

begin the marriage ceremony, discovered with dismay that his inamorata was blind in one eye. Revoking his bond he prepared to desert the fair one, but the father of the bride produced a ten pound note with the significant inquiry,

"Will that put an eye in her?"

"Begorra, yis," was the hearty rejoinder; the bond was re-established and the knot tied.

"Well, Pat, did Biddy get married to Micky yesterday?" inquired an interested spectator of this peculiar custom, on the day following Shrovetide.


"No, yer honor, sir," was the grinning rejoinder, "for when Micky seed her, I 'won't have her,' says he, 'for she's too deeply marked with the small-pox,' says he; but Jimmy O'Ryan, 'I'll have her,' says he, and troth he did."

The strangest feature to an American is the meekness and submission of the girls themselves, who will often, at the advice of parents or friends, marry a man distasteful to them.

Talks with Girls.

BY JENNY JUNE.

THE USES OF LEISURE.



HE "elegant" leisure which we read about as being enjoyed by many persons as a life-long possession abroad has not, fortunately, come, as yet, to many in this country. In fact, a "life of leisure" is a contradiction in terms: the very idea of leisure presupposes the existence and experience of work, for leisure that has not been made leisure by its antecedent, *work*, becomes idleness. One of the most noticeable things, however, in the society which Americans find in the foreign towns and cities which they frequent, is the number of persons living on small, fixed incomes, that life of "refined" leisure of which we, in this country, who are perpetually hurried and always driving from one thing to another, can hardly form an idea. Nor are we greatly fascinated with it when we do encounter it. It is true, there is more to be enjoyed in the old and long-settled countries in the grand accumulations of the past, the treasures of art—the perfection to which the perpetual demands of a cultivated class existing for centuries have brought all industries, and the solidity, the finish, for which we look in vain in the turmoil of tearing down and building up consequent upon our not yet settled or unsatisfactory conditions.

But on the other hand there is nothing more wearisome than this same finish, this same-

ness, this monotony. Those who live among them care little for fine cathedrals, old pictures, "art" coal-scuttles, and wonderful old mantelpieces. They find little time or opportunity, after all, to enjoy their "leisure," for there is one eternal effort to get the most out of small resources—to make ends meet, and put the best foot foremost in the little circle to which they are confined by the narrowness of their means. "Why not increase their means, then?" a dozen bright young readers will ask. Because the growth of population and the advance of modern civilization has circumscribed effort, and rendered it there, as it may be here in the future, not only hard to compete with others, but apparently fruitless and useless to do so. When labor and capital are so little productive that it does not seem worth while to risk the one or employ the other, except from necessity or decided inclination, a class will naturally grow up whose only business is to take care of what they have got, and grade and adapt their living to their means. Cut off from all association with the active interests, looking at the world from the position of outsiders, having no part or lot in the interests which absorb other men and women, it is easy to see that such lives must, after a while, run in a very narrow groove. The scarred hero of a hundred battle-fields goes for the daily quart of milk, while his wife mends the children's hose, and wonders if their shoes will last until the arrival of the next quarterly or monthly payment. Certainly, leisure to be enjoyed must have been earned; and it must be the exception, not the rule of life. Such leisure is as necessary and as useful as work, and, indeed, we cannot do the best work unless we have time to recruit our worn and wasted energies, gather up our resources, enlarge them, and keep informed as to the states and conditions of the world about us. These, then, are to a great extent the uses of leisure. It is no mere quiescent state—it is an opportunity for relaxation, enjoyment, for the gathering together and upbuilding of the forces for fresh efforts. People are just learning that there is no position in life so hard as that of doing nothing—nor is there any such thing as taking hold of work and doing it in a dilettantish sort of way. Work is too good to be so treated; it gives its best only to those who love it, and it makes itself so valued and precious that leisure is cared for less for itself than for the added interest and strength it enables us to put into the serious occupation of daily life.

The worst use to which we can put leisure is to fritter it away idly in wearisome and unimportant efforts to find amusement. It is not always being idle not to be at work. We may find health and strength in hours spent in doing nothing but drinking in life-giving draughts of out-door air, and quiet, tranquil, retrospective rather than introspective, thought. But we find nothing that is worth having in the repetition of folly and scenes of frivolity or dissipation, and the better way is to cut them short, and determine not to waste time or strength in what is valueless, if not positively mischievous, to one's self or others.

It has been intimated that one of the uses of leisure is to enlarge the boundaries of one's life and thought, and associate it with the life and thought outside of our own. Books are the best help in this direction, and they are the best aids to the enjoyment of leisure, because they are independent of almost all circumstances. Friends are lost, but books remain, and acquire additional interest and value to us as we grow old, if they are of a kind to improve, as the best books do, with age. Books should be chosen with fully as much care as personal friends, and they should be cherished and *kept*. No one who has a proper idea of the value of books will ever want to "borrow" a choice edition of a choice author. There are books, and editions of books, which seem made for distribution, but these are not those which have become our personal friends. When a lover of books has accumulated a small library (a large one is useless), and made himself thoroughly acquainted with them, he will have books for every mood, and he will grow into a sense of companionship with them—more close and more sweet than it often falls to the lot of human companionship to be. The source of rest in it, and reliance upon it, is perfect, because the fellowship of books is always the same, and is not affected by moods or circumstances.

One of the very best of earthly possessions is a collection of permanent books, the works of authors that lose nothing by the lapse of time; and it will be seen that this standard reduces the number of works, even in this book-making age, to very small proportions, and that one may go back a long distance to complete the list without making it too large. What is to prevent the poorest from having the choicest friends when books and pictures will make them so? I stood in the house once of a poor man after his body had been taken out for burial. It was very plain, some would call it common, of meager proportions, and isolated for the advantage of fresh air. But within the uncarpeted room were priceless treasures of books and engravings, the accumulation of his working-life. He was by no means a hermit, but he loved the great works of other men's minds, and he used them in the intervals of his daily labor to enrich his own. He did not seek society, but after a little, society of the very best kind sought him. It grew to be considered a treat, even among cultivated literary people, to spend an evening with him, and talk about books and about history as it relates to art, and the growth and development of the human. For the world, since its earliest dawns, was an open page to him, and the master minds, those that have controlled thought and influenced action, were familiar to him as brothers. Seeing such names inscribed upon his shelves, looking at his walls which held no costly frames, but glowed with the light of rare prints and fine engravings of old masters, the poor apartment became suddenly illuminated and made stately by the presence of an illustrious throng. It was no longer where he lived, but with whom he lived, and his daily associates were Homer, and Dante, and Shakespeare, and Goethe, and Schiller, and Milton, and others of the great dead, whose work has inspired all

that has been worth doing in those which have come after them.

This man was an artisan, yet how much nobler than many a prince from the use to which he put his leisure!

But it is not well to force one's self into a certain groove simply because others have occupied it. Daily work is usually imperative, and not always agreeable; but leisure should, as far as possible, satisfy the heart and the taste—the only essential condition is this, that it should have definite purpose, take a definite direction, and be cultivated with a certain amount of faithfulness and steadfastness, such as we put into work itself. To some, perhaps, this will make it seem too much like work, but it must be remembered that we only get pleasure out of our play, in proportion as we put into it the rectitude and strength that we put into our work. There are very many persons, both men and women, who take up a pursuit and make hard work of it through the sheer necessity of their natures, which forces them to put their thought, their activity into something, and to do whatever they do at all with all their might. Strangely enough, this capacity for hard work is very apt to come with mental, moral, and material advancement, and this is the reason why so many rich men are the unpaid drudges in literature, public life, art, and philanthropy in this country, and particularly in England. Laziness is nearly always found among the very lowest and poorest classes, those that need to work the most; but when they get into the region of strong desire and capacity to perform good, skillful work, they leave behind their poverty and their degradation.

The majority of rich young men do not take kindly to a life of absolute inanity. They become muscular, they drive coaches, they cruise about in yachts, they cultivate an art or a profession. A man who is absolutely lazy, listless or demoralized by affluence will be pretty certain to have come up from very low beginnings, to have had few resources, and no distinctive or decided tastes in any useful or beautiful direction. It is indeed only the very poor who have any real leisure. The poor man is at liberty when he gets through with his day's work; his wife is not, but he is, and he resents most bitterly any attempt to infringe upon this privileged time, and is always talking of the hours of work as a hardship, and stirring up agitation to reduce them. Yet, what does he do with the hours he has to spare? smokes, lies around, sleeps, spends them in a bar-room or in listening to some political demagogue. If anything happens to him his wife is penniless, his children paupers, for every shilling has been spent and there never was enough. Such men, moreover, always have large families, many more children than they can maintain, for the same lack of manly character which leads them to consider idleness better than work, prevents them from assuming or even realizing their responsibilities.

Yet the very successes on the part of other men, which they resent, are achieved by hard work, and by making use of every moment of leisure, as well as the time embraced in the working hours. A shoemaker who died re-

cently in Vermont, was not only very poor, but in ill-health. He commenced doing the only thing he could, taking early morning walks, and this interested him in botany. He found the best work upon the subject was in Latin, he began the study of Latin to aid his botany. With his new interests, and out-of-door studies (always taken before the work of the day began), his health improved; he mastered Latin, French and grammar, received the degree of A.M. from two colleges, and became a leading authority in botany. This shows how the leisure, and what was really a severe affliction for a poor man, were turned to useful account, and no help asked of anybody.

I recall now two men, both poor, but one of whom came of good parentage, the other of poor extraction—not what would be called "shiftless," in the Yankee sense, but a family destitute of resources, who could never do anything but eat up what they had, and trust to Providence to get more. The first was a delicate man, and a mechanic, a tailor, whose work was injurious to him to the last degree. To offset it he hired a little house with a garden, in a healthy suburb, and removed with his family. All his leisure after that, night and morning, was spent in his garden—which he dug, planted, watered, weeded, and in short, cultivated entirely himself. To his family it gave the luxury of small fruits and vegetables in abundance—and to the poor tailor it gave comparative health. His wages were very small, averaging from four to ten dollars per week, and upon this he reared six children, so that they became a credit to him, and in time he bought his house and garden, and at his death at sixty-nine, left it to his wife and children, who were able to retain it as a home, and to whom the steady growth in value afterward brought competence in the absorption of the garden into a city.

The second man, a chronic grumbler, always trying to get rid of work; always spending his poor stipend as fast as he received it, and in a way to get the least out of it, lived wretchedly for fifty-six years, and finally died in the poor-house; declaiming to the day of his death against the hardships and cruelties of a system which "drives" a man there, after he had been a steady worker for thirty-five years.

One of the men most distinguished in literature in this country does all his literary work after business hours; it is in fact the occupation of his leisure. Another, a mere dry-goods "floor-walker," died an honored member of several learned and literary societies, owing to the use he made of his leisure, and his attainments gave him the *entrée* of the very best society. Other men work farms for amusement, and still others cultivate some artistic industry. One well-known musical artist in New York city sedulously pursues the art of wood-carving, and also of painting as a recreation, and not only fills his own house with beautiful things, but those of his friends. A book-keeper upon a meager salary, with a wife and three children, has a passion for "tinkering." He is always seizing ideas, and endeavoring, in a modest way, to reproduce them. His little apartment of four rooms in a not

very savory neighborhood, afforded little encouragement or apparent opportunity for the display of taste or ingenuity. But he began by extemporizing a convenient closet, by arranging with a slat, a few nails, and an old calico dress, a wardrobe, and he found such pleasure in his own efforts, that by cultivating the acquaintance of a paper-hanger and carpenter in his neighborhood, and getting some odds and ends of paper, and a few boards cheap, he has finally succeeded in producing a picturesque interior, with dados and square Eastlake mantelpiece upon which is gradually accumulating fans, vases, and bits of crockery, not expensive, but as decorative as much of the rubbish that costs a great deal more. The financial resources of this family are no greater than that of another I wot of, which is making constant appeals to charity, and presents a most pitiable and forlorn exterior and interior; yet the former lives in a little world of refinement and cultivation of its own, which will exercise an influence upon its whole future, and be gained simply by the way the father spent his leisure.

A great deal of the detrimental influence in our lives comes from the public opinion which makes a heaven of play, and a hell of work, when it is exactly the other way. It is always of greater importance to us how we are taught to spend our leisure, than our working hours, for these are pretty likely, if we are taught at all, to be occupied with regularity; but our leisure is supposed to be our own, to do what we please with, and for boys especially, who are to become men, and who are not held to the performance of multifarious household duties, as are women; it is of the greatest importance that some direction should be given to their tastes, or their habits, for if they are rich it will preserve them from temptation, and if they are poor, it will put resources in their lives, which will be a perpetual blessing to themselves and others. One of the best things of this age has been the successful efforts to establish "summer" schools, "vacation" voyages and expeditions, in which the continued improvement and cultivation of the pupil is the object. Boys of from ten to fifteen years of age, or older, ought not to spend four or five objectless, purposeless months in the year, or even months filled with idle "hanging around." The months out of school are golden opportunities which should be improved by adding to his knowledge and useful stock of experience. City boys may spend several summers most advantageously in actual farm-work, in assisting in gardening, in learning all about fishing, and how to manage boats, on the island of Nantucket, for instance; while a country boy would find it his interest to learn enough of the trade of a carpenter and wheelwright, to be able to keep himself in an emergency, and might learn some of the ornamental arts to his own future benefit and that of his family. There is no capital that pays so well as time well invested, and why should we not use our leisure for our own benefit rather than our own destruction! Let us gather up these fragments of precious time, and see to what good use we can put them, so that we may be living witnesses of the results.