day joyfully gamboling about some beautiful park, instead of considering the wherewithal shall we be clothed and the office for to-morrow and the rent day of next month.

All the great nations of history have recognized the need for relaxation and recreation. We see this demonstrated even by the stern Spartans in their games and by their feast days. It is also evidenced by the art of ancient Greece and it is manifested to-day by our public parks, concerts, art collections, athletic games and zoological gardens. Practically every government, be it more or be it less paternal in type, has arranged for the play and relaxation of its people. The fountains of the Latin people, the beer gardens and glorious music of those serious-minded scientists, the Germans, are but evidences of this impelling instinct and the necessity of its normal gratification for the purpose of welfare. Even our own Government has taken cognizance of this constructive demand, and we see it recognized in the establishment of national playgrounds, such as the Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. Hardly now a State or a city of any pretense but what has its Yosemite, its Prospect Park, or its Mount Zoo.

Napoleon's greatness was no more manifested by his great military operations than in his constructive establishment of art collections and his encouragement of architecture and of the numerous similar institutions of France. Perhaps we should have even forgotten Caesar's conquests had he not amused himself by the writing of them down. This is a form of amusement, however, which I am afraid some of you in common with myself may have looked upon as anything but an innocent occupation when we were first attempting to describe that crucial bridge. So great a statesman as Patrick Henry even gave the object of life as "the pursuit of happiness."

National, State and Municipal Governments, despotic or popular, have thus since the time of history made the subject of play and relaxation a serious study and a public care. We hear of city opera, of State theatres, and public playgrounds. Many, if not most of these, are designed not so much to educate as to amuse and to relax, and their establishment is a recognition of that instinctive craving within us for play and diversion, an instinct which then demands thoughtful attention.

In our conscientious wards at the hospitals we have found the necessity of the visiting quartette, of the phonograph, the games and of the pictures designed to entertain and divert. All these subjects have under such circumstances become matters of grave study and careful supervision. We have our professional play instructors, just as certain of the birds, the partridge family for example, have also theirs. The story of the Romans, of the Norsemen or those of our own Americans, the Apaches or the Comanches, are replaced by the trained story-tellers of our city libraries and public schools.

But although every one must recognize these general facts as I have stated them, how infrequently it is that we hear of any person carefully and studiously arranging for his play and relaxation. This is the point to which I wish to especially call your attention this evening, for I am convinced that there is great need for the individual to carefully instruct himself in these matters. A great medical scientist and teacher (Dr. V. C. Vaughan) was accustomed to tell his students that perhaps quite as much of success in life depended on the selection of a hobby or form of relaxation, as in the choice of a profession.



L. Beroud's Painting of the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, a Story Which Embodies Man's Sub-conscious Conviction of the Vital Value of Relaxation and Amusement, Says Science.

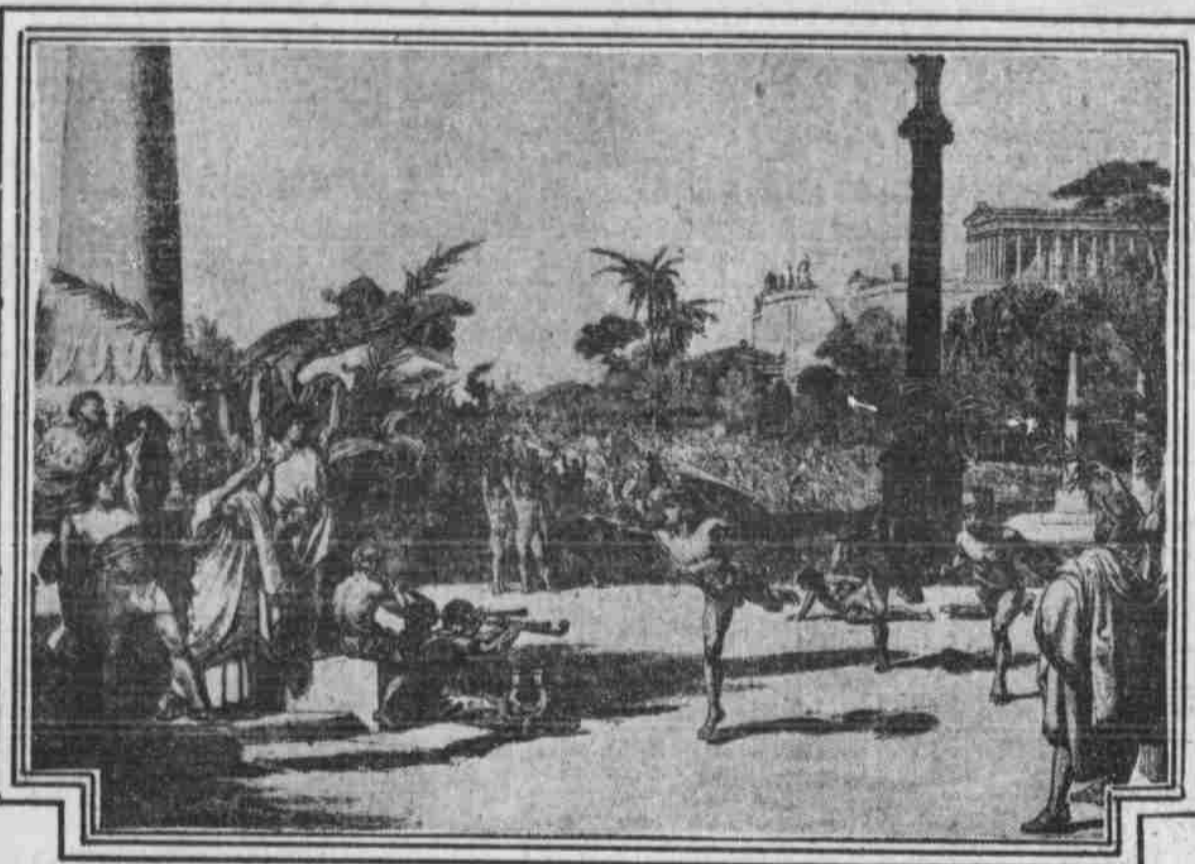
At least a certain part of life should be spent in preparation for old age. We store up money, buy books, art treasures and even friends also fame for our period of youth. It is equally, or more, important to store up diversion and relaxation for that period when the fires of ambition burn low and when the new and unaccustomed fall to attract. Do any of you know a more miserable existence than that of a once busy man in his old age, when work is no longer possible, and when no diverting pastimes or pursuits have been cultivated to make old age the reward and sweetness that it should be? A happy old age, as a happy adult life, must be a busy one, and when youth and the summer of life have been so spent, so tutored, so educated as to make old age still a busy and occupied period, it becomes as joyful as youth itself.

Perhaps we can most vividly bring out the necessity to the individual of serious consideration of this subject by first mentioning some of the disadvantages of those who are not so equipped. Professor Bryant, in a recent number of Popular Science, has advanced the very probable theory that the world-wide inclination to the use of alcohol is primarily founded on a mental condition created artificially by this drug which stimulates and perhaps replaces to a certain degree the normal instinct of relaxation and play. Psychologists tell us that crime itself, in a large part founded on a perverted play instinct, and is frequently but an evidence of abnormal desire for relaxation, for change.

Habitual criminals are those who have in most instances few possibilities in the way of natural and innocent play, and criminals are now largely treated, as Oliver Wendell Holmes predicted, by education along these lines. The fact is well recognized, I believe, by all students of sociology. The sinner and stern, mental type of those who view everything except work as a vanity and delusion is obvious to us all. Play we will and play we must, even such abnormal habits as those of drunkenness or as the designing of punishment for others, or even impel one singularly deficient in humanity and in sense of proportion to the joining of anti-vice-society movements.

All of us are familiar with persons who have made financial or perhaps professional success and yet whose life is most unhappy, because no diversions or outside interests have been cultivated. Not infrequently such persons, though actually successful, derive very little true joy and satisfaction from life. A philosopher has truly said that peace, play and real joy cannot be purchased. The trust of joys lie within the individual himself, and unless the traits have been developed and nurtured a life, no matter how materially successful, becomes an unhappy one.

Pray do not understand me to be an advocate of the life of pure pleasure. I entirely agree with that old philosopher who said that "work is the greatest play of all," but variety



The Spartan Games, the Recognition by the Ancient Greeks of the Play Impulse.

is indeed the spice of existence, the bass but serves to bring out the beauty of the upper register of the violin or oboe. Contrast and change are as essential in congenial occupation as the mystery of the night after the beauty of the sunny day. The one must be the foil, the guard of the other. Gifford Pinchot has said that "the one best receipt for carrying responsibility easily is not to carry it all the time. The spring whose tension is never released must weaken, and the man who thinks about nothing but work is eventually consumed by it. In a sense, our best work is done in our play time."

A well known New York physician, in speaking of vacations and of their necessity in modern life, has expressed the same idea, but in different words. He has said that many men can do twelve months' work in ten months, but no man can long continue to do twelve months' work in twelve months. Like most habits, those of play and relaxation become fixed and grooved as we age, even as do our likes and dislikes of persons, food or drink. Hence, the great importance of early training in these directions in order that the greatest benefits and the greatest aids for the future may be provided.

I therefore particularly wish to call your attention to-night to the necessity for selecting in early life those pleasures or relaxations which are most apt to be beneficial in old age, or when one is most busy with the grim necessities of life. Cognizance in this respect must be taken of the future and of the lines of work most likely to be pursued by the individual. One would not train a boy destined for a marine career in horsemanship, or a ranchman of our great West in the sport of yachting or the art of salt-water fishing.

Perhaps the first essential to be considered in the selection of a hobby or mood of relaxation is the accessibility of that method, not only now but in the probable future. A second important factor dependent upon the first is the possibility of such a method of relaxation remaining open and accessible throughout life without seriously compromising business or



The Female Scorpion Playing with Her Young Like a Girl with Kittens. The Same Play Impulse, Directed into Other Channels, Produced a Darwin and a Huxley.

social necessities. This does not, of course, mean that one who takes up his hobby, let us say baseball, must therefore expect to play

the game all his life, for the most essential part of relaxation is often obtained not from the play itself, but from the mental diversion and interest in it, and at times quite as much benefit may be obtained from an active interest in any sport as from active participation.

A third requirement for ideal play for any person is that it should give pleasure. Without this important attribute the full measure of benefit cannot be derived from any form of relaxation. The simple and solitary exercises in a gymnasium in no way approach in benefit those derived from games or competitions into which the spirit of pleasure and keen interest enter very largely. I question very much, for example, the utility of horseback riding for those to whom it is no joy, but a torture and agony.

In general, also, those diversions which present greatest benefit to the individual are such as combine with pleasure the greatest possible change of action and thought from those avenues most accustomed in the work-a-day life. It may, therefore, be observed that usually those forms of play and relaxation which are most pleasant to the individual, unless his appetite in these directions has been abnormally cultivated or perverted. The natural instinct of a brain-worker is toward those forms of pleasure or relaxation which involve physical exercise. The professor reading or in some fishing trips or his hunting for the other hand, those who earn their daily bread and who carry on the ordinary functions of their life chiefly in a physical way should seek their relaxation more in mental directions. The physical worker, for example, commonly receives his greatest satisfaction and benefit as to play and relaxation in reading or in some other mental avocation. It is indeed true that the best of play is oftentimes but a variety of work or study, a change rather than a rest.

The benefits of play and relaxation are not expressed only in mental terms. It is by no means only to make us happy that we need play and relaxation. It is quite as much necessary to make us physically well. Diverting pleasure rests and relieves the tired and overworked mind as does sleep. It is nearly as essential and quite as direct in its effect on the physical conditions of the body.

Relaxation and play even affect the most essential of the body functions. A high blood pressure may at times be quickly lowered by the peaceful strains of agreeable music, and the flagging and tired heart or muscles are stimulated by the martial strains of the military band. The thrill of the life and the roll of the drum quicken the pulse and send up blood pressure more certainly and more promptly than do strychnine or digitalis. All of us recognize the delightful acts of music, properly designed to induce sleep.

The purr of the cat and night notes of the thrush are but nature's lullabies. How frequently it is that a few pages of an interesting or amusing book will quiet the tired, faded or depressed mind and induce good nature or sleep much more satisfactorily than any of the drugs which your doctor has in his saddle-bags. Relaxation and diverting pleasure are better aids to digestion than the most potent ferments on the pharmacist's shelves. There is no more powerful stimulant to the appetite than congenial friends and agreeable conversation. These are indeed the best and safest of cocktails.

It is, therefore, well worth the time of any person, who is either busy or who expects so to be, to seriously study and consider this important problem of play, that its more satisfactory results may assist him throughout life, which will at the same time become thereby more happy, perhaps longer and doubtless more useful.

A CASE OF TRESPASS

THE elder Martins were reading in the library when they were startled by the sound of angry voices from the little den across the hall.

"Fred, I believe the boys are quarreling," exclaimed Mrs. Martin, laying down her magazine and hastily rising from her chair.

"Well, dear, what if they are?" said Martin. "It isn't our affair. Sit down, Lucy, and let them quarrel in peace."

"Quarrel in peace! How ridiculous! I think we ought to stop them."

"I don't. If they have a little dispute they should be allowed to settle it without our interference."

Mrs. Martin resumed her reading, but in a moment she was on her feet again.

"Now, Lucy, sit down," said her husband, "and let the kids fight their own battles. I think there's no harm however, in our knowing what the boys are doing."

"Yes, I suppose you think you'll be the whole thing if you queer me," Jack was saying. "But I won't stand for it. I say you shan't go there. Do you get me?"

"I should worry. I don't think it's any of your business where I go. I've

got as good a right to call on girls as you have, Jack Martin," retorted Fred, Jr., justly. "You're not exactly my boss."

"Maybe I'm not and maybe you've got a right to call on girls, even if you haven't been in long pants a year yet, but I won't have you calling on a special friend of mine and telling her all sorts of fool things about me."

"What have I been telling anybody, I'd like to know?"

"You know very well that you told Beatrice that my middle name is Obadiah."

"Well, isn't it Obadiah? Did you want me to tell her a lie?"

"I didn't want you to tell her anything about my middle name. It was a nice thing, wasn't it, for you to tell a girl with a swell name like Beatrice that my middle name was Obadiah?"

"And didn't you tell her that I had a heart tattooed on my arm, with a girl's initials in it?"

"Well, then, why do you care if I did tell her?"

"Because Beatrice and her cousin Eugene, who was at her house last night, said they thought that old-fashioned baby pictures were perfectly killing, and from the way they laughed I felt sure they'd seen that wretched old one of me."

"You needn't be so hot about it. I didn't tell her it was you."

"What makes you think I did?"

"Because Beatrice and her cousin Eugene, who was at her house last night, said they thought that old-fashioned baby pictures were perfectly killing, and from the way they laughed I felt sure they'd seen that wretched old one of me."

"You needn't be so hot about it. I didn't tell her it was you."

"There's no use arguing about faults or anything. All I say is that I won't have you going to call on Beatrice and queering me. I tell you right now, Fred Martin, that if you don't quit I'll thrash you."

"Oh!" gasped Mrs. Martin in the library. "Hush! It will be all right" murmured Martin, soothingly.

"And I'll tell you another thing," continued the voice of the elder lad.

"I won't help you with your math or with your Latin grammar. You can fall in your exams for all of me and I won't let you ride on the motorcycle Uncle Obadiah has promised me on my birthday unless you give me your solemn promise that you won't ever call on Beatrice again."

"Poh, who wants to call on her anyway? She ain't the only girl on the south side. Besides, I'm not dippy over brunettes myself."

"Then you promise?"

"Sure! Say, Jack, I wish you'd give me a pointer on this problem. I wish dad would let me cut out algebra."

"I can show you in a jiffy. It's a cinch when you get a little farther. Say, let's call up Uncle Obadiah to-morrow and ask him if he doesn't think we'd better take a look around at the different makes of motorcycles."

Mrs. Martin breathed a long-drawn sigh of relief and Martin threw back his head and laughed.

"There, my dear," he said triumphantly, "you see the watchful waiting policy won out."



Charles Darwin, the Great Scientist, Whose Discoveries Concerning Man's Evolution Resulted from Satisfaction of the Play Impulse.

Probably the most generally desirable single method of play or relaxation is reading. This is particularly true because the character of line reading may be readily adapted to the particular likes or needs of the individual. I know a great mathematician, one of the greatest that this country has produced, whose chief relaxation, now that physical infirmities have cut off his customary physical pleasures, is the reading of detective stories. Another man, whose excursions have barely led him beyond the borders of New York, has made himself, by reading during his few hours of relaxation, an authority on polar exploration. His name has become a frequent one in the geography of both the Far North and of the Far South, and he has been one of the greatest sources of encouragement to many intrepid men who have actually carried out the field work of these arm-chair excursions. No matter what line of work a man may do, reading, once the habit has been formed, adds to his efficiency and work, and at the same time in itself affords for him at least a certain measure of relaxation and an increased interest in both his vocation and in his avocation.

Nature studies are possible for nearly every man who has even a few hours weekly to spend out-of-doors. An acquaintance of mine, a business man, who commuted for domestic reasons, adopted the study of the bird life of the bay on his trips to and from Staten Island. He has derived much pleasure and benefit from his study, and it has proved so interesting that his Sundays and holidays are spent in a similar manner, all without the loss of an hour from his business. Another friend, whose business connections prevented his taking a vacation far from the city, similarly occupied himself with the bird life about his suburban home. When, during the Winter season, he moved to the city, he found the birds of Central Park quite sufficient to pleasantly occupy his spare time. Shortly his descriptions and his photographs of this apparently narrow and circumscribed subject became so important that the lesser matter of business has come to be replaced by his play, which has contributed much to the pleasure of all of us and to real science.

So we might go on indefinitely. Nearly all the great geographical discoveries have been made by men who first in their regular life took up geography as a relaxation or side line of study. An indifferent theoretician has become Vladimir Steffans, Robert Peary deserted engineering problems for the discovery of the North Pole and for his invaluable contributions to the geography of the Far North.

To be a play of staying powers, one which lasts, the game must possess something more than mere entertaining qualities. One who tires of such a sport, and the relaxation which rarely lasts and endures uplifts almost without exception. Such is music, and more than infrequently this relaxation has become a contribution of great men to mankind for all time.

The love of the open and of nature has given the world Darwin and Huxley, who might perhaps have otherwise been barkeepers or clerks in a ladies' furnishing store. Boys who would rather roam the woods and ply the seven seas than confine themselves in the office or school-room have produced men like Hornaday and Daniel Beard. The love of the beautiful has given us Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt and Rodin. It made a soldier of Florence Michael Angelo.

The restless energy and love of the rougher side of nature in Lieutenant Pike gave America Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, and the desire for the thrills of adventure in Lewis, Clark and Fremont gave us the Great West. In fact, there can be but little question that the choice of an avocation leads not infrequently to a happy and most useful vocation. The following of a pleasurable bent or diversion on the part of a normal individual is a tendency toward progress in the world, and the natural following out of such an instinct rarely leads to anything other than good things, happiness not only for the individual but for man. Happiness is perhaps correctly defined as mental health and without it mere physical health is incomplete and unsatisfactory.

For most of us, however, it is not to follow our avocations as callings, but as methods to an end and not, as in some of the cases which I have mentioned, the great objective itself. The value of any drug or person or method in this world's production must be measured by the results produced. Let us recall then some of the direct results of diversions in everyday life. Whether we will or not we must have diversions, and if these be deliberately chosen and well cultivated they become as friends and obedient servants; whereas, if we allow them to choose us or to direct us, they become our masters and often a detriment to true happiness and progress, as exemplified in alcoholism, the muck-raker for gambling, in the chronic grouch, the crack-raker or bilious reformer.

The benefits of relaxation are by no means limited by what it gives to us in itself, even in pleasure, health and uplift. After the play comes a return to work, with renewed mind and refreshed body. Relaxation and play may be well looked upon as a preparation for work and they are to be classed in the same light as sleep and food. None of our old sayings are so play makingly right as that "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Play is not to be looked upon as a luxury, but as a necessity, and as such its selection is indeed entitled to quite as much serious thought and careful education as in the choice and preparation for life's most serious work.