

MORE LEISURE FOR WORKERS

How Will They Use It?

Thanks to mechanical invention, business organisation, and the application of science to agriculture, the demands of the world for goods and food can be met by the employment of a much smaller number of men than in the less mechanical days. This is resulting in people being faced with increased leisure.

This increase in leisure sets up the problem of how people will use it. Mr. J. F. Ward (head master of Prince Alfred College) discussed the subject in an address to the Round Table Christian Sociological Society. He feels that the problem is one of culture and fundamentally one of religion.

The following are extracts from Mr. Ward's address, which was an historical survey of leisure through the centuries and a summary of the factors that have led to the present crisis.



MR. J. F. WARD

THE culture of the Middle Ages was fundamentally religious, that is, it did not omit knowledge of this world of Nature around us, but found the meaning and value of everything in God and the world to come. The break with authority, and the rise of individualism, could not fail sooner or later to bring the advancement of science, and make man and Nature the centre of men's thinking. Physical science created a feeling, especially in the popular mind, that in a large part of our environment laws worked automatically, and that if God ruled He did so from a distance and in a much more indirect way. It became easy to lose sight of the old, intimate, personal idea of God.

Biology then became evolutionary, and this idea of life, too, seemed to pass from the direct personal care of God, and now, to some extent at least, psychology seems to be explaining human mind and personality along mechanistic lines, which will make unreal the divine sway in this, its last stronghold.

Is it not true that the very forces which have won the victories for civilisation have weakened our inherited culture? As scientific knowledge becomes part of the ordinary man's thinking it has made it easy for men to have a working idea of the world around them, and from within which God is excluded.

There are still a great many of us who believe most vitally that men lack peace and inward harmony of life until they find real unity for all the forces of their personality in God. Is it not just because of this breakdown of the basis of our traditional culture that we feel that increased leisure constitutes a problem? If we get to the real basis of our anxiety about leisure, does it not become clear that we fear how folk will use leisure, whose minds and lives have lost what to us, as Christians, is the central rallying point of life?

WHERE EDUCATION FAILED

Some day I feel sure, Mr. Ward continued, we shall find a new central point for our culture. When men can evolve an idea of God and His rule in the universe and His loving care for man, that will have as intimate and necessary a connection with our theories of the universe as the idea of God current in the Middle Ages had with theirs, an idea that will stir men's imagination and demand their devotion, as religion did in the days of the Crusaders, then we shall have again a culture which will have authority over men's minds and hearts.

If the problem of leisure is the fear how people will use that leisure, there are a great many folk who immediately turn to education and demand to know why our schools have not equipped them for spending their leisure time. In the first place, it has to be remembered that compulsory primary education is not a very old institution. The spread of universal popular education took place during the intensely industrial period, and in its origin the system did not contemplate the problems of leisure at all seriously. Much has been done since then to try to put into the minds of the young ideas which will give them food for thought and help them to build character and find higher values in life, but much still remains to be done.

We have all suffered from the failure to realise the distinction between civilisation and culture; and too often in education it has been considered enough if children were helped to understand the great machine of civilisation,

and to some extent their place in it. This might be excellently done, and yet produce men and women with a very low scale of values in life.

In our State I do feel that a good deal more would be accomplished if religious instruction could be included in the school's work, for that is, I am sure, one essential ingredient without which true culture and real value in life cannot be achieved.

If we have a problem it suggests that there is a danger. The danger is of a vast number of boys and girls trained to fill useful places in the modern industrial machine, and now finding no place to fill, and being without sufficient cultural resources to find within themselves the means of occupying their time to their own satisfaction. Our civilisation, built on the applications of science and mechanical forces, has produced many noble things in modern life, but in all things human where there is the power to uplift, there is also the corresponding power to degrade. Unfortunately, some of the forces which could do so much to uplift, are being exploited by avaricious men for their own gain to the degradation of all the ideals of life in the minds of our young folk. Is it that these men are oblivious or indifferent to the harm they are doing?