Freedom

There have probably been more high-flown phrases used, and more cant and hypocrisy demonstrated, in regard to the idea of human freedom, than in regard to any other idea. Now, whatever conditions may appertain to a person's physical, mental or moral ability to choose wisely or to make a 'Christian' choice—these are the subjective determinants of choice—, he has not the objective means to exercise freedom except he can choose or refuse one thing at a time. He cannot choose unless he has power to refuse what he does not want, and he cannot refuse what he does not want unless he has the power to choose what he does want. At the head of this paper is a quotation, which has been there since the publication of the first number. It is incompletely quoted. One person pointed out the error when the first number appeared, and no one has done so since, although the quotation is familiar to practically every reader of this paper. From this issue the quotation will read correctly as "Freedom consists in the ability to choose or refuse one thing at a time."

Professor Daniel-Rops writing under the heading "Towards a Truly Christian Society" says: "... speaking simply as a son of the Church I think that Christian teaching presupposes here a very definite organisation which I might characterise thus: a regime that is wholly directed to the human. I feel very deeply that if the human person is to be truly free, the whole system of economy must be directed in the interest of man. Yes, the aim of an economic regime is not to increase production for production's sake, nor to increase capital; nor is it to give special advantages to this or that trade union. Its aim should be to make it possible for man to dwell on this earth at ease, in harmony and brotherhood; in the language of the economist, that means a consumer's regime."

The determination of Financiers, Socialists and Planners is that the overall policy of our economy shall be 'Full Employment.' This may be called an employers' or an employees' regime, but it is not a consumer's regime. A consumer's regime is one in which the sole determinant of what is produced is what each and every consumer is financially empowered to say over the counter; and this means that primarily a consumer is empowered, which is to say employed. It is axiomatic that in a genuine consumers' regime such happenings as Trade Depressions or accumulated debts are an impossibility, for the simple reason that in accordance with periodic national balance sheets of production and consumption the consumers automatically receive the power to purchase all that is produced, and is still adequately empowered to purchase when his labour is not required (which is not to say when it is refused when it is required).

A consumer's regime is one where the consumer is empowered with freedom to choose; because he is financially independent he can determine where and under what conditions he will work. And, because he is financially independent, he is a free man, and will remain free—so long as he does not abuse his freedom. If he does, natural law will automatically ensure that he loses it.

Man was not given free-will so that it should be taken away by men: that is one instance of a disservice to Him "whose service is perfect freedom." And the reward is not freedom.

Enemies of Leisure

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland possesses the means of material abundance. The fact of this potential abundance of goods is beyond dispute; witness the efforts to find customers, to create artificial demand, hire purchase schemes, the monstrous growth of a bureaucracy that is almost wholly parasitic, the frantic search for markets overseas, the colossal waste of effort and material on armaments, monopoly restrictions of output, and a hundred other similar symptoms. All these "problems" have one common denominator, insufficient money in the pockets of consumers. The latter are forced by the present financial policy to contribute "work," useful or injurious to the welfare of people, before being allowed to gain access to the existing or potential wealth. The people have been brain washed to believe that this "work" is the only possible means to share in the abundance. Who are the policy makers?

A wonderful industrial organisation backed by the capital productive assets accumulated over centuries, such as we possess, constitutes a heritage which, properly used, could give all of us such leisure as we desire. Some of us can do with more leisure than others. Almost all of us are incapable of idleness except for such short spells as we need to recuperate mind and body from the daily grind. As has frequently been pointed out, leisure is not the same
as idleness. Leisure is the ability to do what you like, when you like, without financial penalty. It is a fundamental characteristic of man, more highly developed in some races than in others, that he uses the time he has free from toil to try and progress, spiritually, mentally, or materially. Had it not been for this urge to know more, to create, to be better, to live more easily or more abundantly, homo could not be called sapiens. The creative urge in the widest sense of the phrase has been responsible for the fantastic accumulation of productive capacity we possess and for what little progress we have made spiritually. Looked at from the point of view of the individual, it is unlikely that any person would refuse leisure if it were offered unconditionally. Not only is leisure or a large measure of it a possibility for every man and woman in this country, it is fervently desired and striven for by almost all. Competent engineers have stated that to maintain the present standard of living, the productive problem is unsolved. (What did you say? No, exchanging an unsaleable product for the produce of another country merely renders the latter or some other product unsaleable.) From every point of view leisure is a state of affairs one would think would be introduced as a policy particularly when one considers that a start in this direction could have been made very many years ago. But who are the policy makers?

As there is no doubt about the potential wealth we could enjoy in leisure, so there is no doubt about the conscious and organised policy to prevent us from getting that leisure. The situation now is quite serious enough. When in 10, 20, or 30 years' time the present industrial machine increases its productive capacity several times over by using Automation and Atomic Power, the capacity of industry to grant us all leisure will have increased in the same proportion. Unless the distributive system, i.e., money policy, is adapted to allow for the change, civilisation will crash. It will be like the duke who drowned in a butt of Malmsey. No doubt he was drunk when it happened, but there is no need for us to drown in a glut of our making. The refusal to take advantage of the possibility of leisure and the continuous propaganda in favour of “more work,” “full employment,” “exports,” and other leisure-preventatives must have a reason. Readers of this periodical should be quite clear in their minds as to the nature, locus, and force of the interests that are so anxious to prevent us benefiting from this gift of material abundance.

The main organs for anti-leisure propaganda, particularly the claim that consumption can only be financed through more “work” irrespective of its usefulness, are the daily newspapers. There are others, e.g., the B.B.C. and, alas, the pulpit with few exceptions. The men who control the newspapers, who are not necessarily the editors or even the proprietors, are all men removed from any financial anxieties, men who themselves could enjoy their leisure in other ways. Clearly they use that leisure to try and prevent others having it. That the mass of our people believe the evil propaganda to which they are subjected is a curious psychological phenomenon. The action of the policy makers responsible for this propaganda is still more curious. It can have only one explanation, the urge to dominate others, a condition of spiritual disease. A doctor once told the writer: “neurotasthensics run the world. The others, the cabbages, never do anything, they don't count.” Neurotasehnia suggests a tendency towards a lack of balance in a person’s character. That person will attempt subconsciously to correct that balance. The result in most cases is ambition. Unfortunately it is precisely here that the ways part, one along a path lit by Christian principles, the other promising power over others. Christ being tempted by the devil is the same thing as what happens to men. The greater the mental and material gifts of a man, the greater his temptation. One path is in the service of mankind, the other to dominate one’s fellows. The former path is of benefit to one’s self and leads to stability of character, the other is evil and leads to insanity, power mania. The first path involves an ambition to master some skill or subject, scientific, artistic, or otherwise; to develop some gift or capacity individual to one’s self. The evil path of necessity starts by surrendering self to the power maniacs and supporting their policy. It is only by such surrender of a man’s innate consciousness of right and wrong that he stands a chance of “getting-on” in this world at the present time. Hence we see so many intelligent men ranged against us.

H. R. PURCHASE.

They Said It

“We do not believe that the propounders of the scheme of filling up all appointments in the Civil Service by open competition can have contemplated the full scope or bearings of their plan. As we view it, it would amount to nothing short of an entire administrative revolution. It would create a special Profession—the members of which would be as exclusively entitled to practise the arts of government as are the members of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons and Physicians to administer medicine or to amputate limbs. It would hand over the whole Executive Government of the empire, except as regards its parliamentary functionaries, to a body of employees, trained in the same school, entering through the same gate, passing through the same ordeal, stamped with the same seal, imbued to a great extent with the same notions and traditions. And if, in addition to this, the rest of the plan were adopted, and the youths thus bearing the prescribed impress and superscription like warranted coin, were to rise by regular gradation to the higher posts, their intellectual and moral habits would be indelibly fixed by professional influence before they arrived there; the ideas and spirit of the corps would destroy or benumb all marked individuality; its character, principles, and pervading notions would become as it were stereotyped . . . . The nominal Ministers of the Crown . . . would find themselves, on entering their several departments, in the hands of a body of permanent functionaries, wholly independent of them, masters of all official traditions and details, and linked together in one close fraternity—through whom all business must be done, and who have their own resolute notions as to the right way of doing it. Would not the Chief Ministers be utterly powerless in such a situation?”—The Economist, August 4, 1855.
From an Essay contained in a collection called “Ariadne in Mantua” (The Week End Library—John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1930) by Vernon Lee (pseudonym of novelist and essayist, Violet Paget, 1856-1935). We must evidently begin by a little work of defining; and this will be easiest done by considering first what Leisure is not. In the first place, it is one of those things about which we erroneously suppose that other people have plenty of it, and we ourselves have little or none, owing to our thoroughly realising only that which lies nearest to our eye—to wit, ourself. How often do we not go into another person’s room and say, “Ah!” this is a place where one can feel peaceful!” How often do we not long to be at home, or chain it up in a lawyer’s waiting room, but there is no leisure, nor can any sort of chemical arrangements, like those by which Faust’s pupil made Homunculus in his retort, produce genuinely living, and in its turn fruitful, work. The fear of boredom, the fear of the moral going to bits which boredom involves, encumbers the world with rubbish, and exhibitions of pictures, publishers’ announcements, lecture syllabuses, schemes of charitable societies, are pattern-books of such litter. The world for many people, and unfortunately, for the finer and nobler (those most afraid of ennui) is like a painters’ garret, where some half-daubed canvas, eleven feet by five, hides the Jaconda on the wall, the Venus in the corner, and blocks the charming tree-tops, gables, and distant meadows through the window.

Leisure requires the evidence of our own feelings, because it is not so much a quality of time as a peculiar state of mind. We speak of leisure time, but what we really mean thereby is time in which we can feel at leisure. What being at leisure means is more easily felt than defined. It has nothing to do with being idle, or having time on one’s hands, although it does involve a certain sense of free space about one, as we shall see anon. There is time and to spare in a lawyer’s waiting room, but there is no leisure, neither do we enjoy this blessing when we have to wait two or three hours at a railway junction. On both these occasions (for persons who can profit thereby to read the papers, to learn a verb, or to refresh memories of foreign travel, are distinctly abnormal) we do not feel in possession of ourselves. There is something fuming and raging inside us, something which seems to be kicking at our inner bulwarks as we kicked the cushions of a tardy four-wheeler in our childhood. St. Jerome, patron of leisure, never behaved like that, and his lion was always engrossed in pleasant contemplation of the cardinal’s hat on the peg. I have said that when we are bored we feel as if possessed by something not quite ourselves (much as we feel possessed by a stone in a shoe, or a cold in the head); and this brings me to a main characteristic of leisure: it implies that we feel free to do what we like, and that we have plenty of space to do it in. This is a very important remark of mine, and if it seem trite, that is merely because it is so wonderfully true. Besides, it is fraught with unexpected consequences.

The worst enemy of leisure is boredom; it is one of the most active pests existing, fruitful of vanity and vexation of spirit. I do not speak merely of the wear and tear of so-called social amusements, though that is bad enough. We kill time, and kill our better powers also, as much in the work undertaken to keep off ennui as in the play. Count Tolstoi, with his terrible eye for shams, showed it all up in a famous answer to M. Dumas fils. Many, many of us, work, he says, in order to escape from ourselves. Now, we should not want to escape from ourselves; we ought to carry ourselves, the more unconsciously the better, along ever widening circles of interest and activity; we should bring ourselves into ever closer contact with everything that is outside us; we should be perpetually giving ourselves from sheer loving instinct; but how can we give ourself if we have to run away from it, or bury it at home, or chain it up in a treadmill? Good work is born of the love of the Power-to-do for the Job-to-be-done; nor can any sort of chemical arrangements, like those by which Faust’s pupil made Homunculus in his retort, produce genuinely living, and in its turn fruitful, work. The fear of boredom, the fear of the moral going to bits which boredom involves, encumbers the world with rubbish, and exhibitions of pictures, publishers’ announcements, lecture syllabuses, schemes of charitable societies, are pattern-books of such litter. The world for many people, and unfortunately, for the finer and nobler (those most afraid of ennui) is like a painters’ garret, where some half-daubed canvas, eleven feet by five, hides the Jaconda on the wall, the Venus in the corner, and blocks the charming tree-tops, gables, and distant meadows through the window.

Art, literature, and philosophy are notoriously expressions no longer of men’s and women’s thoughts and feelings, but of their dread of finding themselves without thoughts to think or feelings to feel. So-called practical persons know this, and despise such employments as frivolous and effeminate. But are they not also, to a great extent, frightened of themselves and running away from boredom? See your well-to-do weighty man of forty-five or fifty, merchant, or soldier, or civil servant; the same who thanks God he is no idler. Does he really require more money? Is he really more useful as a colonel than as a major, in a wig or cocked hat than out of it? Is he not shuffling money from one heap into another, making rules and regulations for others to unmake, preparing for future restless idlers the only useful work which restless idleness can do, the carting away of their predecessors’ litter?

Nor is this all the mischief. Work undertaken to kill time, at best to safeguard one’s dignity, is clearly not the work which one was born to, since that would have required no such incentives. Now, trying to do work one is not fit for, implies the more or less unfitness of oneself to do, or even to be, the something for which one had facilities. It means competing with those who are utterly different, competing in things which want a totally different kind of organism; it means, therefore, offering one’s arms and legs, and feelings and thoughts to those blind, brutal forces of
adaptation which, having to fit a human character into a
given place, lengthen and shorten it, mangle it uncon-
cernedly in the process. . . .

And think of the persons born to contemplation or sym-
pathy, who, in the effort to be prompt and practical, in the
struggle for a fortune or a visiting-list lose, atrophy (alas,
after so much cruel bruising!) their inborn exquisite powers.

The world wants useful inhabitants. True. But the
clouds building bridges over the sea, the storms modelling
the peaks and flanks of the mountains, are a part of the
world; and they want creatures to sit and look at them and
learn their life’s secrets, and carry them away, conveyed
perhaps merely in altered tone of voice, or brightened
colour of eye, to revive the spiritual and physical hewers
of wood and drawers of water. For the poor sons and
dughters of men require for sustenance, as well as food
and fuel, and intellect and morals, the special mysterious
commodity called charm. . . .

And here let me open a parenthesis on lamentation over
the ruthless manner in which our century and nation destroys
this precious thing, even in its roots and seed. Charm is,
where it exists, an intrinsic and ultimate quality; it makes
our actions, persons, life, significant and desirable, apart
from anything they may lead to, or any use to which they
can be put. Now we are allowing ourselves to get into a
state where nothing is valued, otherwise than as a means;
where to-day is interesting only because it leads up to to-
morrow; and the flower is valued only on account of the
fruit, and the fruit, in its turn, on account of the seed.

It began, perhaps, with the loss of that sacramental
view of life and life’s details which belonged to Judaism
and the classic religions, and of which even Catholicism has
retained a share; making eating, drinking, sleeping, cleaning
house and person, let alone marriage, birth and death, into
something grave and meaningful, not merely animal and
accidental; and mapping out the years into days, each with
its symbolic or commemorative meaning and emotion.
All this went long ago, and inevitably. But we are losing
nowadays something analogous and more important: the
cultivation and sanctification not merely of acts and occa-
sions but of the individual character.

Life has been allowed to arrange itself, if such can be
called arrangement, into an unstable, jostling heap of
interests, ours and other folks, serious and vacuous, trusted to
settle themselves according to the line of least resistance
(that is, of most breakage!) and the survival of the toughest,
without our sympathy directing the choice. As the days of
the year have become confused, hurried, and largely filled
with worthless toil and unworthy trouble, so in measure,
 alas, our souls! We rarely envy people for being delight-
ful; we are always ashamed of mentioning that any of our
friends are virtuous; we state what they have done, or do,
or are attempting; we state their chances of success. Yet
success may depend, and often does, on greater hurrying
and jostling, not on finer material and workmanship, in our
hurrying times. The quick method, the rapid worker, the
cheap object, quickly replaced by a cheaper—these we
honour; we want the last new thing, and have no time to
get to love our properties, bodily and spiritual. "Tis bad
economy, we think, to weave such damask, linen, and brocade
as our fathers have left us; and perhaps this reason accounts
for our love of tric-a-brac; we wish to buy associations
ready made, like that wealthy man of taste who sought to
buy a half-dozen old statues, properly battered and lichen-
ed, to put in his brand new garden. With this is connected
—I mean this indifference to what folk are as distinguished
from what they do—the self-assertion and aggressiveness
of many worthy persons, men more than women, and gifted,
 alas, more than giftless; the special powers proportionately
accompanied by special odiousness. Such persons cultivate
themselves, indeed, but as fruit and vegetables for the
market, and, with good luck and trouble, possibly primeurs:
concentrate every means, chemical manure and sunshine,
and quick! each still hard pear or greenish cauliflower into the
packing-case, the shavings and sawdust, for export. It is
with such well-endowed persons that originates the terrible
mania (caught by their neighbours) of tangible work, some-
thing which can be put alongside of others’ tangible work,
if possible with some visible social number attached to it.
So long as this be placed on the stall where it courts in-
spection, what matters how empty and exhausted the soul
which has grown it? For nobody looks at souls except
those who use them for this market-gardening.

Dropping metaphor; it is woeful to see so many fine
qualities sacrificed to getting on, independent of actual
necessity; getting on, no matter why, on the road to no
matter what. And on that road, that bitterness and fury
if another passes in front! Take up books of science, of
history and criticism, let alone newspapers; half the space
is taken up in explaining (or forestalling explanations), that
the sage, hero, poet, artist said, did, or made the particular
thing before some other sage, hero, poet, artist; and that
what the other did, or said, or made, was either a bungle,
or a plagiarist, or.—worst of all—was something obvious.
Hence, like the bare-back riders at the Siena races, illustrious
persons, and would-be illustrious, may be watched using
their energies, not merely in pressing forward, but in hitting
competitors out of the way with inflated bladders—bladders
filled with the wind of conceit, not merely the breath of
the lungs. People who might have been modest and gentle,
grow, merely from self-defence, arrogant and aggressive;
they become wapish, contradictory, unfair, who were born
to be wise and just, and well-mannered. And to return
to the question of Charm, they lose, soil, maim in this
scuffle, much of this most valuable possession; their intimate
essential quality, their natural manner of being towards
nature and neighbours and ideas; their individual shape.
Perfume, savour, and, in the sense of herbs, their individual
virtue. And when, sometimes, one comes across some of
it remaining, it is with the saddened feeling of finding a
delicate plant trampled by cattle or half eaten up by goats.

Alas, alas, for charm! People are busy painting
pictures, writing poems, and making music all the world
over, and busy making money for the buying or hiring
thereof. But as to that charm of character which is worth
all the music and poetry and pictures put together, how
the good common-sense generations do waste it.

(To be concluded.)