

THE LOTUS EATERS OF SAN FRANCISCO

WHEN I first met a group of Lotus eaters I thought they were all crazy. I was a hard working plodder myself, fresh from an eastern city, where I learned my alphabet of regard for money, regard for time and such things that seemed unknown terms to my friends Mary and John, to whom I had come with letters of introduction.

Mary and John and their friends were always saying "they hadn't time," yet their definition of time was hopelessly vague. Mary and her friends, Lily and Margaret, who occupied the adjoining apartment to hers, were all alike in their disregard to all things I had thought essentials of a well ordered life. They would leave their breakfast dishes unwashed, their floors un swept, the piano undusted and the furniture in disarray, while Mary would sit down on the unmade bed to evolve a new hat out of two old ones, or Lily would try over a new composition that a pianist had given her the night before, or Margaret would go off for a car ride to the beach.

"We can do the dishes any time, Anne," Mary said to me when I made some remark about lack of system in house keeping, "but I have an inspiration for a hat," and Lily said, "I just feel in the mood for music," while Margaret, rapidly getting into her street clothes and whistling a bar of a popular song she had heard at the cafe last night, said, "Oh, you poor Anne—don't you know that the beach is only nice in the morning? Nobody will call now to see the dust. Don't you want to come with me? I've only car fare for one, but we can walk back."

They were all cheerful. John lay abed until noon most days, and had his breakfast when Mary and the children were finishing. I thought he was lazy, but he explained that he saved money that way.

"You see I only need two meals" a day. Combine breakfast and lunch and save food and gas."

Their Only Saving

It was the only way, then, that they did save money. I never saw such improvident people. When John got ten dollars for a sketch he did for an advertising firm, he took us all—Mary, the children, Lily, Margaret and myself—to dinner at a French restaurant. There was nothing left for car fare when we had finished the cafe noir, and John had tipped the waiter, but they were all absurdly joyous as we walked home.

The next time it was \$20, and as they had paid the rent the day before and given the butcher something on account Mary said we must spend the twenty on a motor trip. "Anne has never been to the beach resorts, John," she said, and though I disclaimed my desire to see those celebrated places we were all bundled into an automobile about 11 o'clock that night and did the round of the resorts. I am free to confess I enjoyed it. It was a novel experience, speeding in the dark and rushing from one place to another, hearing the darbies sing in their raucous voices, dancing to the music of the piano players, and riding home at daylight, the air so fresh and sweet smelling.

But we had hamburger steak for dinner that day, with onions, and no salad or dessert. However, after awhile I began to enjoy the Lotus eaters' manner of living. There was a variety to it that I had never seen in any other land.

It was Lily's admirer, an idle youth who occasionally wrote articles for the Sunday supplements of the dailies, who christened John and Mary and the girls, with the friends of like temperaments, "the Lotus eaters." They had objected to the term "bohemians" as applied to themselves.

"We pay our bills—when we get the money," said Mary, "and the Murger people didn't."

"Bohemians are not what they used to be, in the days of Ross Jackson and Dan O'Connell," said John's friend, Louis.

Louis, by the way, was a lawyer, who got a case once in a while, usually a contingent fee, which he "hocked" in advance. "Bohemians are different nowadays. They think themselves bohemian because they can eat pumpernickel and sardines without gulping at the oil, and can manage two steins of beer without getting dreary. Bohemians are the idle rich, who go to Sanguinetti's and the cafes and pretend they are hilarious."

"And therefore we are the Lotus eaters," said the idle youth, who answered to the name of "Jim," not by any means his right name, which had several christian fronts and a long surname of aristocratic sounding.

Then he lay back in his chair, watching the smoke roll from his cigarette curl about his handsome head, as he quoted:

In the afternoon they came onto a land in which it seemed always afternoon. And deep asleep he seemed, yet all awake And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

All things have rest. Why should we toil alone? We only toil, who are the first of things, and make perpetual moan.

Let us alone. What is it that will last? All things are taken from us and become Portions and parcels of that dreadful past. Let us alone. What pleasure can we have To war with evil? Is there any peace In ever climbing up the climbing wave? All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave In silence, ripen, fall and cease; Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream, With half shut eyes ever to seem Falling asleep in a half dream.

We have had enough of action, and of motion we Doubt to starboard, sail'd to harbor, when the surge was seething free. Where the willowing monster spotted his foam fountain in the sea.

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind, In the hollow Lotus land to live and lie reclined On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind.

Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than tell the shore.

Thou labor in the deep midocean, wind and wave and car; Oh, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

Mighty nice verses, aren't they, kid? "Yes, Jim, they just fit our case," drawled Margaret, "but I have some other verses that I like to say sometimes, when coin is scarce and bills many. Did you ever hear the poem that has the refrain, 'O'er the Hills Lies Spain?' That poem has given me comfort many a time when I've had the blues."

"Saved you from the gas route, do you mean, girle?" "Nonsense!" No true Lotus Eater ever thinks of gas routes. We are too optimistic.

"O'er the Hills Lies Spain"—that's right. There's a gude time comin'." We all laughed. In Lotus land everybody laughed, I found, for laughter to the men and women both was better tonic than one could get at a drug store—and cost nothing, which was well.

Louis had a "tick" at a cafe, whose law business he attended to, and he often took the whole bunch down and charged the dinner on his account. He was always well dressed and he explained this fact by the one that he paid his tailor, too, in legal advice. Another friend of John's, an accountant, also had a "trade" account at a French restaurant, where he and his wife frequently gave charming little dinners. He kept the books for a Chinese merchant and Mrs. Francis

yourself or one of your intimates, and then the other person knows he has found a brother and caps your story with one on himself. That's how the Smiths came to relate some of their hard up experiences in New York. Margaret was telling us how she was awfully hungry one morning, having paid out her last dollar for a room, when she first came to San Francisco from her southern home.

"I just simply couldn't stand it," she said, "and having had no dinner and being nearly a stranger here I knew I must get my breakfast by my own efforts or just die. So I went into a restaurant where I had eaten once or twice and knew one waiter. I had not been niggardly with my tips, and I was pretty sure he would remember me. I told him I was temporarily broke, and if I could order a meal and he would trust me that once I would bring the cash in as soon as possible.

Margaret had been saving up for weeks to buy herself a smart tailor gown, and we wondered why she never bought it. Lily explained, and made us promise not to say anything about it to her friend.

"You see, Margaret knows a woman who had a chance to get some work in Portland. She is a widow with one child, and no one to help her in this world, and the place meant everything to her future. Margaret found out that she had not the fare north, and she went out and bought her a ticket with the money she had saved up for her gown."

I found they were always doing things like that. They thought nothing of it, either. It was just a matter of course to be generous and kind.

The two girls had many admirers, but they were mostly of the impetuous kind. When Jim came to see them and suggested that they "go somewhere," they would first ask him how much money he had. If it were three dollars they would say, "Let's take the whole bunch and go to one of the cheap cafes," or they would spend the money in a little feast and we would all be invited to eat in the girls' rooms. In the long run, the Lotus Eaters seemed to prefer their home parties to going out to the cafes, delicious little feasts nicely served and eaten in comfort. The women would don kimonos and the men remove their starched collars on warm nights, and the sounds of music and revelry would float out the open windows, making the less favored inhabitants of the house envious—frequently envious.

When there was no money to buy food for their happen-in guests they had ways of getting refreshment. I remember one night a professor, a visiting celebrity, came to call on John. Louis brought him and did not telephone beforehand. Probably he did not have the necessary nickel for the phone. There were but two bottles of beer in the company of eight, and it did not enliven them, particularly as the professor was a monologist. "Dear, dear, we must make him up," whispered Mary to John, "but what can we do? Let's see how much money we can manage among us all."

The Lotus Eaters think the man or woman who has not had ups and downs has missed a good deal of life. I did not think so then, but I have come to agree with them.

They were familiar with pawnshops, were my friends. They thought it nothing to "hock" their valuables. Sometimes they got them out in a few hours; sometimes days passed, and sometimes for months the interest mounted up. And alas! sometimes they got them out not at all. They were too kind hearted to hang on to a diamond or a watch when one of their number was in need. For instance, when Lily got an engagement to sing at a concert and had no long gloves to put the finishing touch to her evening costume, and nobody had the price to lend, Mary went out and pawned her one diamond ring so that Lily might wear proper gloves and not have to give up her engagement.

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Providing the Spread

Unobtrusively, Mary canvassed her friends. She secured some dimes, but she was equal to the emergency. Margaret and Lily and myself were sent to search our several cupboards for empty flasks, beer tickets and bottles. Mary, who gathered from those receptacles, and from Margaret's kitchen sufficient bottles and tickets to make the price of one large bottle and some lemons. The janitor's services were begged to carry a suitcase containing the load to the neighboring house where they were disposed of with profit to us, and from there was a dime left for him, he said. "But we had a good one the next day," laughed her husband. "My letter came from home, with a big check, and we blew ourselves at Sherry's."

The Lotus Eaters were not extravagant in tobacco. They preferred the kind that was packed in small sacks and that is rolled in brown papers. I heard Jim say one day, as he turned a solitary dime in his palm: "I have not decided whether to buy a fresh sack and some papers or have a shine. I can't get both, and so it's heads the sack and tails the shine." It fell tails, but I noticed he did not get the shine.

One day a very smart dame came to see Mary, just at lunch time. There was not much to eat in the cupboard, but Mary knew she must ask her caller to lunch.

"I know what I'll do—I'll send Tot"—her little girl—"to the butchers. We owe him something, but he surely can't refuse her—she's such a dear."

It seemed a dubious experiment, but Tot was properly dispatched with a note, stating that some French chops would be acceptable. Mary was trembling all the time she was engaged in brilliant converse with her caller, for the child was a long time returning. Finally Tot appeared at the door of the living room and beckoned her mother. I was in the kitchen preparing a salad when mother and child entered.

"The idea," said Mary, reading a note the little girl handed her. "He writes 'I would like to have you send the cash back by bearer.' Isn't he an insolent wretch? I'll never buy a thing there again. However, he sent the meat, thank goodness!"

But Mary did continue to trade at that same butcher's after she had settled her bill. The insolent wretch was the most convenient butcher in the neighborhood, so the incident of the impudent note was forgotten.

The bill collector is popularly supposed to be minus the saving sense of humor, but surely even the most severe of them must appreciate the irony of dunning for an overdue account while at the same time soliciting future pat-



THEY THINK THEMSELVES BOHEMIAN BECAUSE THEY CAN EAT PUMPERNICKEL AND SARDINES WITHOUT GULPING AT THE OIL

The Doings of a Peculiar Tribe of the Indefinite Land of Bohemia, as Told by One of Their Number

Margaret found attached to the door of her room one morning when she returned from her walk to the beach, a card bearing the scrawl, "We are tired chasing after this bill. Will you let us know when you intend to pay it?"

Margaret was chagrined, for she thought one of her society piano pupils might have read the billet doux. She thrust the offending card into her wastebasket and wrote a telling note to the head of the firm, telling him what she thought of such discourteous tactics. Then she opened her mail and began to laugh.

"Aren't they funny?" she said. "Here that same firm begs to announce that it has removed to its downtown quarters, and desires my further patronage. I wonder whether they mean cash or credit?"

What I thought the worst feature of the makeup of my friends was their lack of ambition, steady ambition and continuous work. Mr. Jones, one of Lily's newspaper friends, was writing a play. It was really a strong play, as he read us parts he had done. But when he had written as far as the sec-

ond scene of the second act, he told us he found he had no more typewriter paper, and not a shred of copy paper. "I looked around but could find nothing to continue on, and my inspiration vanished," he said. "So far as I know he never wrote another line on it."

Jim wrote excellent short stories, and I urged him to send them to an eastern magazine. "Can't," he replied, "have no stamps."

"Well, haven't you? Why didn't you take some of the money you spent when we were at the cafe the other night and buy stamps?" "Oh, I haven't time."

Oh, time—time—time fugues in Lotus land, but not in hard work. The excuse of the clever ones for not doing anything worth while was that they didn't see how they could be foolish enough, at their age, to write, or paint, or carve, anything that they were not sure would turn out well.

"There are so many good books written—why should I write what may prove to be a very poor one?" "Or, 'I think I can paint a great picture, but I am not sure. There are plenty of better artists than I who have painted failures—why should I add one to the number?'"

That was the general answer when they were urged to try for a niche in the temple of fame.

"Why don't you go back to the stage again?" I asked Lily, who had accomplished some very promising work in a stock company before she came to San Francisco. "Oh, I haven't time."

Lily, by the way, spent most of her time—she had a small income that insured her against poverty—in walking with and talking to Jim and Louis and their train, or in reading endless novels which the idle ones discussed at length after each reading. Sometimes she passed her time trying over new songs.

"I might go on again," she vouchsafed after a pause, "if I could get into vaudeville. In stock you have to work so hard to get any kind of a place. I don't see the use of studying a new part every week if you never get a chance at the leads. Now, in vaudeville it's easy."

"How easy?" "Oh, you can work a few weeks and then if you don't like it you can take a rest if you wish—and you've made enough money to keep you while you rest."

The Lotus Eaters, men and women, seemed to abhor what they called "steady jobs."

"It makes one grow old and stupid to sit at a desk all day," said Jim, when it was suggested that, as a preparation for the role of benedick in the future, he take a regular position on a morning paper. "And what's the use, any way? Lily doesn't care to marry me for years and years, she says, and I make enough now for my simple needs."

Some of the way with them all. No need to work unless some vital necessity presented itself.

Some of them invested seriously in lottery tickets and counted hopefully on becoming rich all in a night, as it were. John was one of these. He and Marie had planned an extended motor tour of Europe on his expectations from the monthly lottery tickets. Their children bragged to their playmates about the Shetland ponies and other delightful things they confidently expected to possess "some day."

What struck the outsider was how largely about what they "meant to do," but in the meantime they did nothing at all, so far as my observations extended. I thought Louis' pet name for the group that Jim designated by the poetical avowed posthumus. He was a purpose. Louis called himself and the rest "the educated bums." Perhaps they were that to a certain point, but as Mary had said, they paid their bills at least—when they got the money.

Called them the "idle poor" while I was an outsider; when I became an insider I looked at them from a more rose colored viewpoint. If they were idle and poor, they did work on occasions and their work was of the best quality. They put their heart into their work as they did into their play.

What struck the outsider was how perfectly happy the "idle poor" appeared, but they said themselves that they were of a verily darkly indigo beneath their careless, care free exterior.

"Why," said John, when I voiced my comment on his wonderful exhibit of eternal cheerfulness, "everything worries me and the boys as much as it does the avowed posthumus. But we say to ourselves that it can't last forever—over the hills lies Spain, you know. See? The rich, the real rich envy us our freedom from carking care—"

Let the world slide, let the world go, A fig for care, and a fig for woe.

But we are only apparently heedless. We have minds, my dear Anne. We think, but because we can not do what we wish to do—because we are the great names for ourselves, wear fine clothes and all that—we try to stave the desire. Are you on, Anne? Quote to me from your friend Alfred, who was not one of us, by the way, for he worked too continuously and produced too much—All things have rest, why should we toil alone?"

Why should we? Why? I have written in the past tense, but the Lotus Eaters of San Francisco are very much alive. I and my friends belong to but a small group of them.



WHILE MARY WOULD SIT ON THE UNMADE BED, TO EVOLVE A NEW HAT

Some Famous Freak Ships

COUNTLESS attempts have been made to build sea going ships which will remain stable in high seas. Many curious looking craft have actually been built and tested, but the more conventional shape of hull has in the end been adopted for the great liners. The jointed steamer Connector, which was launched in 1853, actually consisted of four sections of hull, connected with flexible joints, so that the steamer, in a rough sea, moved with an undulating movement not unlike a snake. Her decks and masts were constantly changing angles. She is said to have proved entirely seaworthy, but slow and hard to steer, and the form was abandoned.

A remarkable cigar shaped boat was launched in 1866, the Ross Winans, at Millwall, for the Imperial yacht club of St. Petersburg. Her screw shaft was on the axis of the hull, and there was a propeller at each end. It was launched on a specially constructed cradle, but proved to be no more than an exceedingly interesting toy. A curious twin hulled steamer, the Dacey, was launched in 1873 for the English channel service, consisting of two distinct hulls, connected by girders. The paddles worked between the hulls, which were 35 feet apart. The steamer proved to be steady in a high sea, but the form was not so successful as to encourage the building of other boats.

The Bessemer was still another experiment on this line and was provided with a cabin suspended in a great well in the hull of the steamer. It rested on pivots fore and aft and was supposed to remain in a vertical position when the ship rolled. It was steered by hydraulic power. The theory of the boat was that while the hull might roll violently in a high sea the cabin would swing in a normal position or nearly so throughout. The ship made the first crossing of the channel in one hour and a half, the sea remaining so calm that the machinery was not brought into use. On reaching the dock at Calais she collided with the pier, sustaining serious injury. A similar device was tried on a small yacht, the Cecile, later. It was equipped with an oscillating tank regulated by hydraulic power. It was claimed that this device reduced the rolling of the ship by at least 50 per cent.

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