

# Vacation

By BRO. AUGUSTINE SKEHAN, O. P.



HERE is the lure of vacation time calling you this summer? The possibilities are countless. Perhaps it is to the shores of the booming ocean. If so what delights await you there! Endlessly, the heaving sea cascades upon the sand tossing up a crisp breeze mixed with its salty spray. All day long it tumbles in to greet you, to beat a soothing rumble in your ears, to put the sparkle in your blood and tempt your eyes to strain their powers in the sheer prodigality of open space. An answering surge wells in one's breast as he beholds the vastness of the sea and sky; some faint suggestion of the depths of God seems to play elusively just within, or rather, just beyond the reach of one's perception.

Or instead it may be the lofty mountain altitudes that beckon, up near the clouds where shaggy forests redolent with the piercing aroma of dusky firs spread a velvet mantle over rocky heights. Here new energy awaits us. Keen air insistently demands mastery over our lungs. Cool nights shut down tight around our blankets when soundless eventide has put the sun to bed. Light dawns like a dash of cold water and mocks the sluggish mistiness of the lowlands. What vigor, what exhilaration awaits us here! What soothing quiet smooths away all the jumpiness of our city-frayed nerves.

Others seek out the lovely borders of some little inland lake. There small craft invite our skill; fish steal away our bait—sometimes once too often; and water seems domesticated. It plays with us and lets us play with it. It is not majestic nor fearful here; it is close and friendly. Children heedless in their amphibian romp may dash in and out of it the whole day through. And how beautiful at night! The placid sheen twinkles like a robe of a thousand diamonds in the light of the summer moon.

Or does the summons come from a rough cabin cached in the untamed woods where the polish of city etiquette is barked against the scraggy trees; where trout leaps playfully in the stony brook which gurgles just beyond yonder clump of scrub. Here is the haven for the man who loves to rough it. The sport of playing the plucky fish, sizzling one's own bacon over a crackling fire, brewing coffee never known in man-made cities, soaking up the odor of the smoldry fire, getting comfortably dirty with good clean dirt, watching the bird in the nest—and

game along the barrel of one's rifle; these are the joys of the woodsman.

Instead of these, it may be the open road which leads us on so invitingly, white and hot yet none the less alluring as it yawns ahead above our motor's hood. What lies beyond the crest of that next mysterious hill? We take it with a rush, and then at a delicious rate drop down the winding, weaving ribbon of a road as it eases us into the hazy vale below. Adventure always lies ahead. New lands to conquer, new vistas through which to swirl to the throb of our trusty motor. Each day's journey finds us weary, but with a weariness of the pleasant kind. Weariness that courts deep sleep, and tricks nature into rejuvenating all our sluggish cells. Here is a treat to sate our wanderlust, to overtake our pent up restlessness and dust all humdrum cobwebs from our brain.

These are but a few of the possible vacations that beckon. Each man casts about and finds his own, each of us soon discovers the haunts that most appeal to him, the exploits that best satisfy our hunger for the venturesome. But whatever it be, and wherever it be each variety of vacation has its own peculiar delights, each repays in its own particular way. Every true vacation is a tonic with incredible restorative powers. It is the cure for the evils of our modern life of industrialism and commerce. Vacationing is an institution which has come to stay. In calmer eras when life was not the hurly-burly that it is today, men could pursue their tranquil existence without these interims of diversion. But then existence was not the nerve-trying grind that it now is. The uniquely mechanical character of modern life may be likened to some malevolent genius who racks the nerve fibres of his victims by the incessant torture of raucous noise. When summer comes the exodus begins. Millions snatch what respite they can from this high-pressure existence. Factory as well as office, store as well as school pour out their throngs in successive quotas. In the face of these modern conditions, few will condemn vacationing.

Yet like all good things, it suffers abuse. Its universality and necessity have not prevented distorted notions of its true character from springing up in the minds of many. Vacation must not be a mere haphazard undertaking. It involves its own particular duties and obligations; here as elsewhere, we must act with deliberation.

Once in my grade school career, I recall, all of us in the upper grades were assembled to hear what a grave gentleman in a swallow-tail coat had to say to us. It occurred along near the end of the term when summer vacation was but a few days

from our reach. This unprecedented meeting was more than mystifying to us. In the course of the proceedings, we found that the gentleman in question was the owner of the large estate adjoining the school property. On the nearest corner of his grounds, situated but a short distance from our school, stood a substantial brick building used as a carriage house. The previous year, it seems, when the last day of the term brought freedom, some exuberant young enthusiast in a frenzy of joy had smashed his ink bottle upon the convenient walls of the solemn carriage house. The splotch made an ugly mess. To forestall any recurrence of so untoward an event, the grave gentleman appeared before us upon this occasion. Very fairly and gentlemanly he laid the case before us. He appreciated our joy, he sympathized in our exultation, but he also called attention to the fresh coat of red paint upon the walls of the venerable carriage house. He encouraged jubilation, but he mildly suggested outlet in some less objectionable direction. Needless to say, the evident justice of his words struck home and they had been so dispassionately and considerably delivered that umbrage was impossible. In short—if the brand of paint he used was durable—I am sure that his carriage house stands even to this day glorious and untarnished in its pristine red.

The whole incident is rather characteristic. When vacation comes we are all more or less like thoughtless youngsters just released from school. The wish to dash out to celebrate our liberty is uppermost in our minds. Without giving much thought to serious duties, we are bent on having our fun; we seek the maximum amount of pleasure attainable, too frequently ignoring all cost other than the monetary one. Perhaps then, a few days before our vacation time begins, we too may profitably let reason play the grave gentleman to us and point out a few of the more serious features that even playtime involves.

A vacation means an intermission of our usual employment and generally includes the substitution of some recreational activity in its place. It means renewed strength and a refreshed outlook on life gained through change of scene, change of occupation, and the establishment of new contacts with our fellow men. But besides this, a vacation, for too many, implies heedless freedom not only from ordinary employment, but from all responsibility as well. And at times this occurs to an extent that renders it almost abandon. Vacation, it is true, connotes a departure from our ordinary surroundings, an escape from our accustomed round of work, and in a certain sense it may mean even an escape from ourselves, but there are certain limits beyond which even vacations cannot take us.

Our ordinary business duties may be temporarily held in abeyance, but never those of our spiritual welfare. To a certain extent we may relax, and amid new and temporary surroundings change ourselves, becoming young again, slipping from our shoulders the sober weight of years to play the easier for a few short weeks or more, but under no circumstances may we change our standards of conduct. Right is always right and wrong is always wrong. Religion and morality never go on a vacation, but they are always on duty wherever we go on ours.

The Ten Commandments, the laws of the Church, the norms of true Christian living are just as binding in July as in January, just as cogent in the country, at the seashore, or in the mountains as at home in the city. Remember the indelible mark that baptism has imprinted upon the soul. Once a Catholic always a Catholic. Of all religions, the Catholic religion is not a garment of convenience which can be put on or taken off to suit every whim or every change of weather. It is a sad sight to see large placards bearing the legend: "Closed for the Summer," on many non-Catholic churches, especially in the large cities, during the warm months. It is by no means a rare occurrence. But it does not, it cannot occur with the Catholic Church. The service of God admits of no more suspension than the service of meals.

These religious obligations must be taken into consideration before the vacation is planned and provision for their fulfillment must be foreseen. If they are left until too late, insurmountable obstacles may render their observation physically impossible. Catholic churches are now plentifully scattered abroad throughout the land. With ordinary care in selection and without any sacrifice of variety of choice, one can today easily select a summer resort where a Catholic church will be within attendance range. For the traveler, the difficulty is even less pronounced; large cities are everywhere and every policeman knows the way to the nearest Catholic church.

A word of commendation must be said, in passing, of the truly spiritual method in which some choose to spend part of their vacations. The growth of laymen's retreats during the summer has reached inspiring proportions in this country. Many of the large cities have their havens of solitude and spiritual restoration situated in natural beauty spots adjacent to the city suburbs. New York saw and enthusiastically embraced the great work of the late Father Shealy, S. J., at Mount Manresa. This "spiritual country club" on Staten Island is now one of the great religious power houses of the country. With more than two thousand retreatants each summer drawn from the busy

city of New York it shows what a great attraction a vacation spent spiritually can have even for our busy business man. A similar undertaking has met with phenomenal success in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. On a magnificent one-hundred-and-seventeen acre estate situated twenty-two miles from the old Quaker city at a place called Malvern, three-day retreats are given throughout the whole summer. Although the Malvern establishment has been open since 1922 only, the number of retreatants has leaped to a total well over twelve hundred yearly. Similar things are being done on a smaller scale in other of the large cities. In many places, the different religious communities, such as the Passionists in Boston, and the Trappists in Kentucky and Rhode Island, are conducting laymen's retreats within their own walls.

Nor does this situation confine itself to men. Surprisingly large numbers of our young women in the cities—clerks, stenographers, bookkeepers, or whatever they may be—find time during part of their precious hours of freedom to slip away to one of the many quiet Sisters' convents where short retreats are continually in course. Here in these secluded cenacles they find the truest kind of re-creation.

Perhaps upon first mention, such a means of spending part of one's vacation seems preposterous, but the growing popularity of the practice not only among men but even among young women argues an underlying attraction in the face of which impromptu condemnation on the part of the uninitiated counts for little. Men who have endured office confinement for many months, girls who have kept up the steady grind unremittingly since the previous summer might readily be expected to seek vacations of unbroken idleness. The fact that so many can find time for a short retreat augurs well for the spiritual condition of our city Catholics.

But even for those who are not prepared for such a strictly spiritual excursion, vacation must not lack a degree of spiritual flavor. A man goes on a vacation to better his condition physically and mentally. But in the long run the price he pays is exorbitant if he taxes his spiritual welfare in the transaction. The man of small soul forgets this. For him the ocean is merely the background for the boardwalk, the mountains, no more than a rostrum for luxurious dancing resorts, and camping means lounging in comfortable wicker chairs on the porch of some great railway hostelry in the Yellowstone. Such a man enjoys himself. He is having a "bully" time in a physical way, but he forgets that he is destined for greater things. Life must be seen in bigger terms than animal welfare, and the man who starves



out the spirit is unwittingly robbing himself in a fearful way. We want our vacation to bring us happiness; we hope that the sweet taste of these pleasant days will linger with us throughout the whole toilsome year until the next oasis is reached. But the only enduring tranquility, after all, is the peace of the soul. With it any suffering is endurable; without it no pleasure can be sweet. And of all men who may expect true peace of soul, may the Catholic who has just spent a pagan vacation?

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## TO A GRADUATE

*By BRO. NICHOLAS WALSH, O. P.*

"So run that you may obtain." I Corin., ix, 24.

"Onward" be thy watchword,  
With firm heart and pace,  
So turn you to the future  
And bravely run your race.

The roads of life are many  
And try unwary youth,  
But heaven guides the runner  
Who seeks the road of truth.

Then "Onward" be thy watchword,  
The way before thee lies,  
And many are the runners  
But one must win the prize.