

Life a bane or a boom

Life means different things to different people, and so generalizations about life are almost always misleading for the simple reason, and every man's response to its call is determined but his own experience and temperament. A man who has suffered few mishaps in life, whose upbringing has been in healthy surroundings, who is fortunate in love and friendship, who has identified himself with some public cause or who cultivates a wide range of interests is invariably happy/ On the other hand there are bitter experience of life, deaths in the family and among friends, economic insecurity, frustration in live, failure to achieve anything substantial in life or experiences of life, deaths in the family and among friends, economic insecurity, frustration in love, failure to achieve anything substantial in life or excessive and morbid absorption in self-induced pessimism. Philosophers disgusted with the state of public affairs or with the ways of Providence or nature are always undergoing acute mental anguish which drives them at times to insanity or suicide. Others, Despite the spectacle of human filly or Divine indifference towards human affairs, can find a positive meaning in life and can participate in its varied activities with real zest. Some people are driven into despair by a minor disturbance in their daily routine, by petty vexations, by slight unpleasantness. Some can face even dire calamities with equanimity never allowing the smile on their face to disappear even for a moment. Happiness or unhappiness is, therefore, not a feature of life in any absolute sense. With some people, a melancholic attitude is merely a pose. They luxuriate is unhappiness. Melancholy is viewed by some people as a sign of intellectual sophistication, and happiness is regarded as a sign of mental immaturity. Some persons are haunted by the fear of death, sickness and old age, and they bemoan and transient in nature of beauty, youth and joy, while others are gracefully reconciled to whatever life brings them. Such variations are inevitable. We can neither create conditions of permanent bliss not make everyone happy. We can only closely study the causes which lead to misery and mental anguish and, so far as it lies within our power, to remove them.

The modern age is often spoken of as the age of anxiety. There is no warrant for the assumption that contemporary social condition make for grater unhappiness. Most of us have a nostalgic feeling of the past. Life in rural surroundings is often regarded as much healthier and happier than in towns. Those who hold this view forget the absence of civic amenities in villages, the painful toil of the tillers of the soil, their drab and monotonous existence and the natural calamities to which they are subject. Life can be cheerful or boring anywhere. The primary condition of a happy life is that there should be universal peace and freedom and that everyone should at least be assured of the basis conditions of civilized life. Material insecurity is most demoralizing. Unemployment destroys

individual dignity, impairs a man's self-confidence, created a feeling of profound frustration and disillusionment in him, makes him an enemy of society, wrecks his home or prospects of happy married life and gives him the feeling that he is a failure, a misfit, an unwanted thing. It drives him at times into crime, insanity or suicide. Society must devise an economic system which ensured full employment, fair wages and decent conditions of work and living. It must mitigate the sufferings caused by natural calamities. It must provide equality of opportunity so that none harbors any sense of injustice. Men become unhappy if they feel that their work does not bring out the best within them and does not fully engage their talents or if their work is of so exhausting a nature that it renders them unfit for the full enjoyment of leisure. Wealth provides no assurance of happiness in the absence of work. Even the richest man who can keep himself busy with all kinds of attractions and excitements feels thoroughly bored if he cannot have a settled occupation of an agreeable nature. Nobody can be happy if his country is riven by factions and threatened with political instability. His life is insecure because of prevailing violence or if the international situation is generally explosive. There have always been wars in the history of the human race and men have grievously suffered in consequence of human brutalities. But never before was the threat to the survival of mankind involved in war so grave. Human happiness is bound up with universal peace and freedom. Nothing causes so much discontent as the feeling that a man is not the architect of his own fate, that he cannot make his own decisions and that he is driven about against his will to preserve and promote the interests of a dominant party. Men under totalitarian regimes can never experience the joy that the free exercise of faculties provides.

Some people are suspicious by nature. They invite unhappiness by their old habits and wrong ethical standards. They suffer from persecution mania. They attribute their failures and disappointments not to their own limitations but to the machinations of their enemies. Their work does not receive adequate recognition and they suspect that a conspiracy is hatched somewhere to deprive them of their rights. They turn cynics and atheists by their grievances, however slight they are. They apprehend dangers which are either highly exaggerated or purely imaginary and they lose their sense of proportion and become mental wrecks. Men of common sense are common to most people, both men and women, and to groups of people. People are more easily influenced by feelings of hatred than by feelings of love. Fanatics, demagogues and dictators can easily secure a sizable following by exploiting the passions of the masses against some nation, race or community, a happy person always loves his fellow beings, rejoices in their good fortune and always wishes them well. Timid persons are forced to do many things which they dislike simply because they are afraid of antagonizing public opinion. It is, of course, a source of happiness if our actions meet with social approval, but one should always be prepared to stand by one's convictions rather than to acquiesce in what others believe. Bold spirits do not endlessly flout public opinion, and they never spend

sleepless nights worrying over what others are saying about them. Many people give themselves needless pain out of respect for as religious injunction which is irrational and based on superstitions. Most of us unquestioningly subscribe to a moral code which is so ascetic that nobody can live up to it with the result that we feel ourselves morally guilty and sinful whenever we seek pleasures of the senses. In this country a man's moral character is judged by what he eats and drinks rather than by what he professes and practices. We must evolve a moral standard which most people can follow, not a standard which is rational and based on maximum freedom for self-realization character, not the happiness of intoxication induced by excessive drink and use of drugs. Nothing is more foolish than the idea that perpetual holiday is a source of endless joy. Perpetual leisure is most boring. Boredom can be relieved only if one is engaged in purposeful activity, not by feverish pursuit of exciting but exhausting experiences. A man who seeks relief from boredom in drink and sex by becoming an insurable drunkard and sensualist.

If children are brought up in a congenial atmosphere at home in schools and in society, a great deal can be done to relieve misery and mitigate suffering and unhappiness. Our aim should be to produce citizens who can join with their fellow-men to create a happy race, to make this world a decent place to live in and to establish homes where wedded love and parental affection, combined with judicious care, discipline and training in co-operation give children the right to start in life. Those who cannot co-operate with others for common benefits, who isolate themselves from their fellow men and cut themselves off from the mainstream, of life, who are self-Centre, absorbed in themselves, interested more in taking from society than in giving it are always wretched. "A failure, neurotics, psychotics, criminals, drunkards, problem children, suiciders, perverts and prostitutes are failures because they are lacking in fellow feeling and social interest. They approach the problems of occupation, friendship and sex without the confidence that they can be solved by cooperation." In happy homes where the father and the mother regard marriages not as a means of sexual gratification or as a means of shelter, security and comfort but as a partnership for mutual happiness, the welfare of their children and the well-being of society and are fully conscious of their responsibilities, children will gain their first experience in co-operation an experience which will stand them in good stead throughout their lives. Pampered and neglected children tend to develop all kinds of complexes which stand in the way of a healthy and balanced development of personality. If teachers are intelligent and well versed in individual psychology, they can do a great deal to break their isolation and develop their cooperative impulses. If we study the problem of crime and analyse the causes which promote criminal propensities, we shall find that criminals are the products of an unhappy environment. Criminals are the wretched of creatures. They are cowards at heart who have not had the courage to fight for their livelihood or their ambitions but have taken what they believe to be an easy path, the path of escape. Society often fails to help criminals

rehabilitate themselves and regain the affection and esteem of their fellow beings by maintaining the traditional attitude towards them with the result that they never learn to cultivate social interest and be happy once again.

Life is what we make of it. It holds out infinite possibilities of happiness. Only this happiness has to be worked for. How can we be happy? First and foremost, we must take up work which is congenial to us, which brings about the best within us, which adds in some way to the enrichment of life. Income, of course, is an important consideration in the choice of a career but it should not be the only consideration because work is also a means of self-realization. Next in important to occupation is marriage. Married life would be a success if both partners take deep interest in each other and if there is perfect equality between them. Where one partner is dominant and the other subservient, perfect happiness is out of the question. There must be full co-operation between them for their own benefit, for the benefit of their offspring and for the benefit of society at large. Another factor contributing to human happiness is the ability to use leisure. Some people are bored to death when they have no profession work to keep them busy. This is a symptom of deficiency somewhere, of want of zest in life. Those who have multifarious interests, who make lots of friends and earnestly strive to make them happy, who believe in living at least as much for others as for themselves are always happy. Cultivation of hobbies is one way to relieving boredom. To the extent to which we can develop taste in sports, cultural activities and other matters of absorbing interest, we can take ourselves out of ourselves into the wider life of the community and forget our personal problems, our little worries, vexations and disappointments. Drink and drugs are no substitutes for healthy recreations which, apart from enabling us to utilize our labor will, add to our moral sense by stressing the lesson of co-operation. For the lover of books, the sources of happiness are infinite. He can explore the mysteries of the mind, wander into inter-speller space for a clue to the understanding of the origin of the universe, dissolve deep into the past to get a picture of how men and civilization have grown, go with a clever detective in search of the murderer or identify himself with the fortunes of the hero and the heroine in a romantic novel.

Lonely persons are most miserable. So are social outcasts. The best way of ending loneliness is to make an earnest attempt to identify ourselves with a public cause. Matters for public cause are never disheartened by the prospect of failure or the fear of persecution. They are animated by the consciousness that a worthy cause will, whatever the temporary rebuffs and setbacks. Ultimately triumph. Vain, pompous, egoistic men and women can never achieve the peace of mind so essential for happiness. Too often the world is indifferent to what they have done. They are hurt because the people do not sufficiently recognize their achievements. But public-spirited men who have dedicated themselves to the service of humanity in some form through membership of a political party, participation in a social

reform movement, identification with a humanitarian cause like eradication of disease and ignorance are always sustained by the conviction that their work has a positive value which nothing can impair or destroy. When a scientist discovers a remedy for a disease which has taken a heavy toll of human life, he experiences a joy which monetary rewards cannot give him. It has been said that a long-range view of history is always comforting. Every long-range view is a source of comfort. When we witness the rise of an unscrupulous demagogue to absolute power, or nations plunged in war, we tend to lose faith in man's rationality. When we see people in the grip of violent religious, racial and national passions and are appalled by the atrocities they commit on innocent men, women and children, we wonder whether the civilization and culture of which we are so proud is only a thin veneer that conceals our barbarism. But a student of history who surveys the achievements of mankind from the dawn of civilization to the present day will not only be struck with men's recurring follies but also by the spectacular advance that men have made through the centuries in knowledge, in religion and morality, in control over the environment. In our own life, we should not allow temporary rebuffs and disappointments to obscure our achievements over a long period.

The Indian ethical system provides the real basis on which a life of lasting happiness can be built: the ethics of the disinterested performance of duty. There is no failure in a life of detachment, no disappointment over non-recognition of merit. The life of detachment is not the life of a recluse meditating over the mysteries of the universe but of a man active in the affairs of the world, doing his duty, serene in his mind, in full control of his senses, conscious of the fact that he owes allegiance to humanity whose welfare is his religious duty. It is immaterial to him if the world is ungrateful to him, if he is not recorded according to his merits. If he is misunderstood, he is happy in that he has not failed in the performance of his duties. Death holds no terror for him. He is not a prey to any fears. A serene mind is a happy mind. Happiness does not come to a cheap hedonist who seeks it in food, sex, drink and drugs but to a man who has consciously done his work, who has injured nobody, done nobody any injustice. Duty involves effort. We cannot take happiness for granted. We have to strive for it. Nobody is born melancholy and nobody inherits a cheerful disposition. Happiness depends upon our social system and upon ourselves. Some people are, of course, more fortunate than others in the sense that the circumstances of their lives are less exacting and involve less tension or conflict, but affluence and power are not essential to happiness. In the case of some people it appears as if a malignant fate is bent upon blasting their lives. Only an incorrigible pessimist can say that such men constitute a majority. Such unfortunate men represent isolated or exceptional cases. For a great majority of people, happiness is well within their reach. What is needed is the determination to achieve it.