

THE "PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS"

BY F. W. FITZPATRICK

EVERY American is entitled to it, countless thousands believe in it, and all of us fondly and glibly prattle about it, this pursuit of happiness. Yet, in all the things we believe and are taught, there is nothing sillier, so utterly hopeless and misleading as that "Pursuit."

You may pursue wealth and honors and fame and mayhap achieve them. They may then afford you some gratification, tickle your vanity, enable you to do this or that thing you have wanted to do, or cause you to inflate a bit and parade around as a superior personage, one who has arrived, achieved, conquered, and by his own unaided efforts, one who will receive much adulation, sycophantic flattery. But not Happiness. None of those things make for happiness. Indeed, they often bring in their train unexpected and greater unhappiness, jealousy, added responsibilities and carking cares.

It just so happens that in my many years of rather lively contact with mundane affairs, I have rubbed up against, been intimately acquainted with men of great wealth, exalted position, and vast responsibility, and poor as I am and inconsequential, there isn't a blessed one of them I would trade places with, not for five minutes. Happy? No. Generally most unhappy, careworn and soured on life.

Pursuing Happiness is about the most futile job one can undertake. You never catch-up in that pursuit, never even get in sight of that much desired goal; but paradoxical as it may seem, the moment you give up that pursuit, you begin to stand some chance of realizing what happiness really is and of getting a bit of it.

Pursuit means an intensely selfish desire to acquire, and anything selfish, selfish in the slightest, bars happiness. The two don't mate, are never found together. The former if in control will always

chase the other out, and, if the latter be in control, the former never even approaches.

I am not quibbling upon terms, but I might as well start off by saying that many terms greatly in use are mis-terms, give the wrong impression and should be changed. This Pursuit of Happiness for instance, it is utterly silly as well as misleading. As silly as our understanding of unselfishness. A mother's love is very beautiful and all that, and people rave over it as being so unselfish. Get down to brass tacks, however, and there is nothing quite so selfish. A mother will face death, anything for her child, coddles it, watches over it, and all that. Why? Because it is her's, the apogee of selfishness. If a woman displays this great affection over another child, ah then, that's truly an unselfish devotion most admirable.

Observe how those things work out, too, it is interesting. The woman who is literally crazy over her child, super-affectionate, lavishes it all over him, usually spoils him utterly and he grows up a selfish (inherited at that) unbearable cad who brings great unhappiness upon that doting mother.

So with other great affections, "the Grand Passion" the French rave about. Songs and poems apotheosize the great lover, the crazy lover who cannot live without his dear one, the lad who is ready to climb walls, break fences, and make a general nuisance of himself in the "pursuit" of his loved one. He may achieve her, but it is a selfish desire, his thoughts are all for ego. It will be grand fireworks for a brief while then, invariably, unhappiness and quabbles. Show me two young people who love each other but whose chief thought and consideration is a real desire and intent to make the other happy and I'll bet a good hat on their happiness and a generally cheerful marital atmosphere ever after.

Among nations, in families, in business, everywhere, what is it that causes dissention, fuss, rows, unhappiness? Always and generally only Selfishness. Will the world ever learn that and will our schools ever include a course in fighting selfishness in their curriculums? I wonder.

Forget the pursuit of happiness, forget ego all you can. Think of the other fellow, consider him in whatever you do. Adopt a code of living. Just a short one, "Think about the other fellow." It covers every contingency, works perfectly in every case, every time, does the good old Golden Rule. And one can't think of a place, an occasion, a time or a circumstance where and when that rule of life does not work perfectly. If you foolishly want and can skip

off with another man's wife, just stop and think of the other fellow, how would you feel in his place? Besides, you can be sure if you do "carry on" as planned you are putting our neck into the tightest noose you can imagine; six months and you will wish yourself at the bottom of the lake, yea, or deeper still!

If you have been with friends at home, cards, a good time, a jolly evening and are leaving at eleven or past, your tendency perhaps is to gabble at the door, loud laughter, much good-nighting and so on and start off exhaust wide open and a toot of the horn; just think of the other people in the block or the apartment trying to go to sleep and you will go away quietly, that is, if you mean to be decent. You are on a bus or other public place and want to smoke, you know the smoke and ashes may blow into another fellow's face; stop and think of that and you will refrain from smoking just then, always of course, if you really mean to be decent. On the road, in crowded places, at home, in the office, just think of how what you are going to do is going to effect the other fellow and you will do the right thing, again supposing you are decent at heart. Oh, of course, if you have a congenital quirk and swineish tendencies that you would rather keep than be decent, naturally you will stay swineish all our life. The only relief there can be for society at large is that some day you will croak, and join the other swine in permanent retirement.

Try this thinking of the other fellow for a while. By and by you will find that you not only refrain, abstain from doing things that will hurt or bother him, but you will find yourself going out of our way to share things with him, helping him—intelligently.

I emphasize intelligently, for there is much harm done in the world with unintelligent, promiscuous, vicarious, and a lot of other charities, where the giving is done generally to salve the giver's feelings, to advertise himself, boom his candidacy for something or other; all selfish giving for giving sake. Too often it not only isn't worth a hoot to the giver but is harmful to the recipient, pauperizes him, helps him lose initiative, a desire to help himself and all that.

But a little intelligent sharing with the other fellow is helpful in our education. Even to giving one's coat away if the need be urgent and the other's best interest served. Mark you, however, it can't be with the thought of "Here my good fellow, take my coat, I have several better ones at home," or "How generous I am, for am I not giving that poor sick man my coat!" You still have the ego complex if that sort of thought pops up first. But if, spontane-

ously the thought jumps at you: "Why, you poor chap, you are cold and hungry and sick, here take this coat, you need it more than I and besides, I can perhaps get another some how," why, bless you, you are right on the road to Happiness. You are not pursuing it; it is coming graciously, serenely and of its own motivation to you!

Keep on working at it, the elimination of selfishness, whenever you feel it or find it tear it out; learn to control emotions, desires, to be in complete mastery of yourself, not with the assurance of the braggart, a false front, but with becoming modesty and a real desire to please, and you have taken another big step. Oh, no, I am not preaching a holy anchorite form of life, fasting, long hours of prayer, flagellations and all that sort of flub-dub, a holiness with which I have scant patience. What I have in mind is the forming of enough strength of character to keep you from becoming mere creatures, victims, slaves of habits that may and can become pernicious.

For instance, do you men want to smoke? Well, smoking in moderation is not bad nor harmful; smoking an old pipe or smoking cigars or cigarettes one after the other all day is bad, destructive and silly. I know a chap who has the idea down fine. He smokes but one cigar a day after dinner, in the evening. Now then, if he just goes naturally and easily about it, gets his cigar and lights it casually, well and good, but if he hurries to the box, is anxious for that smoke, then, bang, there is no smoke that day. Do you get it?

Mentioning holiness suggests another detail of selfishness I haven't blamed bit of use for, the monk or nun in cloistered seclusion, praying long hours, mortifying the flesh and so on. It is supreme selfishness, praying and fasting for all the world, yes, but the thought is uppermost that it all certainly redounds to the salvation of their own little souls. My hat is off to the nun or monk out teaching in the slums, off preaching to the savages, taking no end of chances upon his or her own self all for the greater glory of God and the betterment of the world as they see it. There is a difference.

Well, with some sympathy for other people, real unselfishness, the soft pedalling of ego, then the reasonable control of one's self, his emotions and appetites, one has gone a long way, he has two points in his favor. Next, he should cultivate a love of work as against the most natural human weakness for ease, a laziness that grows if given half a chance and makes slothful, useless, parasites of us. And last but not least he will find the other three points helping him toward attaining the fourth, a complete mastery of one's also most natural tendency (aided and abetted by every condition, exam-

ple, temptation of today) toward a constantly increasing yearning for pleasure. A great majority of our youth of today lives but to enjoy one continued round of pleasure so called, parties, outings, theatres, a continuous performance.

Things of that sort pall upon one rapidly, they surfeit, and new amusements must be devised to replace them. It is a constant striving for new emotions, "a new place to dine," an obsession, a restless round of foolish stuff that softens the mind, weakens the will, absorbs every waking moment, unnerves one for anything else and eats one up. It is often called a "nervous breakdown"—seldom from overwork!

With these four controls of one's mental operations at work one soon finds himself enjoying not a fatuous, complacent, foolish self-satisfaction, but a gracious sense of content, a taste of happiness, that grows with the years of effort and soon becomes real life and gives one that Peace and Happiness that truly passeth understanding, secure and lasting and that no pursuit has ever yet come within a thousand miles of achieving.