

DE FELICITATE

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De Felicitate by William F. Miltenberger

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WILLIAM F. MILTENBERGER

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WILLIAM F. MILTENBERGER

*With compliments of the author
who recently had the privilege of
reading "A Religion With Hearing"*

*Washington D.C.
Oct 24th 1914*

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In their dissertations on happiness the ancient philosophers taught that wisdom applied to human life is the art of making our sojourn in this world as pleasant and as agreeable as possible, and all those who seek wisdom will readily agree that one of its chief advantages is the power and ability it confers to go through life with a minimum of pain and suffering. What we will endeavour to do here is to present a sort of résumé or synopsis of the teachings of the old philosophers on that all-important question and try to give the kind and patient reader at least a vague idea of those thoughts and principles which by their beauty, soundness and great practical value have so highly impressed us. We do not claim novelty or originality for what we will write, for certainly the bulk of what is herein stated has been said over and over again for many centuries; nor do we expect that the system of philosophy herein exposed will have any alarming effect upon the turbulence and variety of conduct and opinion so fashionable to-day, for, as Voltaire says—

“Nous laisserons ce monde aussi sot et aussi méchant que nous l'avons trouvé en y arrivant.”

When we inquire into human actions, simple or complex, trivial or important, we find in the overwhelming majority of cases that the men performing them do so with the hope or belief that the result of their effort will be to increase their happiness and satisfaction. Some may go to the trouble of denying that they will in any way benefit from what they are doing; plead earnestly enough that they are working for the happiness of others, etc. Whatever truth there may be in such assertions we need only bear in mind that happiness, human happiness, is always the goal in view, however distant it may appear and whoever may be the individual for whom it is particularly intended. It may well be stated therefore, as a general proposition, that happiness is the object most commonly sought for in the life of the average man.

There are of course a great many different conceptions of happiness; almost as many as there are individuals seeking it; but philosophy and indeed the practical experiences of life prove to us that only a few of those conceptions are capable of realization. The great majority are unquestionably false and erroneous. They are wrong, first, because they are valueless, in so far as they can never be realized; secondly, because they are detrimental to men

in so far as they misdirect human effort, thereby causing a waste of energy; thirdly, because they are incompatible both with the natural order of things and the limitations of human potentiality. It is the constant neglect of these teachings of philosophy and experience that is in a great measure responsible for the social unrest and dissatisfaction in the world to-day.

All men desire happiness; we take that for granted; but a great many, by fostering strange and puerile illusions as to what is really important in life, by refusing to recognize the limitations of human power and the immutability of natural law, create within themselves a state of permanent dissatisfaction much resembling a chronic physical ailment, which grows constantly in intensity, and, by deteriorating their faculties of perception and judgment, decrease considerably their enjoyment of life. Goethe says rightly that:

“He who seeks to free himself from pain always knows what he wants; he who looks for better than he has is as blind as a man with cataract.”

During war, pestilence, famine, or other great national affliction people have neither the time nor the inclination to worry over anything more than the necessities of life,

such as food and clothing, and their intellectual and physical powers are directed and restrained to what is eminently practical and indicated by commonsense; but in times of "peace and prosperity" we see the pursuit of happiness take the most grotesque, ludicrous and extravagant forms. People get feverishly excited over the idea of "Happiness for All." Wild theories are advanced by persons who have apparently nothing else to do but to think them out, and society as well as the individual are subjected to all sorts of ludicrous experiments. Quacks, charlatans, impertinent and vainglorious "scientists" and politicians, who know nothing about the subjects they handle except perhaps that they might "pay," babble forth unceasingly and expound with fire and eloquence a rich variety of boring platitudes and pretentious absurdities and there is an enormous amount of useless preaching, organizing, canvassing and especially COLLECTING. The law, also a victim of the common listlessness, strives to increase its territory and with arrogance and impudence assumes a jurisdiction over man to which none but his Creator has any claim. People who may lead perfectly peaceful, innocent and happy lives are robbed of time-honored rights and privileges under the pretext that they must not have a chance to abuse of

them. The minds of children are burdened with weighty but, to them, useless problems which they only half understand, and they are exhorted to bear in mind all kinds of imposing and extraordinary duties which, for the most part, only serve to make them forget the simpler and more natural ones, such as those due, for instance, to their parents and relations. Men and women who actually have the elementary comforts of life as well as health and remunerative occupations go around with anxious and tired faces, nursing their discontent, thinking only of the future, never of the present, sacrificing the best part of their lives to some fanciful idea, never doubting for an instant that they will always have the health, to say nothing of life, to enjoy what they have persuaded themselves they "must have." With the view of *something better* constantly before them they go through life in a way that recalls the donkeys in Italy whose owners, to make them go faster, tie to the backs of the animals a long pole with a bag of choice feed secured to the end of it in such a way that the feed is always directly in front of the donkey's nose but just beyond his reach. In their efforts to overtake the desired morsel which seems to be retreating before them the animals develop exceptional speed. The idea may be quite profit-