

CHAPTER XXI

RECREATION AND THE PROBLEM OF LEISURE

“ONLY in the modern city,” says Jane Addams, “have men concluded that it is no longer necessary for the municipality to provide for the insatiable desire for play. In so far as they have acted upon this conclusion, they have entered upon a most difficult and dangerous experiment, and this at the very moment when the city has become distinctly industrial and daily labor is continually more monotonous and subdivided. We forget how new the modern city is and how short the span of time in which we have assumed that we can eliminate public provision for recreation.”¹

The playground was the first and is almost the only recognition that wholesome recreation will only be supplied by the city itself. It cannot be left to private initiative or to commercial agencies. The playground takes the child from the streets and provides a proper environment. It relieves the parents of care and anxiety. Joseph Lee, of the Boston Playground Association, says:

“The thing that most needs to be understood about play is that it is not a luxury but a necessity. It is not simply something that a child *likes* to have; it is something that he *must* have if he is ever to grow up.

¹ *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, p. 5.

. . . The child needs a playground because his growth is through activity, through those specific forms of activity which his nature has prescribed; and because, accordingly, he will never grow up—or will grow up stunted and perverted—if he is denied those opportunities and objects to which his vital, instinctive and formative activities relate.”

The Growth of the Playground Movement.

The playground movement began to attract attention about 1900. By 1906 there were forty-one communities with supervised playgrounds maintained by public funds. In 1913 the Playground and Recreation Association of America received reports from 342 cities with 2,400 playgrounds under paid supervision and over 6,000 persons, exclusive of caretakers, who were making it their profession. The expenditure for the year was \$5,700,000, or a gain of \$1,500,000 over the year preceding. Within the past ten years something like \$60,000,000 has been spent by the various cities in the extension of the playground movement. This indicates the rapidity with which the idea has developed.

Provision has also been made for supervision. Recreation commissions have been appointed in many cities, with secretaries who give their entire time to the work, while trained directors or supervisors are employed by most cities. A number of States have passed laws requiring playgrounds to be opened in connection with the schools, while local, State, and national conferences have been held on the subject.

The Playground and Juvenile Delinquency.

Many, possibly most, of the offences of children in large cities spring from a wholesome and natural desire for play, a desire which cannot be satisfied in the city streets. Arrested for some trivial offence and brought in touch with the police-court, children take pride in their notoriety or the experience, or are hardened by contact with it. Twenty-five per cent. of the children brought before the juvenile court in New York were charged with disorderly conduct, which consisted frequently in playing ball, or "cat," or some other sport in the streets which is forbidden by law. The transition from these trivial offences to the graver ones is easy, and without doubt a large part of the juvenile offenders are led on to crime by the indiscriminate arrests and contact with vice through the police courts. Even the gang is a product of the misdirected play instinct.

Statistics reported to the National Education Association in 1910 by Mr. Clark W. Hetherington show that of 480 inmates of a juvenile reformatory from 75 to 80 per cent. "might have been saved an institutional career had they had normal play experience." It is stated by the Playground and Recreation Association that 80 per cent. of all offences against society are committed during the leisure time of the people.

The playground is an effective agency for the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Investigation in Chicago between the years 1904 and 1906 showed

that juvenile delinquency increased by 12 per cent. for the city as a whole, while in sections near the recreation centres it fell off 17 per cent., or a gain of 29 per cent. for the neighborhoods near the small parks. In the stock-yards district, where the population was very unstable, the juvenile lawbreakers arrested increased 44 per cent., with reference to the city as a whole.

“The making of a people’s park or playground,” says Jacob A. Riis, writing on gang life in New York City, “has been invariably followed by a decrease in ruffianism and gang violence. The boy would rather be good than bad; he would rather play than fight the police.”

Chicago Park Centres.

The playground can, however, only be used for a portion of the year and a few hours a day. Chicago has recognized the need for all-the-year-round recreation more generously than any city in the world. There are nearly seventy neighborhood centres in the city in addition to the school playgrounds. These include small parks and squares, public playgrounds, park centres, and bathing beaches. The movement dates back to 1900, when four playgrounds were opened in the congested districts. In 1901 legislation was secured authorizing the expenditure of \$2,500,000 for this purpose. The playgrounds range in size from four to sixty acres and have cost from \$40,000 to \$290,000 each, while the buildings erected in connection with them have cost from \$60,000 to \$100,000 each. The

annual budget for the maintenance of each centre runs from \$20,000 to \$30,000.

The Chicago park centres are the most advanced type of play centre yet developed. They are unique in the provision made for mothers, fathers, and children. They are people's clubs, including both outdoor and indoor activities. They contain separate gymnasiums for men and women, there are running tracks, wading pools, and courts for the children, with tennis-courts and ball-fields, which are converted into skating-rinks in the winter. The club-house includes provision for many social activities. There is a library and reading-room, with other rooms for clubs and small gatherings, as well as a commodious assembly hall for lectures, pleasure parties, dances, and neighborhood meetings. In connection with the club a lunch room or restaurant is maintained.

Upon the bulletin-board within the club-house are announcements of meetings, while trained persons direct the activities of the club in a proper way. There is no charge for anything in the clubs except in the restaurant, where food is supplied at cost.

Direction of Play.

Football and baseball games are played on the grounds, which are often witnessed by thousands of people. Team games are encouraged. An athletic and gymnastic meet is held every year for the older boys of all the playgrounds. Prize contests are held for children, with exercises selected to fit various ages. There are swimming contests, free

swimming instruction being given. Every effort is made to make the playgrounds genuinely attractive, not simply to children but to the older boys and girls, "whose lives normally," says Mr. De Groot, one of the Chicago directors of athletics, "are like volcanoes in action"; and he continues: "Playgrounds for this group must be large, properly equipped and presided over, not by a laborer or a policeman, but by an expert in the great and serious business of sport as the boy understands it. . . . Since the dominant interest in the life of a youth is play and not work, and since the best growth and development at this age comes from play and not from work, it seems that more attention should be given to an all-year playground service and that it should take into consideration the young working boys and girls quite as much as the children in the school."

A unique play festival was held in one of the parks, in which over a thousand children went through plays, games, and dances in groups. There were no prizes, the festival being carried through by the children for the mere pleasure of getting together and doing it.

In all the activities of the playgrounds, indoors and out, the educational motive is present. Frequent conferences are held; there is close co-operation between the public library and the park houses. Reading-rooms in these houses are equipped with well-selected collections of books, and there is free delivery service from the main library. The suc-

cess of this plan in opening the public library to wider use in cosmopolitan districts has led to the installation of branch libraries in various public schools.

The Public School as a Recreation Centre.

Within the last few years the public school has been developed into a recreation centre in hundreds of cities. The school can be used all the year round, at night as well as during the day. It can be used by adults as well as children and in the country as well as in the city.

The schools are used for educational purposes for but six or seven hours in the day, for five days in the week, and but nine months in the year. They lie idle in the evenings, the late afternoons, on holidays and Sundays, and are used to not more than 50 per cent. of their possible efficiency. To the school buildings the children are accustomed to come. About the life of the children activities of the adolescent and the parent can be easily grouped. The public school, with such changes as will be indicated later, is susceptible of being converted into an institution not unlike the recreation centres of Chicago and at relatively little expense.

The Growth of the Social-Centre Movement.

The school centre was first fully developed in Rochester, where in 1907 the people began to use the schools for public meetings, dances, gymnastics, and banquets; for the discussion of public questions and the consideration of their local needs. The board of education appropriated \$5,000 for

maintaining the centres, and in a short time a federation of schools was organized representing more than 50,000 citizens. The gymnasiums were opened in the evening for the use of adults as well as children. The kindergarten rooms were converted into libraries to which books were sent by the public library. The women were organized into clubs. Lectures were provided and local and State officials were invited to discuss public questions. Since that time the movement has spread to hundreds of cities, in many of which the schools have been remodelled to provide for the widest possible community use.

Changing School Architecture.

A recent publication of the division of recreation of the Russell Sage Foundation, by Clarence A. Perry, reviews the "Social Center Features in New Elementary School Architecture." A study of the plans of a score of cities shows that boards of education are consciously adjusting the public school to a variety of uses which in no way impair the building for educational purposes. Auditoriums are being added, often fitted with movable seats, so that the room may be used for dancing, dramatics, music, and receptions. Those in the newer buildings often have stages, and in some pipe-organs are installed. Roof-gardens are common accessories in the larger cities; baths have been provided and gymnasiums are made serviceable to adults as well as children. Inside playrooms are frequently included, and even ward schools are equipped with

regular gymnasiums. A school in Beverly, Mass., is equipped with a bowling-alley, and a Milwaukee school has pool-tables. Schools furnished with gymnasiums usually contain shower-baths in the adjoining dressing-rooms, while many of the new schools possess swimming pools. Many of the schools contain branch libraries, which are open in the evening. The rooms to be used by the community are usually on the ground floor or in the basement, so as to interfere as little as possible with the uses of the school for instruction.

New Uses of the Schools.

Manual-training and domestic-science rooms are included in many schools, equipped with benches, tools, and opportunity for manual-training work. The school kitchens are used for evening training in domestic science and make possible the holding of dinners and other functions. Many of the newer buildings are provided with lunch rooms. Probably the most perfectly developed type of school buildings are those of Gary, Ind.

Medical and dental school inspection, which is now carried on in most up-to-date school systems, has led to provision for special rooms for this work. Dispensaries are placed in many of the newer buildings, as well as rest rooms and laboratories. In Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Worcester (Mass.), and Chicago, rooms are set aside for polling-places, and in some cities political meetings are held in the auditoriums.

Of the school centre as an adjunct to the public

library, Doctor Charles E. McLenegan, the public librarian of Milwaukee, Wis., says:

“Another great advantage of this branch in the schoolhouse is that it gives every home an almost ideal means of communication with the library—and that is one of the unsolved problems in a large library—how the home may communicate with the library.”

It has been suggested that an employment agency be part of the extended activities of the school. Doctor John R. Commons, of the University of Wisconsin, says the schoolhouse should contain public employment bureaus which will take the place of the private agencies. “The schoolhouse,” he says, “is the natural place for labor exchanges such as exist in Germany and Great Britain. Here manless jobs and jobless men will meet: here the problem of demand and supply will be studied.”

The School as a Musical, Dramatic, and Art Centre.

The school is also being developed as a music centre. The old-fashioned singing-school was an outgrowth of the demand for community music, for folk singing, for which the modern social centre again makes provision. Choral singing has been successfully developed in many cities. In New York the People's Music League of the People's Institute uses the public schools for giving concerts, the organization of choral and orchestral societies, and the extension of musical training. Over one hundred concerts were given in 1914 and a half-

dozen volunteer orchestras were organized. These concerts are given with professional and amateur talent.

Some years ago the educational theatre was organized on the East Side of New York. A dramatic group was formed among the boys, girls, and wage-earners of the neighborhood, who gave selected plays. Classes were organized in dramatics and story-telling. After witnessing one of the plays, President Eliot, of Harvard, said:

“Here is this tremendous power over children and over fathers and mothers that ought to be outlined for their good. It is true that the dramatic instinct is very general and it can be used to put into the hearts and minds of children and adults all sorts of noble and influential thoughts; and that is the use that ought to be made of it. Think what it is for any child of ten or sixteen to learn by heart a great play of Shakespeare or some other noble artist. I have seen it among the children of my own family.”

The Educational Dramatic League, another organization in New York, uses the school auditoriums for the presentation of selected plays by school children and wage-earners. Nearly forty instructors train neighborhood groups in dramatic expression, and in the spring of the year competitions of selected plays are given by these groups. During the year 1914 over 1,200 persons were organized in these groups.

The corridors of the Washington Irving High

School, New York, were planned for the holding of art and other exhibitions, and during the year 1914 several creditable exhibitions were given. The city of Richmond, Ind., uses its schoolhouses as art centres and thus saves the expense of separate buildings, while the pictures are placed where they will most benefit the community. Half a dozen other Indiana cities have joined with Richmond to form an art circuit, in all of which cities the school buildings are used to house the exhibitions.

The Problem of Leisure.

Juvenile recreation is only a part of the leisure-time problem; for the hours of leisure are the formative hours of life. This is as true of adults as it is of children. Civilization, in fact, depends largely on the way the people use their leisure. We see this in ancient Greece, which produced an art, drama, literature, and philosophy that has enriched subsequent centuries. The culture of Greece was a product of the wise use of leisure time. The people met in the streets, temples, and amphitheatres, and distinction in the arts became the controlling ambition of the community.

Germany also officially recognizes the leisure life of the people. Cities build splendid opera-houses and theatres which are subsidized and maintained at public expense. Every large city has an art gallery and museum upon which great sums are expended. There are concert halls in which a municipal orchestra gives symphony concerts at an insignificant cost, while during the summer months

military bands attract old and young to the parks and open spaces, where they listen to the best of music in an orderly way. In consequence of this public provision for leisure the whole nation is being trained in the drama, in art, in music. Its leisure life is consciously moulded by the community.

The Commercialization of Leisure.

Under the individualistic tendencies of America leisure has been left to commerce. And commerce exploits it in the saloon, the private dance hall, the motion-picture show, the pool-room, and the theatre. Only an insignificant percentage of the population of a great city is reached by the public agencies, while at least 95 per cent. frequent the commercialized agencies. In New York there are 11,500 saloons, 800 dance halls, and 600 motion-picture shows, in which it has been estimated that the people spend \$100,000,000 a year. The commercialized agencies are not interested in culture; they are interested in profits. They have no concern for the people's life; they push their allurements; they connect them with the most profitable forms of vice in order to still further increase their profits.

The results are obvious. Investigations have shown that juvenile crime is largely traceable to the influences which surround children during their play hours. Men and women in the tenement have no other place to go than the saloon and the motion-picture show, and they, too, reflect the way they use their leisure hours. Girls frequent the commercial

dance hall, and vice is recruited from this source. The recent Chicago vice commission says:

“There are approximately 275 public dance halls in Chicago which are rented periodically to so-called pleasure clubs and societies or are conducted by individuals. . . . Many of these halls are frequented by minors, both boys and girls, and in some instances they are surrounded by great temptations and dangers. Practically no effort is made by the managers to observe the laws regarding the sale of liquor to minors. Nor is the provision of the ordinance relating to disreputable persons observed. In nearly every hall visited, investigators have seen professional and semi-professional prostitutes. . . . In some instances they were accompanied by their cadets who were continually on the outlook for new victims.”

All of these reasons point to the necessity for a much more serious consideration of the leisure-time problem by the city and largely increased appropriations for this purpose.

A Constructive Leisure-Time Programme.

Wisconsin has promoted a leisure-time programme, under the direction of the State university, on a much wider scale than any State in the Union. A university-extension department has been organized with centres scattered throughout the State, in which directors and organizers are located for the purpose of promoting university teaching. Instructors are sent out from the university, while selected lyceum courses and musical entertainments are also offered. Communities are encouraged to

open the schoolhouses as branches of the university, into which the people are attracted by neighborhood activities as well as by the offerings of the university. Classes in mechanics, electricity, and vocational work are organized in connection with manufacturing plants, while courses are given by correspondence in which those students who pass satisfactory examinations are entitled to credit for a university degree.

The motive of this work, according to the dean of the extension division, is to "carry the university to the people."

Through this plan a lifelong educational programme has been developed. The university is projected into every community in the State. The extension work is on a democratic basis, the aim of the university being to meet and co-operate with the people in their spontaneous interests. The schoolhouse is made an educational centre, not only for the conduct of classes and the distribution of expert advice and information from the university, but for the free discussion of live questions of local and general interest. A circulating-library department is maintained, which distributes books, magazines, and clippings, while package libraries are sent out to organizations or individuals free of charge.

Civilization and Leisure.

The leisure-time problem is a problem of one third of life and in many ways the most important third. It means more than recuperation from work; more than freedom from vice; more than the invig-

oration of the body or the preservation of health. It involves opportunities for education to those denied it in youth; it involves increasing the industrial, civic, and social efficiency of men and women as well as opportunity for change, variety, and training which machine industry has destroyed. If we would preserve and promote our civilization, the same official concern must be given to leisure that is now given to education; the same thought that is given to the work hours of the people.

And just as the coming of the city, with the close living of people, made it necessary for the community to provide for the supply of water as a sanitary precaution, just as it became necessary to install sewer systems, to provide police, fire, and health protection, so the metropolitan city, with its cliff-dwelling population divorced from the open fields, with its inadequate home life and the changing social relations, has made it necessary for the community itself to make provision for leisure. In a sense such provision is as important as is elementary education, for it determines the nature of the family life, it moulds the child and the adult, it shapes the character and morals of the people. Even the cultural life of a nation is a mirror of its leisure-time activities.

Summary.

Public provision for recreation is one of America's contributions to the municipal problem. No country in the world has promoted playgrounds, schools, public libraries, and other agencies as intelligently

as have we. Leisure is being recognized as a public problem, which affects not only the health but the morals and intellectual life of the people as well. In spite of what has been done, the leisure life of old and young has been left largely to commerce, which, through the saloon, the dance hall, and the motion-picture show, exploits the life of the people in its leisure time. New York City is developing a comprehensive programme of recreational activities, with the public school as a centre, in which music, the drama, and dancing are being promoted, while the State of Wisconsin has worked out a constructive educational programme with the State university as the centre and the public schools as the local unit.

Provision for leisure is coming to be recognized as just as much a necessary public function as provision for fire, police, and health departments, the supply of water, or any other traditional services of the city.