

THE CHAUTAUQUAN.

VOL. XXI.

AUGUST, 1895.

No. 5

WOMAN'S COUNCIL TABLE.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF REST.

BY LILIAN WHITING.

REST and idleness are not synonyms; there is a far closer connection between rest and work—in the sense of work that has any significance—and between fatigue and idleness, than there is between rest and idleness. To be absolutely idle is *not* restful. No one whose life is of any value, has time for vacuity and idleness. Each and all of us have time for rest; because rest is the very condition on which all true work depends. And so, if here at our Council Table we discuss rest, we will all concede that we are not, thereby, discussing mere stagnation.

It may be an open question as to whether any of us work too much, or too hard, as we sometimes fancy; but there is little question that we do not always work in the best way. To grow nervous and flurried and irritable is not the condition of accomplishment, though we sometimes mistake it for a proof of marvelous faithfulness and zeal.

In these days *all* women are working-women. The wife and mother and house-keeper is confronted by a perpetual round of varied duties; the business woman has certain hours of each day filled with specific demands; the professional worker, be she doctor, lawyer, architect, or teacher, is never free from the claims of her work; still less so, even, is the creative worker—the woman of art or literature. And the society women, of the—so-called—leisure classes? They are the busiest of all, whatever may be the results of their ceaseless activities. In fact, outside the indigent and the imbecile, I, for one, know of no unemployed women.

Now the philosophy of rest is the philosophy of work, as well. Rest and work are not opposite and antagonistic terms, but are, instead, complementary to each other. We work that we may rest; we rest that we may work; and the two together, in happy blend-

ing, make up the condition of harmonious activity, and that is the ideal condition of life. "Without haste, without rest,"—these words express the true aim of living.

The philosophy of rest is found in the condition of spiritual receptivity. Nor does this mean some vague and abstract thing unrelated to the need of the hour. The busy housewife confronts, we will say, a day of unusual annoyances and unforeseen demands. Her one maid is ill, or the old one has gone and the new one not yet arrived, as she promised. Johnny has upset the syrup pitcher over his clean jacket and Susie has burned her hand. The house has all fallen into disorder, as it has a way of doing now and then, and the mistress of this household recalls with terror the fact that her cousin with another friend will arrive on the four o'clock train for a two or three days' visit. However, yesterday's ironing is not done and the sprinkled and folded clothes cannot be left or mildew will gather. And to add to all these troubles she is quite conscious of not feeling well, herself, and her tasks seem hopeless. Should you, or I, my dear reader, bid her lie down and rest she would be indignant at the hopelessness of it, and I am quite sure we should be in her place.

Now it is not rest,—in the sense of turning her back on her chaotic affairs and betaking herself to bed in a dark room, that she wants; not at all; she wants that resistless current of energy that is generated only on what we may call the spiritual side of life. This potent energy is as infinite as the air and at any moment we may so relate ourselves to it—as the electric car relates itself to the storage battery—that we may draw from it. And how? "Lift up your hearts." Just pause for an instant to collect the forces into harmony. Let Susie put

Woman's Council Table.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF REST.

her burned finger in water and soothe her into smiles with a pleasant word. Explain to Johnny sweetly and serenely, how his carelessness has made extra trouble, and enlist his eager good will to avoid the mishap next time. Touch the right spring and see how quickly he will respond. Pause for a moment to realize that life is made up of the essential and the non-essential; that the essential things include the atmosphere of love and peace and sweetness; of some degree of thought and mental activity; and that immaculate housekeeping, however desirable, is bought with too dear a price if paid for by despair and drudgery.

To be the sweet, joyous wife, mother, and friend is essential; to have a clean and daintily ordered home is essential; but cleanliness and dainty living need not imply luxurious cooking and elaborate appointments. There is far more beauty in plain hems that economize time and strength in both sewing and in laundering, than there is in ruffles and embroidering. Take the extra time ruffles would consume and read the children a story, a poem, or take them for a walk. Furnish their minds with the beautiful, the noble things in life; familiarize them with good literature; with the photographs of great works of art in painting and sculpture—for if we dwell afar from cities, good photographs of the great works are the nearest approach that can be made, and teach them the great primary truth that *this* life, too, is the spiritual life; that they are spirits placed by God in bodies, which are their instruments, as it were, given them to use.

A very young child will understand the idea of the hand being the spirit's instrument to work with, to do good and useful things; that the feet are to carry the body about; the eyes, the ears,—all the organs given for certain uses and purposes. A child of six trained with these higher ideas will have had thereby his entire life set to a key of harmony. He can be taught to feel that the little crosses and losses, the accidents of the day, need not make him unhappy; but that to tell untruths, to hurt the feelings of another, to be angry or unkind—are very real troubles, and that these troubles he can

escape and grow away from, by thinking sweet and pure thoughts, and by always remembering that love and generosity are things his spirit needs, just as his body needs food, and sleep, and this trend of thought can be made habitual to the child; and when the mother has established in her home this atmosphere, she has solved the problem of rest. In harmony of thought, in pure and high purpose, lies that energy which re-creates life.

Physical labor is fatiguing just in proportion to the absence of thought, or the depressing quality of the thought. Rest from this fatigue comes very largely from a change of thought currents. It is a great mistake to fancy that one is only at work when he is doing something on the visible and tangible side. An afternoon on the lounge, or in an easy chair, or a hammock, reading is not unfrequently far more productive even to the busy housewife, than it would have been spent over the mending basket or at the sewing machine. By living high enough to catch the outlook, so to speak, one generates a certain degree of creative energy, which tides over work otherwise exhausting with little sense of fatigue. To receive this energy is to rest. Therefore the philosophy of rest is to bring one's self into receptivity to this infinite potency.

Just how?

One way is simply to sit down alone and silently, and lift up the thought to the divine world. To realize, quietly, the exceeding beauty of life as lived on the spiritual plane. Things have happened, perhaps, that are irritating, yet hold fast to the thought that one must banish resentment; must govern his thoughts as well as his acts by benevolence; that one must ever keep in his mind the ideal of the divine harmony. This habit of daily concentrating the mind on the divine qualities results in rapid acquirement of poise, exhilaration, and enduring strength.

"The spirit-world around our world of sense floats, like an atmosphere,"

says the poet Longfellow, and the poet's insight has discussed a literal fact. As we are primarily spiritual beings, we can receive of this infinite potency in which we live and

Woman's Council Table.

move and have our being if we are sufficiently receptive and harmonious. Life may be narrow from circumstances but it always may be deep and high. And touching this, one touches the best, and the freedom of the whole world in travel, culture, what you will, could give him nothing higher than this spirituality which may be achieved in the humblest home.

Again, another means of this best possibility of rest is through certain books; through special authors, aside from the general reading for information or for intellectual activity and culture. Among the great specialists for suggesting higher currents of thought are Emerson and Robert Browning. Matthew Arnold, too, is stimulating on the spiritual side, and the sermons of Bishop Phillips Brooks are unusual in a certain rich vein of immediate applicability to daily life. The writings of the mystics and poets are peculiarly conducive to this uplift of mind that reacts on the body, and produces that effect that we call being rested.

Indeed, it is impossible to treat this subject of rest from the physical side alone. It has a physical side, distinctly: involving not only repose and bodily inactivity, but the entire subject of hygiene as well: bathing, fresh air, exercise, sleep and food; holidays and vacations; trips and excursions; but restricting it to daily rest in domestic life it still remains more than half a mental rather than a physical problem.

It is a matter of leading importance to *know how* to rest. The subject has a two-fold aspect,—in the prevention as well as

the cure of fatigue. It is safe to say that fret, worry, and ill temper produce infinitely more exhaustion than work, alone, ever can do.

“A merry heart goes all the day!
Your sad one tires in a mile-a.”

The prevention of fatigue, then, lies in keeping the home atmosphere sweet and serene and joyous. The riches of life are in health, honor, and happiness. It is integrity that is valuable and not upholstery. It is gentle manners that are of consequence, and not appliances of luxury. We often see children made unhappy because their home is not beautiful and luxurious like their neighbors. Yet the best things in the world are those that money cannot buy, nor the want of it withhold. So let the atmosphere of the home be held to this pleasant and joyous note and the causes of fatigue are thereby largely removed.

When tired—rest. Remember that the life is more than meat, and that life is too sweet and sacred a thing to permit degenerating into a treadmill. Go and take a walk in the fresh air; run in and see a neighbor; throw yourself on the lounge with a charming book; swing in the hammock and dream, turn to music if you are musical, to poetry, to romance, to mystic thought, to spiritual aid. If one feels particularly out of sorts let him go and do something for another if it be only the writing of a letter, and at once a new current of activities will set in, and he will be rested, refreshed, even exhilarated. And ever may we all well hold in mind the wise maxim of Confucius,—“Keep in view the divine harmony.”