

## Happiness.

**W**E ALL desire happiness. Nothing is so universally sought for in life or so ardently wished for in death. Men say that success is their object in life. By this they generally mean that they are seeking distinction of some sort, such as wealth or honors. Yet, if the thought is pursued a little further it is seen that happiness after all is the object sought for, because riches and position are but as a means to that end. Some say that there is no happiness in this life, while others affirm that the pleasures of this world are the only ones that we shall ever enjoy. Both views are manifestly wrong, but however that may be, the fact remains that happiness has been and shall continue to be the great quest of mankind.

Just here it may be doubted how much happiness can be promoted by mere reasoning and discussion on the subject. For it would appear that no rule so far laid down for the amelioration of grief or the acquirement of happiness can be of any effect in the presence of real sorrow, and that the happiest people are those who think least about it. The circumstances of life by which one is surrounded and the inherited tendencies of character may seem the main factors in deciding the degree of one's happiness. To a certain extent this is true, but it must not be forgotten that each one can influence his own character and can cultivate those dispositions and tendencies that most largely contribute to happiness. Moreover, reasoning along this line can be of great benefit, for in this way much may be done to avoid the calamities of life, as well as to combat its

tedium and despondency. But this blessing like many others is not much thought about until we have been deprived of it, and it frequently happens that men begin to write on this subject only after they have suffered some serious misfortune.

Although much has been said about happiness there has been no attempt to describe it. This is perhaps because happiness will not bear too close an examination. When we attempt to learn what it is, it flies from us. If we try to lay hands on it, it eludes our grasp. We reach for it, and find that it is gone. It will not do to make happiness the direct object of our search for it will not come to us while we keep thinking about it.

There are many who make happiness the principal business of their lives. They are generally those whose wealth relieves them of the necessity of earning a livelihood. Having nothing of importance to engage their attention, their sole occupation becomes one of self-gratification. Since they act on the supposition that happiness can be bought, they fill up their days with a series of idle pastimes and delude themselves into the belief that they are purchasing pleasure. If they have a desire to travel they roam the world in search of happiness, but are always restless and discontented, and never knowing why. Although they know it not, such people are the victims of ennui. Life is a bore to them, and must continue so until they decide to change their habits, and adopt a different standard by which to measure things. Of course, it would be wrong to say that all persons of wealth occupy themselves with the pursuit of pleasure or that the evils of ennui are confined to the wealthy, but this is at least true of a type of persons who have a

misconceived idea of what should constitute a happy life.

It is one of the paradoxes of human life that the things for which we strive most are not the ones that give us the most enjoyment. If we ask the man of wealth what it is that gives him the greatest happiness, we shall be surprised to hear that his genuine pleasures are not derived from things that money can buy, but rather from sources that have no monetary value. The affection shown him by his family, the attachment of his friends, or the possession of a cherished heirloom are often more prized than the favor of distinguished personages or the possession of costly furniture. In view of this fact we can readily understand that happiness is not the exclusive privilege of any class, and is certainly not confined to those who are rich in material wealth.

But while we take care to avoid the dangers of inertia and of useless abstraction, there is a danger of going to the opposite extreme—that of anxiety. This is, perhaps, the greatest enemy of happiness in the present age. So great, indeed, that the habit of worry among the American people has been termed a disease. Our modern industrial civilization is not conducive to the growth of contentment and contentment must be considered the chief ingredient of happiness. The conditions of living today are such that we torment ourselves with doubts and fears, with cares and anxieties, and we arrive at this frame of mind because of the tendency to multiply our wants and desires and the consequent effort to satisfy them.

This principle of action is taught by political economists as a satisfactory theory of progress, and as a means of promoting material advancement, the doctrine may not be questioned. But it cannot be said



that dissatisfaction with existing circumstances is likely to lead to happiness for this is secured by limiting the desires rather than by satisfying them. In some of the southern countries, where civilization has not advanced much, the wants of the people are few and easily satisfied. They are however, a contented people with no anxieties for the future and it is highly probable that the sum of their happiness is at least as great as ours. We may not care for their manner of living, but we might learn from them a lesson on how to avoid worry. It is necessary to exercise prudent forethought but we should be on our guard against that habit of mind which is continually anticipating the dangers of an uncertain future. Our problem must be to maintain, in their due proportion the spirit of content and the desire to improve; to avoid the opposite dangers of Ennui and anxiety; the Scylla and Charybdis on which the bark of human happiness is so commonly wrecked.

The dangers of anxiety can be most effectually overcome by limiting the desires and trying to live simply. The teachers of this materialistic age tend in the opposite direction, for we are told to seek happiness in improved circumstances and in the development of new capacities for enjoyment. In the matter of satisfying these desires there has been wonderful progress but the improvement of circumstances effects happiness to a less extent than we are accustomed to imagine. When our conditions of living have been improved we feel an added pleasure for a time, but our nature soon accommodates itself to the new order of things and then we cease to receive any positive enjoyment, whereas its loss would be painful. The success of human effort is more apparent in the sufferings that it has alleviated, than in the positive happiness that it has attained.

Hence, the energy expended in opening up new sources of enjoyment is not so productive of permanent happiness as is generally believed.

A mistaken tendency, common to most of us, is to confuse the means of attaining happiness with happiness itself. The fact is continually overlooked or is perhaps not sufficiently understood, that happiness is a condition of the mind and not a result of circumstances. No one can expect to be happy who maintains an attitude of mind unfavorable to happiness. A little reflection must convince us that this is so. We can see in the lives of those around us evidences that prove how little happiness depends on the comforts that are ordinarily sought for, such as money, health or fame. The possession of health and friends and even of virtue is quite consistent with unhappiness. What is commonly considered as success in life makes for happiness but does not necessarily secure it. That result must depend upon the individual who alone has the power to influence the condition of his mind.

Everyone is obliged to interpret the acts of life for himself and in no two cases is the interpretation of any particular fact exactly alike. Everyone sees things in his own way. Hence our experience will depend more on the view which we take of things than on the things themselves. What appears to one as a source of happiness, to another brings no pleasure. Each one creates his own world. The attitude which we adopt toward life is the important matter, so important, indeed, that our happiness and peace of mind depend almost entirely upon it. It was said by an English writer that "the great secret of happiness is to study to accomodate our minds to things external rather than to accomodate things external to our own minds." The trend of latter day philosophy, on the other hand, is to

attribute the cause of happiness to external circumstances and this belief finds abundant expression in the activities of present day life. We frequently make the mistake of seeking happiness from without rather than from within, or in other words of seeking it indirectly in improved circumstances, rather than by acting directly on the mind and character. For the fundamental question is not of possessing any definite outward thing, but of the inward happiness attained through that possession.

Although happiness depends on ourselves it can be best attained when it is not made the direct object of our activities. It is better to seek for interests rather than pleasures. They yield the only lasting enjoyment and are the most effectual means to offset the vexations and disappointments of the world. To have a life to live without work to do is to be unhappy. We know, too, that genuine activity which is not mere sport, has the property of becoming interesting as soon as one is seriously absorbed in it. Our interests, however, must be free from selfishness and ambition, for it is the experience of mankind, that we can more surely secure happiness for ourselves by endeavouring to promote the happiness of others.

Character plays a more conspicuous part than intellect in the happiness of life and the cultivation of the unselfish part of our nature is worthy of our serious attention. Apart from its influence on morals, unselfishness is a matter of wisdom and he who cultivates this virtue will finally gain what the seekers of pleasure in its course sense call happiness. If we take a kindly interest in the world about us we will surely find much to occupy our attention and arouse our sympathy. At the same time we will be performing a duty, for the obligation rests on every one to



enlist himself in the fight that is being continually waged for the betterment of the world. The opportunity to do so is ever present. One can always exert an influence for good in the eternal struggle between the forces of right and wrong, and the life that is quietly devoted to noble, unselfish works will find happiness that is independent of changes.

The good works with which we identify ourselves are innumerable. Through the medium of charitable societies, we may become the means of doing much good. But it must be remembered that the pleasure derived from charity bestowed is in proportion to the amount of trouble taken in bestowing it. To be of benefit to the donor his gifts must be offered with a sympathetic hand and must be the outward expression of true inward goodness. For those also who use their influence privately there is always the assurance that unselfish actions are rewarded by feelings of the most pleasurable kind. Among the individuals with whom we are brought in daily contact there are some to whom we can be of much assistance both in a material and moral way. Every day is fraught with opportunities to practice, "the little unremembered acts of kindness and of love." Without love and charity and peace of mind it is possible to be great and rich and powerful but one cannot be happy. Without sympathy we should become encased in an armor of selfishness, and should deny ourselves many of the greatest and purest joys of life.

Moreover, in developing the sympathetic side of our nature we will find it easier to be bright and genial. This effect will in itself be well worth while because to be cheerful ourselves is to contribute to the happiness of others. To be bright and cheerful sometimes requires an effort. There are times when we

even take comfort in feeling miserable. There would be no difficulty in overcoming this tendency if we were to compare our lot with that of others in less fortunate circumstances and try to realize the extent of our good fortune.

God made all men to be happy and implanted the desire for happiness in our nature. There are, however, many well-intentioned people who think that life is a kind of purifying process, or if you will, a period of probation, during which we are given an opportunity to prove our fitness for happiness in a future state without possessing it here. But those who hold this view overlook the fact that happiness is not only the reward, but that it is in itself a duty.

It is not, however, a difficult duty. Nature provides the main elements of human happiness, and, on the whole, the laws of the universe tend in that direction. Our life, therefore should be directed by faith in the permanent moral order of the world. If we do our best and avail ourselves of the manifold blessings which surround us, we must surely feel that life is an inheritance of some value. If it is hard to see the bright side of things, we can at least try to see things as they are and avoid the habit of magnifying trifles. When things are seen in their true proportion it is frequently found that our troubles are but the result of a morbid imagination.

Perfect happiness, of course, cannot be obtained short of heaven, but we have in this life a reflection of it that is sufficient to satisfy our needs. It must be admitted also that happiness is of short duration. In early life we live continually in anticipation of the happiness to come, and when one hope is realized another takes its place, and we again look forward to pleasure unfulfilled. But always the sun of hope shines



through the clouds of adversity and by its beneficent rays our lives are warmed into cheer and gladness. In later life we look back across the vale of years and are surprised at the picture of happiness which the past presents. Failing to observe the softening and mellowing influence of time, which has blended the joys and sorrows of the past with such a pleasing effect, we wonder why the pleasant experiences of other days should have so completely passed away. These are the pleasures of anticipation and of retrospection, and to these we may add the enjoyment of the present, if only we acquire the habit of realizing our blessings while they last. There are times when we would give all we own to be as we were yesterday, although that yesterday was passed over unappreciated and unenjoyed.

Let us, therefore, concentrate our minds on the immediate present and on the nearest duty. Let labor and study be opposed to dissatisfaction and regret, and let all gloomy thoughts, all abnormal tendencies be kept at a distance. A quiet and peaceful mind is a source of rest where we may at all times find comfort and refreshment. If we fill our minds with happy thoughts, with pleasant memories of the past and reasonable hopes for the future, we will rise superior to the common frivolities of life and find a more lasting satisfaction in the kingdom of the spirit. A rightly disposed mind will be free from the shallowness of vanity, and from the restless search for fame and power, and being free we shall be better disposed to devote ourselves to the service of others and in this we may hope to find the truest happiness.