

Hobbies

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No doubt there are people who have no hobbies at all; but these people obviously are freaks of nature, just like the left-handed, saints, vegetarians and other singular phenomena. The normal person, however, is usually characterized by a somewhat less noticeable lunacy which is called a hobby; for instance, he collects stamps, raises cacti, passionately gathers mushrooms, breeds tropical fish, plays chess, pursues short waves in the ether and the like. I'm talking about people in general, but I would rather talk only about men; women less frequently, indeed too infrequently, become addicted to the passions of collectors, devotees and amateurs in general; whether it is because they are less sportive than we, or because their interests are more personal than matter-of-fact and more universal than narrowly specialized, is another issue. It is enough for us to state that for every female hobby there are ten masculine ones; when the Lord directed Noah to bring into the ark "two of every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort," He no doubt spoke as man to man, that is to say, as collector to collector; after which He turned from Noah to his wife and ordered: "And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten."

Every proper hobby is made up of two components; the first is sentimental; it is simply a fancy or even a sort of love for a thing. A person breeds tropical fish because he likes them, or collects butterflies because he finds pleasure in their mysterious beauty. But let us not overemphasize this sentimental factor; the additional and more powerful component of every hobby is a typically masculine factor, the desire to be an expert. No one becomes a stamp collector only because he likes stamps, but because, by means of this collection, he is attaining a certain specialized knowledge and putting into practice certain collectors' axioms. A man becomes a collector or a devotee because he wants to be a specialist in something

that he himself has chosen. It is not enough for him to be a passionate hunter; he wants passionately to be an expert and a specialist in game-keeping. I would say that a hobby is the male instinct for game-keeping manifesting itself in the area of play. For a hobby continues to be a hobby only to the extent that it remains a playful and private pleasure that a person allows himself. You know somebody for ages; suddenly you are taken by surprise to discover that he collects china or devotedly raises pigeons. A person does not talk about his hobbies, ordinarily, perhaps he is even a ^{bit} ~~little~~ bashful about them; certainly he is not terrorizing the neighbors because of them.

A genuine hobby can be an affair of passion, but it cannot be an affair of principle. As soon as we practice it on principle, it is no longer our own private affair; for principle is recognizable by the extent to which we want to enforce it on those around us. Granted, philanthropy can be our hobby, in that we practice it quietly and for our own pleasure; but if we are philanthropists on principle, we begin publicly to preach and to organize and to demand that the whole world fall in with our philanthropical ^{agenda} ~~program~~. This, then, is the difference between a hobby and a mania: a hobby remains play, while a mania is terribly serious and principled. For instance, we can't keep our political opinions to ourselves or let them be merely our own personal concern; nor do we shorten long evenings by quietly occupying ourselves — and only ourselves — with our ^{personal} ~~own~~ views on the national economy; as soon as something becomes involved with our principles, it's beyond help and we are obliged to menace our neighbors with it, in order to convince them, enlighten them, and bring them around to our side.

From this you can see just what sort of boon to humanity it is, that so many human interests and passions remain only hobbies.

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