

## In Praise of Idleness

March 27, 1923

I would like to be idle today: perhaps it is because the weather is particularly fine, or because carpenters are working in the courtyard, or because the sun is shining, or because of a thousand other reasons: I would like to be idle.

I wouldn't want to go out anywhere, for going out is not idling; nor read, nor sleep, because neither the one nor the other is idling; nor amuse myself nor rest, because idleness is neither relaxation nor amusement. Idleness, pure, perfect idleness, is neither a pastime nor time's extension; idleness is something negative: it is the absence of everything by which a person is occupied, diverted, distracted, interested, employed, annoyed, pleased, attracted, involved, entertained, bored, enchanted, fatigued, absorbed or confused; it is nothing, a negation, an intentlessness, a lack-purpose, I don't really know how to put it: in short, something perfect and rare.

First of all, idleness is not wasting time; I could waste time if, say, I ladled water into a sieve; but when I am idle, I certainly don't do anything like that; I don't do anything useless, because I simply don't do anything at all.

In the second place, idleness is not the mother of sin; indeed, it can't be a mother at all, being completely barren. It yearns for nothing; idleness which yearns is not being idle, because it is doing something, because it has some sort of goal.

In the third place, idleness is not laziness. Laziness is neglecting to do something which ought to be done, but instead of doing it, a person prefers to loaf. To be idle is to do nothing at all while at the same time wanting nothing at all.

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Nor is idleness resting or repose. Anyone resting is doing something useful; he is preparing for future work. Idleness has no relationship whatsoever to past or future work; it is not the result of anything, and it looks forward to nothing.

Idleness is not enjoying a little relaxation, either. Basking in the sun, blissfully closing one's eyes, purring like a cat, all these activities can be very meaningful, on occasion, or at least pleasant; and pleasantness in itself is close to being meaningful. Idleness is totally devoid of meaning;

it calls for neither relaxation nor pleasure; quite simply, it calls for nothing at all.

Relaxation is a slow, ever-flowing current which gently laps and cradles you; resting is a dark, calm pool in which the angry foam and sediment from evil or intense moments are drifting away; laziness is an inlet covered with green algae, slime and frogs' eggs; but idleness is a standing-still. It has neither rhythm nor sound; it is fixed, it does not progress. It gives life neither to weeds nor slime nor mosquitoes. Water — lifeless and transparent. ~~Though it stands still, it~~ <sup>but</sup> acquires no warmth. It stands still ~~and~~ <sup>but</sup> does not become overgrown. It has neither direction nor content nor flavor.

I would like to be idle today; indeed, I want to do nothing.

I want — what, as a matter of fact, do I want? Nothing; for idleness is exactly that. To be like a stone, but without weight. To be like water, but without reflection. Like a cloud, but without motion. To be like an animal, but without hunger. To be like a human, but without thoughts. To look at a piece of white paper, empty and clean; not to write, but to look until it might (on its own initiative) fill itself up with little black letters, words, sentences, phrases, from top to bottom: a first page, a second and a third; and then, then not to have to read it, then, with the amazing obviousness of deep and genuine idleness, not read it through at all, but to turn one's eyes instead to the first fly of spring, which is crawling on the window; to look at it but not to see it; and then — see here, when does idleness need some sort of program? For it is always possible to find something not to do, not to see, and not to follow up.

And when a person is through idling, he arises and returns as if from another world. Everything is a little alien and distant, distasteful, somehow, and strained; and it is so. . .so strange, that. . .a person has to take a little rest after being idle; and then after resting, lounge around for a while; and then relax a little more, then devote himself to a certain amount of inactivity, and only afterwards is he able to recover his strength and begin to do something completely useless.