RICHES—AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: BY CHARLES RICHARD DODGE

In Professor Ward’s *Dynamic Sociology* it is laid down that “the fundamental law of nature, and therefore of political economy, is that all men will, under all circumstances, seek their greatest gain.”

Unfortunately, in our twentieth-century civilization, the slow and sure methods for seeking “greatest gain” have become old-fashioned, and men resort to short cuts to accomplish the object of their desires. Undoubtedly the acquiring of great wealth, and the lavish expenditure of wealth, by the few, in recent years, have established false standards not only of the value of money after it has been accumulated, but of the power by means of which money may be accumulated.

As an example of the tendency of the times, the man with a small income, but who has cultivated “champagne tastes,” desires to go the pace of the man higher up. He fails to appreciate, however, his own value as a money-getting proposition. He is earning every cent that he is worth; he may be able to provide reasonably for the necessities of existence, and he may have a sufficient surplus with which to purchase a rational degree of enjoyment. But, having placed a false valuation upon his own power to acquire money, he further assumes an ideal estimate of the happiness the other man’s money will purchase, and not only deludes himself, but wrecks the happiness that he already enjoys. In his discontent he is like the dog in the fable, who lost his piece of meat while crossing the stream in the attempt to snatch a bigger piece which was only a shadow. To learn how it works out in every-day life, consult in the columns of the daily press the records of suicide and embezzlement cases, and the wretched stories of graft everywhere.

If we may assume, for the sake of the argument, that all a man actually has during his natural life is the food, lodging and raiment he can use, plus such happiness as his means may have afforded him—the measure of his happiness, or his ability for enjoyment during the period of human existence, must establish the degree of his individual benefit. To illustrate: One of the poorest men I ever knew accumulated half a million dollars—legitimately, let it be said, in these days of high finance. He died at the age of fifty, and during the course of his busy life he literally worked for his board and clothes. He never
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

traveled for pleasure; he never read; he spent little time with his family, for in his feverish anxiety to amass a million dollars before he quitted the earth, he was too busy for such trifles. He missed his mark, for overtaxed nature collapsed under the strain just at the halfway point. But let us take a glance down the ages to a period when money did not exist.

Primitive man recognized but two great wants: food and a covering for the body—that is to say, protection from the elements either in the form of rude clothing or a habitation. His clothing was the skin of an animal he had killed for food, or the coarse textiles his necessities early taught him to weave. He viewed life objectively, and if he possessed a thinking brain, it was of an exceedingly low order, and when the mental process was not directed toward satisfying his physical necessities it was probably dormant. Like the animal when hunger is appeased, he doubtless slept, and this may have been the primitive idea of happiness.

As PREHISTORIC man advanced in the rude civilization of his time, out of his food necessities were evolved other wants; he discovered fire and learned how to fashion pottery, and was able to please his palate with new forms of food. Perhaps aesthetic taste was dimly foreshadowed in that rude age when the man began to appreciate differences in colors, or when he attempted a grotesque ornamentation of his apparel or person. And in the ages that have rolled by since that remote period, for we are thinking of the Stone Age in Europe—a matter of seven to eleven thousand years ago—the evolution has steadily progressed.

As far as the struggle for existence is concerned, how much better off is man to-day? Like his ancestor in the Stone Age, the mental process still goes on in the direction of securing food, clothing and shelter, only the proposition has grown ten times, yes, a hundred times more difficult because man’s wants have increased with his civilization, and through his intellectuality he has now acquired, in fullest measure, the power to enjoy.

Human enjoyment is derived from a gratification of the senses. One man enjoys a good dinner, a comfortable chair, or a soft bed. Another finds particular gratification in reading an interesting book, in viewing a fine picture, listening to music, or in the contemplation of
nature. The man who has reached a little higher stage of development seeks to acquire knowledge by study and travel, and derives satisfaction from the possession of knowledge. A fourth delights in creation through the activities of hands and brain, as the painter or the inventor. Still another class finds the source of happiness in doing good in the world and relieving suffering. Power to enjoy involves the power to acquire the means for enjoyment. The consideration of food and protection, from being a simple proposition, has become a complex proposition through the increase of numbers, called society, and because of constantly increasing needs which to the civilized man are essential to his being, and which are the result of his civilization. As a man comes into the world with nothing, he must either provide for his natural wants by his own activities, or he must be provided for by the exertions of others; and in all ages man has eaten bread by the sweat of his brow, and through his labor he has found means for the gratification of the senses.

REFERRING again to our ancestors in the Stone Age, we may be sure that degrees in strength, skill and cunning were recognized by the members of the rude society of that early period. We will imagine that “Mr. Ab,” who was a clever hunter, was able to obtain three reindeer to “Mr. Tau’s” one, which meant a ratio of three times as much food, three skins and longer periods of rest. In consequence of this superiority, in time Mr. Ab found himself able not only to live better, but to enlarge his wardrobe and his habitation, and have more skins upon which to sleep. He then discovered that there was a certain satisfaction in the possession of property; he had become a man of influence in the community, and when poor Tau met with an accident Ab may have sent Mrs. Tau a haunch of reindeer meat to show that his head had not been turned by his improved condition.

We will now suppose that when Tau was convalescing he busied himself with making pottery, which Mrs. Tau exchanged with her neighbors for necessaries of existence. Later it was discovered that there was something about Tau’s pottery that made it stronger than other pottery, it increased in demand—and the Tau family began to look up. Then another of Mr. Ab’s neighbors, who had envied both Ab and Tau their good fortune—realizing even in that early period that necessity is the mother of invention—devised a loom for
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

weaving the vegetable substances which, up to that time, had only been wattled. To make a long story short, we will suppose that through the superior attainments of certain members of society, this prehistoric, aboriginal community in time acquired a commerce (trade or barter), a rude knowledge of the liberal arts,* and a knowledge also of the power of money, or some equivalent of money, to purchase happiness.

In the present stage of civilization, considering the increased capacity for enjoyment among mankind, and larger resources with which to supply the means for enjoyment, there are so many different ways in which money can be applied to the gratification of the senses, that the term embraces almost the entire scheme of human experience.

Now, as we brought nothing into this world when we entered it, and can take nothing out of the world when we leave it, and have actually nothing individually while we are in it but the food we consume, certain physical comforts necessary to health (such as raiment and shelter), and the experience of certain sensations resulting in a state of the mind or body which we call enjoyment, who are the rich men of our age?

The idea is not so speculative as it may appear. All money, all property, all matter belongs to the universe of matter, and the man who assumes ownership of any part of it is merely a temporary agent or guardian charged with its keeping. All he can possibly get out of it for himself, before it passes into the keeping of another, is his enjoyment of it. And during the period of his guardianship others may derive from it the same enjoyment that he experiences. He may “possess,” for example, a fine gallery of paintings. Every day in the year a score of his fellow men may visit the gallery and derive more mental pleasure from viewing the pictures than he may be able to derive from their possession. And when he has passed from earth the pictures will continue to give pleasure to others, as though he had never existed.

Did any one ever stop to think that a man with fifty millions of dollars can not possibly purchase one hour more of the rational enjoy-

* The arts of pottery making, and spinning and weaving of flax, are known to have been practised in the Stone Age in Europe.
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

ments of life than the man can purchase whose wealth represents but a hundred thousand? Has any one ever considered that there are men earning small salaries who can count up more hours of happiness in a month than some very rich men have experienced in years? How many people realize that we are here but once—that life at the longest is but a span? Without warning—pouf! out goes the candle. If the man, then, has only a million dollars’ worth of securities locked in a vault, to show for his life, does it pay?

LIKE a spring of cold water in the desert was that recent appeal of a young man to a great metropolitan daily for advice. Living in a small New York town, he had been able to accumulate a fortune of $35,000 between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, and being fond of literature and music, and appreciating nature and the delights of travel, he was thinking of retiring. He had a good business, but he felt that there was something better in the world than mere money-getting, and he was in a dilemma. Would it be wise to retire at the age of thirty-five and take up a country residence? He should have been advised to retire without delay, and combine with the pursuit of happiness—with his books and music—the raising of poultry, or frogs, or the cultivation of mushrooms, for no man can be really happy without some form of responsibility—some kind of regular demand upon his time.

One difficulty with society to-day is the kind of training the people have been getting. Too many parents educate their children out of their proper spheres of usefulness, and too large a proportion of college men study for professions that are overcrowded. When it comes to looking for a “paying job,” after graduation, the brawny young fellow without an education, but who belongs to the trade union, will double-discount the college man in the matter of income three times out of five. The proposition that there is always room at the top influences many a young man’s choice of the line of study he will pursue. The large incomes enjoyed by eminent lawyers, doctors, clergymen, teachers and men of letters, are alluring. Yet, how many large incomes are also enjoyed by men who, with no special early training, have entered what might be termed the creative professions—the liberal arts—and worked their way to the top? A young man, of fair intellect, who could never be anything but a third-rate lawyer, might
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

possess the talents that would have enabled him to become a first-rate architect or civil engineer. Another young man, eking out a bare living as a country clergyman, might have become a successful designer of ornamental brass-work, or of wall-paper, and found lucrative and delightful employment.

There are too many square men in round holes, and vice versa; too many young men are occupying uncongenial positions, their minds filled with discontent, their hearts with envy of the success of more fortunate acquaintances in other occupations. They are what they are because they lack the training that would have fitted them for something higher. This very discontent blunts ambition and forces many to spend their lives in a mere struggle for existence.

HOW much better would it be, in choosing life work—considering again the argument that all we have in life is our food and protection from the elements, plus a certain gratification of the senses—were the man always enabled to enter a congenial occupation, where a goodly share of his enjoyment in life might be derived from the occupation itself. There are many such properly placed men in the workshops of the world, and their enthusiasm is the mainspring of their endeavor.

I hope I have made it clear that the contented man, the man who finds out what is his proper sphere in life, and who lives his life earnestly, rationally, simply and happily—while laying up something for a rainy day—is the truly rich man in this frenzied, strenuous age.

As a social fabric we are approaching a crisis. In the accumulation of colossal fortunes is beginning to be perceived moral decadence. In the widespread unrest of the people may be observed an effect, though the people themselves have not yet discovered the cause. When they are able to find their true bearings they may discover a remedy. But, meanwhile, there is simplicity of life for those of us who begin to realize that the pace is becoming too rapid—and tired souls are already hurrying back to nature.