

THE HAPPY LIFE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649599127

The Happy Life by Charles W. Eliot

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CHARLES W. ELIOT

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New York

Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.

Publishers

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Published September, 1905

D. B. Updike, The Merrymount Press, Boston

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The Happy Life

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The Moral Purpose of the Universe



Y subject is "The Happy Life." I address here especially young people who have passed the period of childhood, with its unreflecting gayety, fleeting shadows, gusty griefs, and brief despairs, and have entered, under conditions of singular privilege, upon rational and responsible living. For you happiness must be conscious, considerate, and consistent with habits of observing, reading and reflecting. Now reflecting has always been a grave business,

"Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;"

and it must be confessed that our times present some new obstacles to a life of thoughtful happiness. Until this century the masses of mankind were almost dumb; but now their moans and complaints have become audible through telephone, telegraph and rotary press.

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The millions are now saying what the moody
Happy poets have always said:
Life

“The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies,
All that we wish to stay
Tempt, and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright.”

The gloomy moralist is still repeating: “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

The manual laborers of to-day, who are much better off than the same classes of laborers have been in any earlier times, are saying just what Shelley said to the men of England in 1819:

“The seed ye sow another reaps,
The wealth ye find another keeps,
The robes ye weave another wears,
The arms ye forge another bears.”

They would adopt without change the words in which that eminent moralist, Robinson Crusoe, a century earlier, described the condition of the laboring classes: “The men of labor spent their strength in daily struggling for bread to maintain the vital strength they labored with; so liv-