

IDLENESS

They say that idleness is a gift of the immortals and, indeed, in the serene and Olympic quietude of those who are known for their inactivity, there is something which gives them a certain similarity to the gods.

They say that work keeps man holy. This must be the origin of the old Spanish saying, "A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando," or "Pray to God, but work hard while you do it." However, I have my own particular opinion about this idea. I believe, in fact, that you can recite a short prayer while you are working your head off by pounding on an anvil; but a true prayer, a prayer without words, that will actually put us in touch with our Supreme Being through some mystical state, could never happen without having idleness as its basis.

Thus, idleness not only ennobles man, it gives him something in common with those exceptional beings who enjoy immortality and, no matter how often they speak against it, it is surely one of the best paths to follow in order to reach heaven.

Idleness is a deity that is praised by an infinite number of worshipers, but its religion is a silent and practical one, and its priests preach it by example; on days of sunshine and warm temperatures, Nature itself helps to support it and spread it with a truly irresistible persuasion.

It is well-known that the reward of the righteous is a great happiness that we will never be fully able to comprehend, or define, in any satisfactory way. The intelligence of man, dulled by his contact with matter, cannot grasp that which is purely spiritual, and this has been the reason that we all think of heaven, not as it is, but as we would like it to be.

I think of it as complete quietude, and as the first element of happiness; the emptiness around it, and the soul deprived of its three faculties (will, memory, and understanding): in other words, the spirit, centered within itself, and taking pleasure in the contemplation of its own existence.

This is the reason that I cannot agree with the poet who once said:

Heureux les morts, éternals paresseux!

The inactivity of the corpse, taken from the grave and lying comfortably on the ground, is not something I find completely displeasing; it *could* be my perfect ideal if, in death, I were able to be aware of my repose. Could it be that when the soul is separated from matter, it will come and hover over the grave, enjoying the tranquility of the body it once had inhabited?

If this were so, I would certainly become a supporter of the well-known, and often misused phrase, "The repose of the tomb," a favorite theme of sad and sorrowful poets, and the constant aspiration of misguided souls. But death..., "Who knows what there is after death?" Hamlet asked in his famous monologue, which nobody has answered yet. So let's go back to our idleness, which I believe is a positive attribute.

The best proof that idleness is an instinctive aspiration of man, as well as one of his greatest blessings, is that the way this crazy life is organized it is not easy to put it into practice, and to do it is so risky that it is often compared to being in a hospital. And that the world, as we know it today, is the exact opposite of Paradise, is also so obvious that it needs no proof. But the sky, the light, the forests, the rivers, the flowers, the mountains,

all of creation, tell us that idleness is something that is good. Why has this been denied? Man has eaten the forbidden fruit; he wished to know, and now he has no right to be idle.

“Get to work, get a move on, make an effort, if you want to eat!”

This is just as bad as if they were to tell you: “Work that pump, sweat, and toil, just to deserve the air you breathe.”

How many times, thinking of the blessing that was lost because of the original sin of Adam and Eve, I have said to myself, parodying Don Quijote in his famous speech about the Golden Age, “Oh, the blessed years, the blessed days, when man did not know time because he had not yet experienced death and was able to appreciate the joy of idleness with the fullness of his being.” We fell from the throne where God had put us and are no longer the lords of creation, just part of it; a wheel in the machine, somewhat important, but still a wheel, and condemned, therefore, to rotate and to engage with others, grinding and clanking, as we try to resist our inexorable destiny. Sometimes that heavenly deity, Idleness, the best friend of the happy man, would pass by our side, and we would be enveloped in an atmosphere of languor; and it would sit down with us and speak to us with the divine language of unspoken ideas, so that we would not even have to make the effort to open our lips in order to speak. I have often felt it float over me and pull me out of the world of activity for which I am so badly suited. But then, its passage through the world is always short-lived; it brings us the sensation of bliss in order to make us feel its absence more acutely. But how chaste, how mysterious, how full of sweet humility, the idleness of man always is!

Just look at all the activity rushing through the world like a reckless Bacchante, giving an ugly, material form to its ideas and its dreams; and then, look at the greedy merchant who puts a value on them and sells them for the price of gold. Our Sacred hopes, our purest sensations, our wildest fantasies and strange ideas, all the mysterious children of our spirits, are hardly born when they are grabbed by matter and then, when they are naked, trembling, and ashamed, are exposed to the ignorant multitude.

I would like to think for myself, enjoy my pleasures, and weep for my sorrows, while wrapped in the arms of idleness, and not have to entertain anyone with an account of my secret thoughts and feelings.

We are traveling from a previous eternity of repose, to another future eternity, passing through a bridge, which is this life. So why get excited by the idea that we accomplish something by working!

I have seen a drop of water through a microscope, and in it were some barely visible insects whose existence is so short that in an hour there are several different generations; and as I saw them moving, I have thought: “Does this bug think it is doing something?” In order to accomplish something in this life, it would be necessary to place a cover over the sky, so that the vision of its immensity would not make us aware of how little we are. I want to be consistent with my past and my probable future and travel over the bridge of this life that connects those two eternities, as calmly as possible. I want...; but there are so many things I want that, by enumerating all of them, I could make a list that would stretch from here until tomorrow, and that is certainly not my intention.

I remember an occasion when I was seated on top of a hill from which I could see the entire length of the immense horizon. My spirit was filled with a voluptuous tranquility and, as motionless as the rocks that rose around me, I felt like I was one of them: a rock that thought and felt, as I believe all things in the world think and feel; and this permitted

me to understand the joys of quietude and perpetual immobility, the supreme idleness which is exactly what we idlers dream of; and I resolved to write an ode and speak of its unknown pleasures to the restless multitude.

But then I was faced with a dilemma, because when I was ready to write it, I realized that the best hymn to idleness is one that was never written, and never would be written. The person who is capable of doing that would contradict himself by writing it.

And I didn't do it. At this moment I recall what I was thinking that day: I was thinking of standing up in praise of idleness, in order to create converts to its religion. But how was I going to convince with words, if I contradict them with my example? Impossible.

So the best proof of the strength of the beliefs which I am professing is to stop now and go to bed. It's a pity that I didn't write this while I was lying in bed! Then, all I would have had to do is to rest my head, open my hand, and let the pen fall out!