Chapter XVII

TRADITIONAL WAYS OF SPENDING LEISURE

Some of Middletown's waking hours escape the routinization of getting a living, home-making, receiving training in school, or carrying on religious or communal practices; in contrast to more strictly marshaled pursuits, such hours are called "leisure time," and this precious time, quite characteristically in a pecuniary society, is "spent."

The manner of spending leisure is perforce conditioned by the physical environment of the city and by the rest of its culture. Its location in the flat ex-prairie known as the Corn Belt precludes such variety of activity as cities adjacent to mountains, lakes, or forests know; Middletown, according to a local editorial, "is unfortunate in not having many natural beauty spots." There is rolling country to the south, but no real hills nearer than one hundred miles. Equally distant to the north are "the lakes," large prairie ponds scattered through flat farming country. A small river wanders through Middletown, and in 1890 when timber still stood on its banks, White River was a pleasant stream for picnics, fishing, and boating; but it has shrunk today to a creek discolored by industrial chemicals and malodorous with the city's sewage. The local chapter of the Isaak Walton League aspires to "Make White River white."

"This Corn Belt . . . is not a land to thrill one who loves hills, wild landscape, mountain panorama, waterfalls, babbling brooks, and nature undisturbed. In this flat land of food crops and murky streams rich with silt, man must find thrills in other things, perhaps in travel, print, radio, or movie." ¹

Middletown people today enjoy a greater variety of these alternate other things than their parents knew a generation ago. The lessening of the number of hours spent daily in getting a living and in home-making and the almost universal habit of the Saturday half-holiday combine with these new possibilities

for spending an extra hour to make leisure a more generally expected part of every day rather than a more sporadic, semi-occasional event. The characteristic leisure-time pursuits of the city tend to be things done with others rather than by individuals alone; and except for the young, particularly the young males, they are largely passive, i.e., looking at or listening to something or talking or playing cards or riding in an auto; the leisure of virtually all women and of most of the men over thirty is mainly spent sitting down. Its more striking aspects relate to the coming of inventions, the automobile, the movies, the radio, that have swept through the community since 1890, dragging the life of the city in their wake. Yet these newer forms of leisure must be viewed against an underlying groundwork of folk-play and folk-talk that makes up a relatively less changing human tradition.

Middletown has always delighted in talk. The operation of its business as well as of many of its professional institutions depends upon talk; honored among those who get its living are those puissant in talking. The axis upon which the training of its children turns is teaching them to use language according to the rules of the group and to understand the talk of others, whether spoken or written. Talking is the chief feature of its religious services. Much of its leisure time it spends in talking or listening to talk.

The habit of thinking no occasion, from an ice cream social to the burial of the dead, complete without a speech, is nearly as strong as in the nineties when, on a characteristic occasion, it took no less than seven speakers to dedicate a public building:

"The evening's exercises were begun by placing Rev. O. M. T— in the chair, Rev G— then delivered a very fine prayer and was followed by the regular address of the evening by Mr. T—. He was succeeded by Mr. J. W. R—. Then came Glenn M—, Charley K—, Richard M—, and George M—. Mrs. P— then delivered a short address, after which the meeting adjourned."

The dedication of two new buildings at the local college in 1925 included in its morning, afternoon, and evening programs six formal "addresses" and five other "talks." Indeed, as the author of The American Commonwealth pointed out forty years ago, "there is scarcely an occasion in life which brings forty or fifty people together on which a prominent citizen or a stranger . . . is not called upon 'to offer a few remarks.'"

And today, as in the nineties, the oratory of the speaker is nearly, if not quite, as important as the subject of his speech. "No matter what it's about, there's nothing I like better than a real good speech," remarked a leading citizen in 1924. In 1890 it was not necessary to announce the subject of a "lecture" to draw a crowd; "Rev. C. R. Bacon of W— will deliver a free lecture at the Methodist Church Wednesday night. . . . Everybody invited" ran a characteristic announcement in the 1890 press. Another minister was invited to repeat his lecture on "Sunshine." "The lecture has been delivered here before," said the press notice, "and yet so well pleased was the audience that the church was well filled to hear the eminent divine a second time." The relative unimportance of lecture subjects today appears in the civic clubs which are kept alive week after week by an endless succession of speeches on almost every subject from Gandhi to the manufacture of a local brand of gas burners for coffee roasters. One of the most popular speakers frequently paid by Middletown to talk to it is a woman travel lecturer described by the local press as one who "delights in superlatives and whose fluency of expression has won for her an enthusiastic group of admirers in this city." "No subject is prescribed for him," continues Lord Bryce in the passage cited above; "... he is simply put on his legs to talk upon anything in heaven or earth which may rise to his mind."

If the subject of the address is one with which the hearers are unfamiliar or upon which they have no fixed views, they frequently adopt bodily not only the speaker's opinion but its

*Cf. Ch. XIX for a discussion of the basis of person-to-person association around which these activities are built.
weighting of emotion. It is not uncommon to hear a final judgment on "the Philippine problem," "economic fundamentals," "the cause of cancer," or "the future of the white race," delivered with the preamble, "Well, I heard —— say at Chautauqua [or at Rotary] two years ago. ..." Heckling is unknown; people think with the speaker; rarely do they challenge his thought.

Changes are, however, apparent in this complex of speech habits. Speeches are getting shorter; the long, general public lecture bringing its "message" is disappearing as a form of entertainment. At the Farmers and Knights of Labor picnic in 1890, the feature of the afternoon was "an address lasting two hours" to a "great crowd." This sort of thing would not draw a crowd today. "A large and cultured audience" no longer "crowds the Opera House" to hear "a polished gentleman of pleasant presence and happy manner, thoroughly at ease before an audience," deliver a lecture at once "eloquent and humorous, logical, and pathetic" on the subject of "Nicknames of Prominent Americans," "Milton as an Educator," or "The Uses of Ugliness." The humorous lecture, so popular in 1890 when the great Riley-Nye combination rocked the Middletowns of America, has almost disappeared today. Likewise have all but vanished the heavy crop of moral and religious lectures by visiting ministers and denominational college presidents on "That Boy," "Strange Things and Funny People," "Backbone," "The

4 One such popular speaker told Rotarian: "My friends, we've been asleep as a nation! But we are waking up. We always have waked up in time. We've been in just as bad holes as any of the nations of Europe, but there is always this difference, we always wake in time. ... That's a characteristic of us Anglo-Saxons. Babylonia went into a hole—and stayed there. Rome went down—and never came up. Greece—swept away. Spain went down, and we don't see her getting out. But we somehow always do and always will!" And the Rotary Club cheered him to the echo and went home to bring his wives to his evening lecture, the school authorities sending special word for all teachers to turn out. At the evening lecture, speaking on "The Eagle and the Oyster," the speaker lauded the American business individualist as the eagle and decried the radical and socialist as the "colony-hugging non-individualist." According to an enthusiastic business class citizen, "He showed how some things we don't think much about are really socialism creeping in. He said that all these attempts to regulate wages and hours are a mistake—getting away from the law of supply and demand. It is just the sort of sound logic that puts you back on your feet again."

5 The prominence of oratory as well as this docility of the audience is probably not unrelated to the authority of the evangelical Protestant preaching tradition in the community.

Trials of Jesus." The secularization of lectures and lecturers is marked and includes the increasing supplanting of such lectures as the above by short talks to club groups, more and more of them talks on specific subjects to specialized groups such as the Advertising Club, Poultry Raisers, Bar Association, and Medical Association. The one-time popular money-raising device of Sunday School classes and Young People's Societies of sponsoring a public lecture or winter lyceum is almost unknown today. The lecture at which an admission fee is charged is in general a losing proposition in these days of radio and movies. The teachers have abandoned their effort to conduct a winter lyceum, and the lyceum conducted by the Ministerial Association, after strenuous city-wide efforts to drum up audiences, lost $6.00 on a course of five lectures in 1923 and made $15.00 in 1924. The local Chautauqua, lasting less than a week, is rapidly ceasing to be popular with the business group and achieves only a precarious support, likewise after hard pushing by the churches. A cleavage between business and working class groups is apparent in the greater tendency of the latter to support the earlier type of general discourse.

Among the activities tending to displace listening to talk is another form of this complex of speech habits, the reading of printed matter. Most of Middletown's reading matter originates elsewhere. Through the development of devices for producing and distributing this material, the city now has access to a range and variety of reading matter unknown to its parents. Book
reading in Middletown today means overwhelmingly, if we exclude school-books and Bibles, the reading of public library books. Over 40,000 volumes are available in the library, roughly fifteen volumes for every one to be had in the early nineties. Middletown drew out approximately 6,500 public library books for each thousand of its population during 1924, as against 850 for each thousand of population during 1890. Four hundred and fifty-eight persons in each 1,000 were library card-holders in 1923, whereas even as late as 1910 only 199 people in each 1,000 had cards.

The buying of current books is almost entirely confined to a limited number of the business class. The rest of the population buy few books, chiefly religious books, children’s books, and Christmas gifts, in the order indicated. Only twenty-four housewives out of the 100 working class families from whom family expenditures were secured reported expenditures for books other than school-books by members of their families during the past twelve months. The totals for the year ranged from $0.50 to $2.50; twelve of the twenty-four had each spent less than $5.00, six between $5.00 and $10.00, and six $10.00 or more. The religious organizations of the city, many of which maintained small separate libraries in 1899 which are said to have been a boon, have for the most part ceased to perform this service, though free Sunday School papers are the rule today. On the other hand, the public library has entered the schools of the city with sixty libraries and maintains a book truck carrying books to the outlying sections. Seven full-time librarians and a part-time assistant have displaced the single untrained librarian who received $40.00 a month for conducting the public library tucked away in upstairs rooms in 1890.

Figures on card-holders in 1890 are not available. Such figures as these must be used carefully. Any literate resident can obtain a card today by merely asking for one, without references or delay of any kind, whereas cards were issued in 1890 only to those ten years of age and over and after more red tape than today. Branch deposits in school buildings, the use of the book truck, and the “supplementary reading” required of children, particularly in the high school, tend to diffuse the card-holding habit. The number of books withdrawn is influenced by the fact that more books may be taken out on a single card today, thereby allowing the borrower to take more books home and read the one that turns out to be most interesting.

There is no way of estimating the circulation of Sunday School library books a generation ago.

The following books were bought by these twenty-four families, the purchases of each family being set off by semicolons: Lives of Great Men and University Encyclopedia (total $5.00); a Bible for daughter; a $5.00 book on Sunday School work; a Bible and, for little son, ABC Books, and Bible stories; a fifty-cent History of the Methodist Church.

Even more marked than the greater availability of books is the increase in the number of weekly or monthly periodicals since the days of “The Pansy for Sunday and weekday reading” and “The Household sent free to every newly-married couple upon receipt of ten cents in stamps.” Today the Middletown library offers 225 periodicals as against nineteen periodicals in 1890. Heavy, likewise, has been the increase in the number of magazines coming into Middletown homes. Into the 9,200 homes of the city, there came in 1923, at a rough estimate, 20,000 copies of each issue of commercially published weekly and monthly periodicals, excluding denominational church papers, Sunday School papers distributed free weekly to most of the 6,700 attending Sunday School, and lodge and civic club magazines. Forty-seven of the 122 working class families and one of the thirty-nine business class families giving information on this point subscribe to or purchase regularly no periodical; thirty-seven of the former and four of the latter subscribe to or purchase regularly only one or two periodicals; and thirty-eight (three in ten) of the workers’ families and thirty-four (nine in ten) of this business group take three.

Fox’s Book of Martyrs, Hurlbut’s Story of the Bible; technical books, ten-cent little leather library books for the children; a family doctor book; a New Testament and Four Thousand Questions and Answers on the Bible; two Bibles, and five or six Christmas books; a set of the World’s Wonder Books ($5.00); Williams’ Tinsmith’s Helper and Pattern Book ($3.00—a book for the husband’s trade); Bible stories; family doctor books; religious books ($14.00); a Bible with encyclopedia and concordance ($7.00) and a Prayer Book; boys’ books for Christmas; the set of books studied by the Delphian Chapter of local club women, though the wife was not a member, and also some sociology books in connection with her club work; a Bible and a pamphlet; story books at Christmas time; Human Interest Library (for $10.00, five volumes); Beautiful Story of the Bible; story books at Christmas time; Human Interest Library.

Data were not secured on the book purchases of the business group.

Of a given issue of the Literary Digest 939 copies reached Middletown in 1923, as over against thirty-one in 1900. Three hundred and fifty-five copies of the National Geographic went into local homes in 1923 as against twenty-five in 1910. Both the number of different periodicals and their efficient distribution have increased notably. As many as seventy different current periodicals may be seen displayed in a single drug store window in Middletown today.

There were no national circulations in 1890 like the 2,000,000 circulations of today. The Atlantic Monthly had a circulation of only about 10,000 in the entire United States in 1890, as against twelve times that today. In 1890 the Saturday Evening Post had a national circulation of 33,069, whereas nearly 1,500 copies of each issue go to Middletown alone today.

Based upon subscription and newsstand totals. The circulation of one issue, whether weekly or monthly, is here taken as the unit.
or more periodicals. In both groups additional periodicals are bought from the news-stand sporadically by certain families.

The significance of such a ceaseless torrent of printed matter in the process of diffusing new tools and habits of thought can scarcely be overstated. Does this greater accessibility and wider diffusion of books and periodicals today mean, however, that Middletown is spending more time in reading? Library and periodical records suggest a marked increase, but other evidence necessitates qualification of this conclusion. The type of intellectual life that brought anywhere from two dozen to a hundred people, chiefly men, together Sunday after Sunday for an afternoon of discussing every subject from "Books, What to Read and How to Read Them" to the Origin of Species and the "Nature of God" has almost disappeared among the males; men are almost never heard discussing books in Middletown today. The impulse in the local labor movement represented in the statement in trade union constitutions, "Each labor union should found libraries, [and] hold lectures," and which eventuated in 1900 in the organization of an independent Workingmen's Library, has gone. The "reading circles" of the nineties have all but disappeared, but the women's clubs of today fill much the same place they occupied as stimuli to reading. Although groups of ten or twelve women no longer meet weekly to gain "the college outlook" by following the four-year cycle of Chautauqua readings, at least one business class woman is still reading for her "diploma" and more than one points to the rows of her mother's "Chautauqua books," saying that they are her chief help in preparing her club programs. When teachers come together today it is not to read

14 Few male leaders in Middletown read except in a desultory manner. Social workers and ministers complain that their outstanding problem is lack of leadership. "There is no group of intellectuals here," said a leading minister, "only the bourgeoisie of the Rotary Club." One never hears book-talk around the tables at civic club luncheons. Even the ministers, as noted elsewhere, have little time to read.

15 The working men employed one of their number as librarian at $50.00 a year. Among the purchases for the library recorded in 1900 are the American Statesmen Series, John B. Clark's Distribution of Wealth, Charlotte Perkins Stetson's Women and Economics, David A. Wells' Recent Economic Changes, "seven books on religion," and 210 volumes of fiction, including Thackeray and Dickens. This was before the day of the automobile and movies. The library has long since disappeared.

16 See Ch. XIX for discussion of the Delphian Chapter, which probably corresponds most closely to these early reading circles, and for an account and discuss books as in the old state reading circles; nor do young people meet to read books suggested by the state for Young People's Reading Circles, although according to some of the teachers, State Young People's Reading Circles were never organized very extensively in Middletown and the required supplementary reading now being done in connection with English classes in the high school more than makes up for their decline. No longer do a Young Ladies' Reading Circle, a Christian Literary Society (of fifty), a Literary League, a Literary Home Circle, a Literary Fireside Club meet weekly or bi-weekly as in 1890, nor are reading circles formed in various sections of the city, nor does a group of young women meet to study the classics. The young people's societies of the various churches do not form Dickens Clubs or have "literary evenings," as, for example, "an evening with Robert Burns," with the singing and recitation of Burns' poems and the reading of the poet's biography—a program of eleven numbers, concluding with "a discussion of Burns and his writings." "Young ladies' clubs in Middletown are more likely now to play bridge; the attenuated church young people's societies follow mission study or other programs sent out of the other women's study clubs. In these days of multiplied periodicals, public libraries, motion pictures at every cross-road, and no farm house or village too isolated to "tune in" on a metropolitan lecture or symphony concert, it is difficult to appreciate the vigor and enthusiasm aroused by the Chautauqua and Bay View circles. By 1903, says the Chautauqua booklet on Literature and the Larger Life, "more than 11,000 Chautauqua circles" had been conducted in "about 6,000" different localities. To these eager groups that met "around the study lamp" week after week, "Mehr Licht," the motto of the Bay View Circle, and Bishop Vincent's quotation of "Knowledge is power" at the opening of the Chautauqua Circle, were no mere mottos but promises of fuller life. In Middletown a number of women, after having followed the "readings" on German literature or Greek life, one year on each country through four years, took examinations and received their "diplomas," a few going on to Chautauqua, New York, for the graduation exercises.

17 State Teachers' Reading Circles were active in the nineties. Earlier figures are not available, but in 1903-4, 180 of 286 teachers in the county are listed as members of the state reading circles, and of the 19,566 children enrolled in the schools of the county, 1,817 belonged to state reading circles owning 3,412 books.

18 Such a group as this last did not meet in 1890, but in 1895 the press reported a class of ten young women organized two years earlier which "meets Saturday afternoon, and has read Ruskin's Essays, Dante's Pia^ion, Pope's Homer's Iliad, and is now reading the Odyssey, a new prose translation by George Herbert Palmer, professor of philosophy in Harvard College. This little society is a class of students, not a club, and enjoys the distinction of having no officers."
from denominational headquarters; men do not talk books; chiefly in women's clubs does the earlier tradition persist.

Middletown papers do not now carry such book advertisements as were familiar in the nineties: advertisements of the *Franklin Square Library*, Stanley's *In Darkest Africa*, the life of Dwight L. Moody, the life of Barnum, "New Books this week—Star Drug Co.: *A Laggard in Love* by Bettyan, *The Tale of Chloe* by Meredith," or literary notes on "Black Beauty, the Uncle Tom's Cabin of the horse (price 12c.)," John Ward, Preacher, or a new edition of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. So widespread was the reading of certain books that, when the census of 1890 was being taken, a local paper suggested as additional questions for the census taker: "What is your opinion of the evolution theory? and, Have you read Robert Elsmere?" Even a young lawyer noted in his diary the reading of Robert Elsmere between his hilarious evenings of "banging about town." A newspaper in 1892 offered "a set of Dickens to the person sending in the best record of the number, contents, and firms inserting advertisements in the Tribune"—a procedure hardly apt to elicit popular response today.

Concrete evidence of sorts as to the amount of time Middletown spends reading today is afforded by the statements of the women interviewed as to the amount of time they and their families spend in reading of all kinds, including newspapers, periodicals, and books. Of the forty business class and 117 working class male heads of families for whom data were secured from their wives, only one of the former and nineteen of the latter were said to spend any time of reading in any kind.26 None of these business class wives said she reads none at all, as against twenty-one of the workers' wives; twenty (half) of the former and thirty (a fourth) of the latter average six or more hours of reading a week.

To working class women reading apparently presents itself as a less urgent leisure-time pursuit than to women of the busi-

25 "When do you get time to read?" a rising young lawyer was asked. "I don't—much. It's next to impossible to get any regular reading or study done. We know an awful lot of people, and at least two or three evenings every week go out with them. Now Monday evening we went over to a little club we belong to where we play cards every week, Tuesday we went to that lecture for the benefit of the Day Nursery, Wednesday I forget what we did, but we went somewhere or other—and so the week goes."

ness group. Although eighteen of the former mentioned reading as the chief thing they would like to do with an extra hour in the day, answers of these women were given only after some urging and tended to be vague, as "Oh, I don't know—read, I guess." Considerably more frustration was reflected in the more pointed answers of the fourteen business class women who mentioned reading:

"I would read if I only had the energy and quiet."

"I have tried three times to get into *The New Decalogue of Science*, but I never have time to give to it."

"I would take up some definite study. I am really interested in intellectual work, but I have so little time for it. I have tried to get one of the librarians at the public library to make me out a list of books on history but it doesn't work very well. My reading is so scattered, due to my children being small, and I want to organize it."

"I just read magazines in my scraps of time. I should so like to do more consecutive reading but I don't know of any reading course or how to make one out."

According to statements of the women interviewed as to the time they and their husbands spend in reading as compared with the time spent by the wife's parents in the nineties, business class men would appear to read somewhat less, business class women about the same amount, and working class men and women somewhat more than did the wife's parents a generation ago.27 The trends possibly suggested by these answers are supported by the observation of teachers and others who have

26 For answers to this question see Ch. XIX.

27 Some working men, however, found time for a good deal of reading in the nineties. A partial list of the books recorded in the diary of the baker quoted above as read during the year 1889-91 includes: *Barriers Burned Away*, Robert Elsmere, *Dinner for Three*, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde ("made my hair stand on end"), *Carmen*, or the Fate of a Gypsy ("a tale of fast life"), *The Rock or the Rye*, *Broken Vows*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Love's Conflict, *Linda Newton*; or *Life's Discipline*, Huckleberry Finn, and History of the United States in Our Time (Pt. I). The diary of this young blood, whose comment after seeing *Faust* at the local Opera House was: "Very good play. Takes me out of the hereafter," and who had only eighteen evenings in a six-month stretch when he was not "on the go" "out having a time," records his managing to read one book every six weeks or two months.
known Middletown since the nineties. Any increase in book reading indicated by heavier library circulation is certainly not among business class men and only to a limited extent among their wives.\textsuperscript{28} It may reflect an increase in the amount of reading done by the working class and particularly by children of this group, as habits of prolonged schooling and increased use of the library are spreading among them.\textsuperscript{23} More buying of cheap paper-covered books in the nineties and the reading of books from the meager Sunday School libraries undoubtedly offset to some extent the increased use of the public library and the far wider periodical circulations of today. Testimony of many local people suggests that more things are skimmed today but that there is less of the satisfaction of “a good evening of reading.” There appears to be considerably less reading aloud by the entire family.

As Middletown reads it is participating in other worlds, being subjected to other ways of living. The nature of this culture stream from without is not worth scrutinizing. A stream of the

\textsuperscript{28} The predominance of women among users of the library appears in the fact that of 489 adults taking out cards in a sample period immediately following January 1, 1922, 61 per cent. were women, and of 492 adults taking out cards in a similar period following September 1, 1923, 61 per cent. were women.

\textsuperscript{29} Eleven per cent. of 275 boys and 8 per cent. of 341 girls in the three upper years of the high school answered “reading” to the question asked in mid-November, “in what thing that you are doing at home this fall are you most interested?”

Three hundred and six boys and 379 girls in the last three years of the high school listed their reading of books in a “usual month,” and 315 boys and 305 girls, largely the same group, listed their reading of magazines in a “usual month” as follows:

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>of Boys</td>
<td>of Girls</td>
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<tr>
<td>of Boys</td>
<td>of Girls</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Read no books outside of school reading ........ 16 12 Read no magazines 7 5

Read 1 book .......... 19 14 Read 1 magazine .... 25 20

Read 2 books .......... 19 26 Read 2 magazines .... 27 28

Read 3-5 books .......... 28 29 Read 3-5 magazines .... 35 42

Read 6-8 books .......... 9 7 Read 6-8 magazines .... 5 5

Read 9 or more books .......... 9 12 magazines ........ 1 0

The boys of this group averaged 2.4 magazines read regularly, and the girls 2.6. The boys averaged 3.2 books read monthly and the girls 3.1.

books available in the adult department of the Middletown library, issued in 1893, showed in useful arts (technology, advertising, salesmanship, etc.) 91 books as against 1,617 in the adult department of the library in 1924; in fine arts 45 as against 1,166; in history 348 as against 2,867; in biography 132 as against 1,396; in sociology 106 as against 1,937; in literature 164 as against 2,777; in science 89 as against 585; and so on through the other classifications. During the twenty years between 1903, the first year for which library circulation figures are available, and 1923, while the population less than doubled and the reading of library books in the adult department of the library increased more than fourfold, reading of library books on useful arts increased sixty-two-fold; on the fine arts twenty-eight-fold; on philosophy, psychology, etc., twenty-six-fold; on religion, particularly the religion of this group, elevenfold; on the institutional devices involved in group life, sociology, economics, etc., ninefold; on history eightfold; on science sixfold; of fiction less than fourfold; and so on.\textsuperscript{26} To Middletown adults, reading a book means overwhelming that story-telling means to primitive man—the vicarious entry into other, imagined kinds of living; in 1903, 92 per cent. of all the library books read by adults were fiction, as against 83 per cent. in 1923. Under a trained children’s librarian the reading of fiction by children has decreased from 90 per cent. of the total of books read in 1903 to 67 per cent. in 1923.\textsuperscript{28} This interest in imaginative narratives, like the constant movie attendance to be noted later and the prime popularity of comedy and society films, obviously assumes greater significance when viewed against the background of the day-long preoccupation with getting a living and other routinized activities in this prairie city. Says one of Middletown’s

\textsuperscript{24} The librarian says that books on business, particularly salesmanship and advertising, and technical books, particularly those on automobiles and radio, are in such demand that they are “never on the shelves.”

\textsuperscript{25} See Table XVII.

A distinct trend towards the secularization of the books in the library on natural science is observable when the current catalogue is compared with that of thirty-five years ago. In the 1893 catalogue the scientific books commonly bore such titles as The Wonders of Creation, The Wonders of Bodily Strength, The Wonders of God’s Universe, as over against such titles in the 1924 catalogue as Introduction to Geology.

\textsuperscript{26} In 1903 the children of Middletown read 12,224 library books, of which 11,048 were fiction, as against a total of 93,873 in 1923, of which 63,307 were fiction.
prominent citizens in an editorial in the local press under the caption “Kicking Over the Traces”:

“Most of us, perhaps fortunately, take it out in wishing. We can’t rush off to Timbuctoo when it is necessary for us to stay home and provide food, coal, and shoes for the missus and the kids.” If we were to do so, we wouldn’t have a good time.

“And so we remain at home, go to the office at eight in the morning and depart from it at six at night, and attend committee meetings, and drive the old family bus over the streets that we have traversed a thousand times before, and in general continue the life of the so-called model citizen.

“But these conditions need not fetter our fancy. In that realm we can scale the lofty Matterhorn, sail the sleepy Indian Sea, mine glittering gold in the snow-clad mountains of Alaska, tramp the Valley of the Moon, and idle along the majestic Amazon.”

And so, as in primitive story-telling, the social function of these forays into the realm of fancy demands that the experiences thus vicariously shared be happy or valorous ones. “There’s enough trouble in the world all about one, so why should people have to put it in books?” is an opinion frequently heard in connection with the prevailing demand for “happy endings— or at least endings that if not exactly happy still exalt you and make you feel that the world is coming out all right.” Many people in Middletown would agree with their favorite poet, Edgar Guest,28 in condemning people who condone “sin or unhappiness” in fiction by saying, “The book is sordid, but it’s art.” He concludes his syndicated message in the local press:

28 The position of this reading of books, predominantly fiction, as a marginal leisure-time activity with many people, is suggested by the fact that, if the circulation to students of the local normal college be not included, the monthly totals of library books read tend to be from 50 to 100 per cent heavier in winter than during the summer. The compulsory supplementary reading of high school students figures somewhat in this increase.

“Eddie” Guest is more widely read in Middletown than any other poet, with Riley as runner-up in popularity. Rotary has tried to secure him as a speaker, as has the Men’s Club in a leading church. In a group of college-trained men prominent in local life, one said that “Eddie” Guest and Riley were his favorite poets. “That man Guest certainly gets to my heart”; one liked Kipling, “never could get Burns, and Byron always seemed a dirty fellow dressed up in poetic form”; while a third prefers Kipling and “never could get Browning. Why didn’t he say it in prose instead of the awful way he did?”

TRADITIONAL WAYS

“But should you by chance be cheerful, using people not so fearful, Should your characters go smiling down the street; Should your fiction girl or man do just the very best they can do With the obstacles and trials they must meet; Should they come to sane conclusions about life and its illusions, Should they keep their marriage vow ‘till death do part; Should they find a thrill in duty and in life some joy and beauty, They will say: ‘The story’s pretty, but not art!”

Any detailed analysis of the contents of the periodicals which flood Middletown weekly and monthly is impossible. Of the 225 periodicals offered by the Middletown library in 1924, twenty-five were trade and technical journals, twenty-three religious, fifteen educational, nine each women’s, public administration, and juvenile magazines, eight each business and financial, scientific, and arts and decoration, seven nature, six economic, five musical, five garden, four household arts, four travel, three theater, etc.; of the nineteen periodicals in the 1890 library, seven were children’s papers, six general monthlies, three weeklies, two scientific journals, one agricultural. Some further indication of the way periodicals operate, probably even more powerfully than books, to shape the habits and outlook of the city, may be gathered from the distribution of certain national periodicals. Approximately one in each five of the 9,200 homes in the city receives the American Magazine and one in each six the Saturday Evening Post. Each of the following goes regularly into from one in each five to one in each ten of the homes: Delineator, Ladies’ Home Journal, McCall’s, Physical Culture, True Story, Woman’s Home Companion. Two hundred to 500 homes receive one or more of Adventure, Argosy, Collier’s, College Humor, Cosmopolitan, Country Gentleman, Dream World, Good Housekeeping, Hearst’s International, Modern Marriage, Motion Picture Magazine, National Geographic, Pictorial Review, Popular Science, Red Book, True Romance, and others. One hundred to 200 receive College Comics, Flynn’s Magazine, Triple X, True Confessions, True Detective Magazine, White Bang, and many others. Approximately sixty receive Vogue and the same number Vanity Fair, about thirty-five the Atlantic Monthly, about twenty each Harper’s and the Century, about fifteen the
New Republic, five the Living Age, four the Survey, three the Dial.

The different levels of diffusion within the city appear in the fact that fifty-four periodicals drawing 115 subscriptions from the thirty-nine business class families giving information on this point have not one from the 122 workers' families, while forty-eight periodicals drawing ninety-six subscriptions from seventy-five working class families have none of this group of business class families as a subscriber; in between is a narrow group of twenty periodicals with 128 subscriptions from thirty-eight business class families and 105 from seventy-five workers' families. Nine of the 122 workers and seventeen of this business class group take the Literary Digest; seven of the former and twenty of the latter the Saturday Evening Post; forty-four of the workers' wives subscribe to women's magazines, scattering a total of 101 subscriptions among twenty-one different women's magazines, while the twenty-seven of the business class wives who take women's magazines bunch their forty-eight subscriptions among only nine magazines, almost entirely recognized leading magazines; thirteen of the workers and nineteen of this business group subscribe to the American Magazine; there are only seven subscriptions to juvenile magazines among 122 workers' families, as against twenty-six among the thirty-nine business class families; none of the sample of workers takes a magazine of the Atlantic, Harper's, World's Work type, as against a total of twenty-two such subscriptions among less than one-third as many of the business group.

A cleavage between the reading habits of the two sexes is possibly suggested by the answers of 310 boys and 391 girls in the three upper years of the high school to the question, "What magazines other than assigned school magazines do you usually read every month?" Forty-four boys and 367 girls read women's magazines; ninety-five boys and fifteen girls read scientific magazines; 114 boys and seventy-six girls read the Saturday Evening Post, Collier's and Liberty group of weeklies; thirty-five boys and two girls read outdoor magazines; seventy-two boys and sixteen girls read juvenile magazines; other smaller groups were more evenly balanced.

Although, according to the city librarian, increased interest in business and technical journals has been marked, as in its reading of books Middletown appears to read magazines primarily for the vicarious living in fictional form they contain. Such reading centers about the idea of romance underlying the institution of marriage; since 1890 there has been a trend toward franker "sex adventure" fiction. It is noteworthy that a culture which traditionally taboos any discussion of sex in its systems of both religious and secular training and even until recently in the home training of children should be receiving such heavy diffusion of this material through its periodical reading matter. The aim of these sex adventure magazines, diffusing roughly 3,500 to 4,000 copies monthly throughout the city, is succinctly stated in the printed rejection slip received by a Middletown author from the New Fiction Publishing Corporation:

"Live Stories is interested in what we call 'sex adventure' stories told in the first person. The stories should embody picturesque settings for action; they should also present situations of high emotional character, rich in sentiment. A moral conclusion is essential."

"Until five years ago," said a full-page advertisement in a Middletown paper in 1924, "there was nowhere men and women, boys and girls could turn to get a knowledge of the rules of life. They were sent out into the world totally unprepared to cope with life."

The groups given here are, of course, not mutually exclusive. The predominance of the reading of magazines on making a home among girls of this age and the fact that, aside from this negligible fringe of boys, the males of the group neither here nor elsewhere come in contact with any discussion of home-making problems is suggestive in connection with the concentration of the males upon matters divorced from the home and the fact that habits of management are still in vogue in the homes of Middletown that are becoming obsolete in Middletown's industries.
Then came True Story, a magazine that is different from any ever published. Its foundation is the solid rock of truth. It will help you, too. In five years it has reached the unheard-of circulation of two million copies monthly, and is read by five million or more appreciative men and women.

In these magazines Middletown reads "The Primitive Lover" ("She wanted a caveman husband"), "Her Life Secret," "Can a Wife Win with the Other Woman's Weapons?" "How to Keep the Thrill in Marriage," "What I Told My Daughter the Night Before Her Marriage" ("Every girl on the eve of her marriage becomes again a little frightened child").

While four leading motion picture houses were featuring synchronously the sex adventure films, Telling Tales, the Middletown news-stands was featuring on its cover four stories, "Indolent Kisses," "Primitive Love," "Watch Your Step-Ins!" ("Irene didn't, and you should have seen what happened") and "Innocents Astray." The way Middletown absorbs this culture about (to quote the advertisement of a local film) "things you've always wanted to do and never DARED" was suggested by the coverless, thumb-marked condition of the January, 1925, Motion Picture Magazine in the Public Library a fortnight after its arrival. One page, captioned "Under the Mistletoe," depicted seven "movie kisses" with such captions as:

"Do you recognize your little friend, Mae Busch? She's had lots of kisses, but never seems to grow blasé. At least, you'll agree that she's giving a good imitation of a person enjoying this one," and "If any one should catch you beneath the mistletoe and hold you there like this, what would you do? Struggle? But making love divinely is one of the best things Monte Blue does. Can't you just hear Marie Prevost's heart going pitty-pat?"

And a Middletown mother complained to the interviewer, "Children weren't bold like they are today when we were young!"

Music, like literature, is a traditional leisure activity regarded as of sufficient importance to be made compulsory for the young. The emergence of music to a prominent place in the school curriculum has already been described. It seems probable from informal local testimony that the taking of music lessons is a generally accepted essential in a child's home training among a wider group of the city's families than in the nineties. In forty-one of the 124 working class families, all of whom, it will be recalled, have children of school age, one or more children had taken music lessons during the preceding year; in twenty-seven of the group of forty business class families interviewed, one or more children had taken lessons. Of fifty-four workers' wives reporting on the amount of time their children spend on music, forty-four said that they themselves spent less time on music as children than do their children today, while only five spent more time, and five "about the same." Among the business class, sixteen reported that they had spent less time on music than do their children, three that they spent more time, and three "about the same." In answer to the question to the three upper classes in the high school, "In what thing that you are doing at home this fall are you most interested?" "music" led the list with the 341 girls, being named by 26 per cent. of them, with "sewing" next most often mentioned, by 15 per cent.; among the 274 boys "radio" led the list, being mentioned by 20 per cent., while "music" followed with 15 per cent. The current interest arises in part from the musculature injected into music by jazz, the diffusion of instruments other than the piano, and the social and sometimes financial accompaniments of knowing how to "play." The one musical club among women of the business class maintains a Junior and a Juvenile section with social meetings at which children play for an audience of their mothers; in addition to the two high school bands and three orchestras, Middletown has a boys'
band, a girls' band, and a band of both boys and girls from nine to thirteen years.  

Mechanical inventions such as the phonograph and radio are further bringing to Middletown more contacts with more kinds of music than ever before. Thirty-five years ago diffusion of musical knowledge was entirely in the handicraft stage; today it has entered a machine stage. The first phonograph was exhibited locally in 1890 and was reported as "drawing large crowds. The Edison invention is undoubtedly the most wonderful of the age."  

Now these phonographs have become so much a part of living that, for example, a family of three, when the father was laid off in the summer of 1923, "strapped a trunk on the running board of the Ford, put the Victrola in the back seat with the little girl, and went off job-hunting. Wherever we lived all summer we had our music with us."

And yet, although more music is available to Middletown than ever before and children are taught music with more or-

83 Those familiar with the local musical life express the belief that the orchestral and other musical work in the high schools is recruiting an entirely new crop of musicians rather than reducing the number playing the piano. This is probably less true in the case of girls than of boys. Boys are more attracted to other instrumental work than to the piano because of the prestige of playing in one of the high school bands or in the well-known local boys' band, and more particularly because of the money they can earn playing in small dance orchestras. The energetic jazz aggregation of four or five boys, featuring the easily learned saxophone, presents a new and relatively distinguished occupation by which sons of working class parents are seeking in some cases to escape from the industrial level. The city has several of these small groups seeking engagements playing for dances.

84 As late as 1900 "graphophones" were still curiosities. "The graphophone is rapidly superseding the piano in Middletown saloons. Fully fifty are being used and they never fail to draw large crowds," said the press.

85 The ownership of radios in Middletown is noted elsewhere. No check was made of the ownership of phonographs and of pianolas. Of 100 working class families from whom expenditures were secured, however, twenty-three had bought phonograph records during the last twelve months. Eleven had bought less than $5.00 worth each; the amounts ranged from $1.05 to $20.00, averaging $11.17. Three had spent money for pianola records, each less than $4.00 worth. More than twenty-three phonographs were owned by these 100 families, however, as a number of others spoke of owning them but of having no money to spend on records. There was a marked tendency to sacrifice phonograph records both to the cost of installing a radio and to the cost of children's music lessons.

In the study of Zanesville, Ohio, in 1925 they discovered phonographs in 54 per cent. of the homes, pianos in 43 per cent., organs in 3 per cent., and other musical instruments in 8 per cent.; the figures for the thirty-six cities, including Middletown, compared with Zanesville were 59 per cent., 51 per cent., 5 per cent., and 11 per cent., respectively. (Op. cit., p. 112.)

organized zeal than formerly, the question arises, as in the case of reading, as to whether music actually bulks larger as a form of leisure-time enjoyment than in the nineties. If one boy in each six or seven in high school enjoys music more than any other leisure-time home activity, this enthusiasm evaporates between high school and his active life as one of those getting Middletown's living. Music, like poetry and the other arts, is almost non-existent among the men. As noted elsewhere, "having a love of music and poetry" was ranked ninth among the qualities desirable in a father by 369 high school boys and seventh by 415 girls, only 4 per cent. of the boys and 6 per cent. of the girls ranking it as one of two qualities in the list of ten that they considered most desirable. 86 Music for adults has almost ceased to be a matter of spontaneous, active participation and has become largely a passive matter of listening to others. The popular singing societies of the nineties have disappeared, with one working class exception. One such group in the nineties, composed of works, met every Sunday afternoon and Thursday evening with a "keg of beer" and a hired "instructor." Another singing society celebrated its sixty-fourth anniversary in 1890. Still another group of forty of the city's male social leaders, calling themselves the Apollo Club and dubbed "dudes" by the others, met every Friday evening, "instructed by Professor B" — who came over from a neighboring city; its three concerts each year were widely attended and received enthusiastic reports in the press. Even schoolboys apparently enjoyed chorus singing, for as late as 1900, 300 of them gave a concert at the Opera House, the program including Gounod's "Praise Ye the Father," "The Lord's Prayer," and "Follow On" from Der Freischütz. In commenting upon the rehearsals, the local press said, "The boys are enjoying the practicing and are attending well despite the fine marble weather."

Even more characteristic of the nineties was spontaneous singing as a part of the fun of any and all gatherings. When a family reunion was held it began with prayer and ended with the inevitable address and singing; at the lawn fêtes of the day some of those present would sing or play while the others sat in the windows or on the porch rail and listened. "Lay awake awhile last night," says a local diary, "listening to sere-
naders." The diary of the young baker mentions music of all sorts as an informal part of his "hanging around town" night after night:

"Went to L——s' and serenaded them." "Gang over at N——s'. Singing, guitar, mouth harp, piano, cake, bananas, oranges and lemonade. Had a time!" "Yesterday——'s birthday, so he set up cigars and a keg at the union meeting. After the meeting we played cards and sang till eleven."

Even at an "elegant party" of "some of our society young men" of the Success Club in 1900 the press states that "an entertainment of vocal solos and readings was enjoyed by those present."

Solo singing or group singing to jazz accompaniment still appears occasionally at small parties but is far less common than a generation ago. Serenading is a thing of the past. Chorus choirs are disappearing in the churches most frequented by the business class. There is today no chorus of business class men. In the city of today, nearly three and one-half times as large as that of 1890, there are only two adult musical societies in which the earlier tradition survives, as over against four in 1890. The first is a chorus of working class men. This, together with the chorus choirs in working class churches and the frequent appearance of songs and recitations in the 1890 manner in the "socials" of these churches, suggests the relatively greater place of singing and playing in the play life of working class adults. It suggests, too, the tendency noted elsewhere for many of the workers' habits to lag roughly a generation behind those of the business class.

A second group participating actively in music is composed of women of the business class. This group, responsible for most of the organized musical life of the city, began in 1889 with a membership of thirty of the city's leading women, each of whom appeared on the program at every third meeting. Today it has 249 members, sixty-seven of them active, forty-eight professional, and ten chorus members, with many even of these taking no active part in the meetings. "The interest in the club and participation in its programs is not as great today as in the nineties," lamented one member. "Now there are so many clubs and other diversions to occupy people's time." Those most active in the club complain of continual lack of interest on the part of the members. The sophistication of a few of the more privileged women in the city tends to make them impatient of a less cultivated group to whom the club affords a more satisfying form of social and artistic expression. There was a net drop in membership of fifty-nine from 1923-24 to 1924-25. A possible indication of what the mass of the members prefer is furnished by the fact that a recitation to music of Eugene Field's "the dear little boy, the sweet little boy, the pretty little bow-legged boy" will be greeted with more applause on a program of American music than characteristic examples of Negro and Indian music. Leaders complain of lack of support for the various concerts which they bring to the city, although they say that Middletown is "music hungry"; the concert of an organization like the Letz Quartet barely pays for itself, but some song recitals receive more support.

It is an open question whether the devotion of Middletown to music as a personal art, as opposed to listening to music, today is not more a part of tradition and the institutional relationships kept alive as part of the adult social system than of the spontaneous play life of the city. Music seems to serve in part as a symbol that one belongs, and much of the musical activity of the women appears as a rather self-conscious appendage of the city's club life. An incipient trend away from the ritual of music lessons for children may be apparent in the remark of a prominent mother: "My children are not interested in music and there are so many things children can be interested in today that we are not going to waste time and money on them until they really want it. I had five years of lessons as a girl and can't play a thing today. I'm not going to make this mistake with my children." The mothers of the present generation of children were brought up in a culture without Victrola and radio when the girl in the crowd who could play while the others sang or danced was in demand. In their insistence upon music lessons for their children they may be reliving a world that no longer exists. Today when great artists or dance orchestras are in the cabinet in the corner of one's living room or "on the air," the ability to "play a little" may be in increasingly less demand. It seems not unlikely that, within
the next generation, this habit of taking music lessons may become more selective throughout the entire population as music is made available to all through instruction in the schools and the wide diffusion of Victrolas, radios, and other instruments in the home, while other abilities supplant it as the ritualistic social grace it so often is today.

Like music, art as a leisure-time activity appears to be somewhat more a thing of passive knowledge than of creative enjoyment. It, too, has its national "week" celebrated locally and its place in the school curriculum, but even more than music it is among adults largely a social ritual of a small group of privileged women.

The art activity of the city in 1890 was largely confined to the business class. Early in the eighties a number of citizens lent a promising artist in the state capital a sum of money to go to Munich to study; in return, he undertook to copy celebrated pictures for their homes. In 1888 this artist, with an associate, set up an art school in Middletown. A studio was opened in a downtown business block, and larger studios had to be taken in each of the two succeeding years. The pupils were all local business class women. Annual exhibitions of the work of the school were held and enthusiastically reviewed in local papers, and many of the paintings found their way to the walls of the homes of the city. In 1892 the school was given up and the Art Students' League was organized. "The great thing in this world," according to the motto of the League, "is not so much where we stand as in which direction we are moving." The members rented a studio where some of them worked daily, having a class model one evening a week. Members brought sketches to each meeting, sketches made on the river bank or in their yards or homes. 88

Creating "art" is part of the program of the present Art Students' League. This fashionable club now meets to listen to papers by members or by traveled speakers giving "an exhausitive description of modern excavations in North and Central America," or an account of "Renaissance Art," or "Japanese Prints." The programs for a given year have coherence but may skip in fourteen meetings from "The Character of the Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic Periods," through "A Historic Survey of the Middle Ages," "Medieval Sculpture and Painting," and various aspects of Renaissance history, architecture, sculpture, and painting. The Literature and Art Department of the local Woman's Club is a less socially exclusive group of women, engaged largely in writing and listening to papers on similar subjects. Art figures sporadically in the programs of other women's clubs. A few women in the city continue their interest in painting and sketching.

One is struck by the gap that exists between "art" as discussed in these groups and as observed in most of the homes. As noted in Chapter IX, although art is regarded, at least among the business class, as a thing of unusual merit, art in the homes is highly standardized and used almost entirely as furniture. 89 With the exception of a few wealthy families, people do not have collections of unframed prints as they do of books and Victrola records. It is noteworthy, too, that the buildings for religious worship are, with the exception of the Catholic church and an occasional Sunday School room, naked of art objects.

Art is diffused to Middletown by more channels today than in 1890. In place of the early art school, local loan exhibitions, and forty-five volumes on fine arts in the public library, there are today the Art Students' League, the Art and Literature.

88 It is to the point to recall how essentially primitive is this limitation of creative spontaneity that has gone forward in the art of Middletown since 1890. Speaking of the period of man's known history, Tegart says: "It is difficult for the modern man to realize that, in the earlier period, individuality did not exist... So completely was the individual subordinated to the community that art was just the repetition of tribal designs, literature the repetition of tribal songs, and religion the repetition of tribal rites." Processes of History (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1918), p. 86.

It is also noteworthy that the tendency observed in Middletown art clubs to make the group leisure-time activities "merely imitations of ceremonial occupations" also has its roots in life among primitive man. Rivers points out, e.g.: "The artistic side of life among the Todas is but little developed. Their interest is so much absorbed in ceremony that little is left for the development of art, even of a primitive kind... In their ceremonies again we shall find that the influence of ceremonial is so great, that many of the games are merely imitations of ceremonial occupations." (The Todas, p. 570.)
USING LEISURE

Chapter XVIII
INVENTIONS RE-MAKING LEISURE

Although lectures, reading, music, and art are strongly inter-trenched in Middletown’s traditions, it is none of these that would first attract the attention of a newcomer watching Middletown at play.

"Why on earth do you need to study what’s changing this country?” said a lifelong resident and shrewd observer of the Middle West. “I can tell you what’s happening in just four letters: A-U-T-O.”

In 1890 the possession of a pony was the wildest flight of a Middletown boy’s dreams. In 1924 a Bible class teacher in a Middletown school concluded her teaching of the Creation: “And now, children, is there any of these animals that God created that man could have got along without?” One after another of the animals from goat to mosquito was mentioned and for some reason rejected; finally, “The horse!” said one boy triumphantly, and the rest of the class agreed. Ten or twelve years ago a new horse fountain was installed at the corner of the Courthouse square; now it remains dry during most of the blazing heat of a Mid-Western summer, and no one cares. The “horse culture” of Middletown has almost disappeared.¹

Nor was the horse culture in all the years of its undisputed sway ever as pervasive a part of the life of Middletown as is the cluster of habits that have grown up overnight around the automobile. A local carriage manufacturer of the early days estimates that about 125 families owned a horse and buggy in 1890, practically all of them business class folk. “A regular sight summer mornings was Mrs. Jim B—— [the wife of one of the city’s leading men] with a friend out in her rig, shelling

¹ Two million horse-drawn carriages were manufactured in the United States in 1909 and 10,000 in 1923; 80,000 automobiles were manufactured in 1909 and 4,000,000 in 1923.
peas for dinner while her horse ambled along the road.” As spring came on each year entries like these began to appear in the diaries:

“April 1, ’88. Easter. A beautiful day, cloudy at times but very warm, and music walking and riding about town.”

“May 19, ’89. Considerable carriage riding today.”

“July 16, ’89. Considerable riding this evening. People out ‘cooling off.’”

“Sept. 18, ’87. Wife and myself went to the Cemetery this afternoon in the buggy. Quite a number of others were placing flowers upon the graves of their dear ones. . . .”

But if the few rode in carriages in 1890, the great mass walked. The Sunday afternoon stroll was the rule.

Meanwhile, in a Middletown machine shop a man was tinkeringing at a “steam wagon” which in September, 1890, was placed on the street for the first trial. . . .

“The vehicle has the appearance of an ordinary road wagon, when put in motion,” said the newspaper, “though there is no tongue attached. It is run on the principle of a railroad locomotive, a lever in front which guides the vehicle being operated by the person driving. The power is a small engine placed under the running gears and the steam is made by a small gasoline flame beneath a fuel tank. Twenty-five miles an hour can be attained with this wonderful device. The wagon will carry any load that can be placed on it, climbing hills and passing over bad roads with the same ease as over a level road. The wagon complete cost nearly $1,000.”

In other cities other men were also working at these “horseless wagons.” 2 As late as 1895 Elwood Haynes of Kokomo, Indiana, one of the early tinkerers, was stopped by a policeman as he drove his horseless car into Chicago and ordered to take the thing off the streets. In 1896 the resplendent posters of the alert P. T. Barnum featured in the foreground a “horseless carriage to be seen every day in the new street parade”—with elephants, camels and all the rest of the circus lost in the background while the crow cheers “the famous Duryea Motorwagon or Motorcycle.”

2 See the Silver Anniversary Number of the Automobile Trade Journal, Vol. XXIX, No. 6, Dec. 1, 1924, for the story of these adventurous days.

The first real automobile appeared in Middletown in 1900. About 1906 it was estimated that “there are probably 200 in the city and county.” At the close of 1923 there were 6,221 passenger cars in the city, one for every 6.1 persons, or roughly two for every three families. 3 Of these 6,221 cars, 41 per cent. were Fords; 54 per cent. of the total were cars of models of 1920 or later, and 17 per cent. models earlier than 1917. 4 These cars average a bit over 5,000 miles a year. 5 For some of the workers and some of the business class, use of the automobile is a seasonal matter, but the increase in surfaced roads and in closed cars is rapidly making the car a year-round tool for leisure-time as well as getting-a-living activities. As, at the turn of the century, business class people began to feel apologetic if they did not have a telephone, so ownership of an automobile has now reached the point of being an accepted essential of normal living.

Into the equilibrium of habits which constitutes for each individual some integration in living has come this new habit, upsetting old adjustments, and blasting its way through such . . .

3 These numbers have undoubtedly increased greatly since the count was made.

As a matter of fact, by far the greater part of the wide diffusion of the automobile culture one observes today in Middletown has taken place within the last ten or fifteen years. There were less than 500,000 passenger automobiles registered in the entire United States in 1910 and only 5,500,000 in 1918, as over against 15,500,000 in 1924. (Cf. Facts and Figures of the Automobile Industry, 1924 Edition, published by the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce.)

Some further idea of the spread of automobiles, involving different degrees of inroads into the family budgets of the city, is afforded by the following list in order of frequency: Ford, 2,578; Chevrolet, 590; Overland, 459; Dodge, 343; Maxwell, 309; Buick, 205; Studebaker, 264; Oakland, 88; Willys-Knight, 74; Nash, 73; Interstate, 73; Durant, 65; Star, 62; Oldsmobile, 57; Saxon, 51; Reo, 50; Chalmers, 47; Franklin, 45; Essex, 45; Hudson, 44; Cadillac, 36; Chandler, 32; Monroe, 31; Paige, 31; Haynes, 29; International, 28; Sheridan, 26; Hupmobile, 25. Sixty-nine other makes are represented by less than twenty-five cars each, including fifteen Marmons, fourteen Packards, one Pierce-Arrow, one Lincoln, but for the most part cheap, early models, many of them of discontinued makes.

The 6,221 cars owned in the city at the end of 1923 included models of the following years: 1924—13; 1923—901; 1922—1,053; 1921—1,633; 1920—746; 1919—585; 1918—447; 1917—785; 1916—517; 1915—294; 1914—154; 1913—85; earlier than 1913—37.

8 This is a rough figure based upon the total of 11,600 passenger cars and 1,768 trucks registered in the county at the close of 1924. The gasoline tax paid during the year, an arbitrary assumption that a truck used three times the gas used by a passenger car, and upon an estimate of 17.5 miles per gallon. The number of motorcycles is negligible.
acquainted and unquestioned dicta as "Rain or shine, I never miss a Sunday morning at church"; "A high school boy does not need much spending money"; "I don't need exercise, walking to the office keeps me fit"; "I wouldn't think of moving out of town and being so far from my friends"; "Parents ought always to know where their children are." The newcomer is most quickly and amicably incorporated into those regions of behavior in which men are engaged in doing impersonal, matter-of-fact things; much more contested is his advent where emotionally charged sanctions and taboos are concerned. No one questions the use of the auto for transporting groceries, getting to one's place of work or to the golf course, or in place of the porch for "cooling off after supper" on a hot summer evening; however much the activities concerned with getting a living may be altered by the fact that a factory can draw from workmen within a radius of forty-five miles, or however much old labor union men resent the intrusion of this new alternate way of spending an evening, these things are hardly major issues. But when auto riding tends to replace the traditional call in the family parlor as a way of approach between the unmarried, "the home is endangered," and all-day Sunday motor trips are a "threat against the church"; it is in the activities concerned with the home and religion that the automobile occasions the greatest emotional conflicts.

Group-sanctioned values are disturbed by the inroads of the automobile upon the family budget. A case in point is the not uncommon practice of mortgaging a home to buy an automobile. Data on automobile ownership were secured from 123 working class families. Of these, sixty have cars. Forty-one of

6 "The Ford car has done an awful lot of harm to the unions here and everywhere else," growled one man prominent in Middletown labor circles. "As long as men have enough money to buy a second-hand Ford and tires and gasoline, they'll be on the road and paying no attention to union meetings."

7 What a motor car means as an investment by Middletown families can be gathered from the following accepted rates of depreciation: 20 per cent. the first year, 20 per cent. more the second, 10 per cent. more each of the next three years. The operating cost of the lightest car of the Ford, Chevrolet, Overland type, including garage rent and depreciation, has been conservatively figured by a national automotive corporation for the country as a while at $5.00 a week or $105 a mile for family use for 5,000 miles a year and replacement at the end of seven years. The cost of tires, gas, oil, and repairs of the forty-seven of the workers' families interviewed who gave expenditures on cars for the past year ranged from $250 to $920.

the sixty own their homes. Twenty-six of these forty-one families have mortgages on their homes. Forty of the sixty-three families who do not own a car own their homes. Twenty-nine of these have mortgages on their homes. Obviously other factors are involved in many of Middletown's mortgages. That the automobile does represent a real choice in the minds of some at least is suggested by the acid retort of one citizen to the question about car ownership: "No sir, we've not got a car. That's why we've got a home." According to an officer of a Middletown automobile financing company, 75 to 90 per cent. of the cars purchased locally are bought on time payment, and a working man earning $35.00 a week frequently plans to use one week's pay each month as payment for his car.

The automobile has apparently unsettled the habit of careful saving for some families. "Part of the money we spend on the car would go to the bank, I suppose," said more than one working class wife. A business man explained his recent inviting of social oblivion by selling his car by saying: "My car, counting depreciation and everything, was costing mighty nearly $100.00 a month, and my wife and I sat down together the other night and just figured that we're getting along, and if we're to have anything later on, we've just got to begin to save." The "moral" aspect of the competition between the automobile and certain accepted expenditures appears in the remark of another business man, "An automobile is a luxury, and no one has a right to one if he can't afford it. I haven't the slightest sympathy for any one who is out of work if he owns a car."

Men in the clothing industry are convinced that automobiles are bought at the expense of clothing, and the statements of a number of the working class wives bear this out:

"We'd rather do without clothes than give up the car," said one mother of nine children. "We used to go to his sister's to visit, but by the time we'd get the children shod and dressed"

4 "The National Retail Clothier has been devoting space to trying to find out what is the matter with the clothing industry and has been inclined to blame it on the automobile. "In one city, to quote an example cited in the articles, a store put on a campaign that usually resulted in a business of 150 suits and overcoats on a Saturday afternoon. This season the campaign netted seventeen sales, while an automobile agency across the street sold twenty-five cars on the weekly payment plan: In another, retail clothiers are unanimous in blaming the automobile for the admitted slump in the retail clothing trade." (Chicago Evening Post, December 28, 1923.)
there wasn't any money left for carfare. Now no matter how they look, we just poke 'em in the car and take 'em along."

"We don't have no fancy clothes when we have the car to pay for," said another. "The car is the only pleasure we have."

Even food may suffer:

"I'll go without food before I'll see us give up the car," said one woman emphatically, and several who were out of work were apparently making precisely this adjustment.

Twenty-one of the twenty-six families owning a car for whom data on bathroom facilities happened to be secured live in homes without bathtubs. Here we obviously have a new habit cutting in ahead of an older one and slowing down the diffusion of the latter. 9

Meanwhile, advertisements pour away at Middletown people with the tempting advice to spend money for automobiles for the sake of their homes and families:

"Hit the trail to better times!" says one such advertisement.

Another depicts a gray-haired banker lending a young couple the money to buy a car and proffering the friendly advice: "Before you can save money, you first must make money. And to make it you must have health, contentment, and full command of all your resources. . . . I have often advised customers of mine to buy cars, as I felt that the increased stimulation and opportunity of observation would enable them to earn amounts equal to the cost of their cars."

9 This low percentage of bathtubs would not hold for the entire car-owning group. The interviewers asked about bathtubs in these twenty-six cases out of curiosity, prompted by the run-down appearance of the homes.

White inroads upon savings and the re-allocation of items of home expenditure were the readjustments most often mentioned in connection with the financing of the family automobile, others also occur: "It's prohibition that's done it," according to an officer in the Middletown Trades Council; "drink money is going into cars." The same officer, in answering the question as to what he thought most of the men he comes in contact with are working for, guessed: "Twenty-five per cent. are fighting to keep their heads above water; 10 per cent. want to own their own homes; 65 per cent. are working to pay for cars." "All business is suffering," says a Middletown candy manufacturer and dealer. The candy business is poor now to what it was before the war. There is no money in it any more. People just aren't buying candy so much now. How can they? Even laboring-men put all their money into cars, and every other branch of business feels it. 9

Many families feel that an automobile is justified as an agency holding the family group together. "I never feel as close to my family as when we are all together in the car," said one business class mother, and one or two spoke of giving up Country Club membership or other recreations to get a car for this reason. "We don't spend anything on recreation except for the car. We save every place we can and put the money into the car. It keeps the family together," was an opinion voiced more than once. Sixty-one per cent. of 337 boys and 60 per cent. of 423 girls in the three upper years of the high school say that they motor more often with their parents than without them. 10

But this centralizing tendency of the automobile may be only a passing phase; sets in the other direction are almost equally prominent. "Our daughters [eighteen and fifteen] don't use our car much because they are always with somebody else in their car when we go out motoring," lamented one business class mother. And another said, "The two older children [eighteen and sixteen] never go out when the family motors. They always have something else on." "In the nineties we were all much more together," said another wife. "People brought chairs and cushions out of the house and sat on the lawn evenings. We rolled out a strip of carpet and put cushions on the porch step to take care of the unlimited overflow of neighbors that dropped by. We'd sit out all evening. The younger couples perhaps would wander off for half an hour to get a soda but come back to join in the informal singing or listen while somebody strummed a mandolin or guitar." "What on earth do you want me to do? Just sit around home all evening!" retorted a popular high school girl of today when her father discouraged her going out motoring for the evening with a young blade in a rakish car waiting at the curb. The fact that 348 boys and 382 girls in the three upper years of the high school placed "use of the automobile" fifth and fourth respectively in a list of twelve possible sources of disagreement between them and their parents 10.

As over against these answers regarding the automobile, 21 per cent. of the boys and 33 per cent. of the girls said that they go to the movies more often with their parents than without them, 25 per cent. and 22 per cent. respectively answered similarly as regards "listening to the radio," and 31 per cent. and 48 per cent. as regards "singing or playing a musical instrument." On the basis of these answers it would appear that the automobile is at present operating as a more active agency drawing Middletown families together than any of these other agencies.
suggests that this may be an increasing decentralizing agent.  

An earnest teacher in a Sunday School class of working-class boys and girls in their late teens was winding up the lesson on the temptations of Jesus: "These three temptations summarize all the temptations we encounter today: physical, comfort, fame, and wealth. Can you think of any temptation we have today that Jesus didn't have?" "Speed!" rejoined one boy. The unwanted interruption was quickly passed over. But the boy had mentioned a tendency underlying one of the four chief infringements of group laws in Middletown today, and the manifestations of Speed are not confined to "speeding." "Auto Polo next Sunday!" shouts the display advertisement of an amusement park near the city. "It's motor insanity—too fast for the movies!" The boys who have cars "step on the gas," and those who haven't cars sometimes steal them: "The desire of youth to step on the gas when it has no machine of its own," said the local press, "is considered responsible for the theft of the greater part of the [154] automobiles stolen from Middletown during the past year."  

The threat which the automobile presents to some anxious parents is suggested by the fact that of thirty girls brought before the juvenile court in the twelve months preceding September 1, 1924, charged with "sex crimes," for whom the place where the offense occurred was given in the records, nineteen were listed as having committed the offense in an automobile. Here again the automobile appears to some as an "enemy of the home and society.

Sharp, also, is the resentment aroused by this elbowing new device when it interferes with old-established religious habits.

11 See Table XIII.

12 In any consideration of the devotion to "speed" that accompanies the coming of the automobile, it should be borne in mind that the increased monotony for the bulk of the workers involved in the shift from the large-muscled hand-trades, including farming, to the small-muscled high-speed machine-tending jobs and the disappearance of the saloon as an easy means of "tellin' the world to go to hell" have combined with the habit-cracking, eye-opening effect of service in the late war to set the stage for the automobile as a release. The fact that serviceable second-hand cars can be bought for $75.00 and up, the simplicity of installment payment, "the fact that everybody has one"—all unite to make ownership of a car relatively easy, even for boys. Cf. the incident cited above of the boy who wanted to "swap in his Ford for a Studebaker that will go seventy-five miles an hour."

13 For ten others charged with sex offenses during this same period the scene of the offense was not given.

The minister trying to change people's behavior in desired directions through the spoken word must compete against the strong pull of the open road strengthened by endless printed "copy" inciting to travel. Preaching to 200 people on a hot, sunny Sunday in midsummer on "The Supreme Need of Today," a leaing Middletown minister denounced "automobility—the thing those people who have off motoring on Sunday instead of going to church. If you want to use your car on Sunday, take it out Sunday morning and bring some shut-ins to church and Sunday School; then in the afternoon, if you choose, go out and worship God in the beauty of nature—but don't neglect to worship Him indoors too." This same month there appeared in the Saturday Evening Post, reaching approximately one family in six in Middletown, a two-page spread on the automobile as an "enricher of life," quoting "a bank president in a Mid-Western city" as saying, "A man who works six days a week and spends the seventh on his own doorstep certainly will not pick up the extra dimes in the great thoroughfares of life." "Some sunny Sunday very soon," said another two-page spread in the Post, "just drive an Overland up to your door—tell the family to hurry the packing and get aboard—and be off with smiles down the nearest road—free, loose, and happy—bound for green wonderlands." Another such advertisement urged Middletown to "Increase Your Week-End Touring Radius." If we except the concentrated group pressure of war time, never perhaps since the days of the camp-meeting have the citizens of this community been subjected to such a powerfully focused stream of habit diffusion. To get the full force of this appeal, one must remember that the nearest lakes or hills are one hundred miles from Middletown in either direction and that an afternoon's motoring brings only mile upon mile of level stretches like Middletown itself.

"We had a fine day yesterday," exclaimed an elderly pillar of a prominent church, by way of Monday morning greeting. "We left home at five in the morning. By seven we swept into ——. At

14 Over against these appeals the Sunday of 1890 with its fewer alternatives should be borne in mind: as a Middletown plumber described it, "There wasn't anything to do but go to church or a saloon or walk uptown and look in the shop windows. You'd go hunting saloons that were open, or maybe, if you were a hot sport, rent a rig for $1.50 for the afternoon and take your girl out riding."
eight we had breakfast at ——, eighty miles from home. From there we went on to Lake ——, the longest in the state. I had never seen it before, and I’ve lived here all my life, but I sure do want to go again. Then we went to ——— the Y.M.C.A. camp —— and had our chicken dinner. It’s a fine thing for people to get out that way on Sundays. No question about it. They see different things and get a larger outlook.”

“Did you miss church?” he was asked.

“Yes, I did, but you can’t do both. I never missed church or Sunday School for thirteen years and I kind of feel as if I’d done my share. The ministers ought not to rail against people’s driving on Sunday. They ought just to realize that they won’t be there every Sunday during the summer, and make church interesting enough so they’ll want to come.”

But if the automobile touches the rest of Middletown’s living at many points, it has revolutionized its leisure; more, perhaps, than the movies or any other intrusion new to Middletown since the nineties, it is making leisure-time enjoyment a regularly expected part of every day and week rather than an occasional event. The readily available leisure-time options of even the working class have been multiplied many-fold. As one working class housewife remarked, “We just go to lots of things we couldn’t go to if we didn’t have a car.” Beefsteak and watermelon picnics in a park or a near-by wood can be a matter of a moment’s decision on a hot afternoon.

Not only has walking for pleasure become practically extinct, but the occasional event such as a parade on a holiday attracts far less attention now.

“Lots of noise on the street preparing for the 4th,” reports the diary of a Middletown merchant on July 3, 1891. And on the 4th: “The town full of people—grand parade with representatives of different trades, an ox roasted whole, four bands, fireworks, races, greased pig, dancing all day, etc.” An account in ’93 reports: “Quite a stir in town. Firecrackers going off all night and all this day—big horse racing at the Fair Ground. Stores all closed this afternoon. Fireworks at the Fair Ground this evening.”

Today the week before the Fourth brings a pale edition of the earlier din, continuing until the night before. But the Fourth dawns quietly on an empty city; Middletown has taken to the road. Memorial Day and Labor Day are likewise shorn of their earlier glory.

Use of the automobile has apparently been influential in spreading the “vacation” habit. The custom of having each summer a respite, usually of two weeks, from getting-a-living activities, with pay unabated, is increasingly common among the business class, but it is as yet very uncommon among the workers. “Vacations in 1890?” echoed one substantial citizen. Why, the word wasn’t in the dictionary!” “Executives of the 1890 period never took a vacation,” said another man of a type common in Middletown thirty-five years ago, who used to announce proudly that they had “not missed a day’s work in twenty years.” Vacations there were in the nineties, nevertheless, particularly for the wives and children of those business folk who had most financial leeway. Put-In Bay, Chautauqua, country boarding-houses where the rates were $5.00 a week for adults and $3.00 for children, the annual conference of the State Baptist Association, the Annual National Christian Endeavor Convention, the annual G.A.R. encampment, all drew people from Middletown. But these affected almost entirely business class people. A check of the habits of the parents of the 124 working class wives shows that summer vacations were almost unknown among this large section of the population in the nineties. In lieu of vacations both for workers and many of the business class there were excursions: those crowded, grimy, exuberant, banana-smelling affairs on which one sat up nights in a day coach, or, if a “dude,” took a sleeper, from Sat-

18 Not all of the business class are paid while on vacation, e.g., many retail clerks are not paid, but the custom is usual.

The growth of the vacation habit is reflected in the fact that the Woman’s Club met with unabated vigor all through the summer in 1890. It took the first vacation in its history for July and August. Commencing with 1914 it has closed earlier and earlier, and since 1919-20 has closed for the three months from June 1.
urday till Monday morning, and went back to work a bit seedy from loss of sleep but full of the glamour of Petoskey, or the ball game at Chicago. Two hundred and twelve people from Middletown went to Chicago in one week-end on one such excursion. One hundred and fifty journeyed to the state capital to see the unveiling of a monument to an ex-governor—"a statesman," as they called them in those days. Even train excursions to towns fifteen, twenty, and forty miles away were great events, and people reported having "seen the sights" of these other Middletowns with much enthusiasm.

Today a few plants close for one or two weeks each summer, allowing their workers an annual "vacation" without pay. Others do not close down, but workers "can usually take not over two weeks off without pay and have their jobs back when they return." Foremen in many plants get one or two weeks with pay. Of the 122 working class families giving information on this point, five families took one week off in 1923 and again in 1924, seven others took something over a week in each year, twelve took a week or more in only one of the two years. No others had as extensive vacations as these twenty-four, although other entire families took less than a week in one or both years, and in other cases some members of the families took vacations of varying lengths. Of the 100 families for whom income distribution was secured, thirty-four reported money spent on vacations; the amounts ranged from $1.49 to $175.00, averaging $24.12.

But even short trips are still beyond the horizon of many workers' families, as such comments as the following show:

"We haven't had a vacation in five years. He got a day off to paint the house, and another year they gave him two hours off to get the deed to the house signed."

"Never had a vacation in my life, honey!"

"Can't afford one this year because we're repairing the house."

"I don't know what a vacation is—I haven't had one for so long."

"We like to get out in the car each week for half a day but can't afford a longer vacation."

But the automobile is extending the radius of those who are allowed vacations with pay and is putting short trips within the reach of some for whom such vacations are still "not in the dictionary."

"The only vacation we've had in twenty years was three days we took last year to go to Benton Harbor with my brother-in-law," said one woman, proudly recounting her trip. "We had two Fords. The women slept in the cars, the men on boards between the two running boards. Here's a picture of the two cars, taken just as the sun was coming up. See the shadows? And there's a hill back of them."

Like the automobile, the motion picture is more to Middletown than simply a new way of doing an old thing; it has added new dimensions to the city's leisure. To be sure, the spectacle-watching habit was strong upon Middletown in the nineties. Whenever they had a chance people turned out to a "show," but chances were relatively fewer. Fourteen times during January, 1890, for instance, the Opera House was opened for performances ranging from Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Black Crook, before the paper announced that "there will not be any more attractions at the Opera House for nearly two weeks."

In July there were no "attractions"; a half dozen were scattered through August and September; there were twelve in October.13

Today nine motion picture theaters operate from 1 to 11 P.M. seven days a week in summer and winter; four of the nine give three different programs a week, the other five having two a week; thus twenty-two different programs with a total of over 300 performances are available to Middletown every week in the year. In addition, during January, 1923, there were three plays in Middletown and four motion pictures in other places than the regular theaters, in July three plays and one additional movie, in October two plays and one movie.

About two and three-fourths times the city's entire population attended the nine motion picture theaters during the month of July, 1923, the "valley" month of the year, and four and one-half times the total population in the "peak" month of December.14 Of 395 boys and 457 girls in the three upper years

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13 Exact counts were made for only January, July, and October. There were less than 125 performances, including matinees, for the entire year.
14 These figures are rough estimates based upon the following data: The total federal amusement tax paid by Middletown theaters in July was $3,002.04 and in December $4,781.47. The average tax paid per admission
of the high school who stated how many times they had attended the movies in "the last seven days," a characteristic week in mid-November, 30 per cent. of the boys and 39 per cent. of the girls had not attended, 31 and 29 per cent. respectively had been only once, 22 and 21 per cent. respectively two times, 10 and 7 per cent. three times, and 7 and 4 per cent. four or more times. According to the housewives interviewed regarding the custom in their own families, in three of the forty business class families interviewed and in thirty-eight of the 122 working class families no member "goes at all" to the movies. One family in ten in each group goes as an entire family once a week or oftener; the two parents go together without their children once a week or oftener in four business class families (one in ten), and in two working class families (one in sixty); in fifteen business class families and in thirty-eight working class families the children were said by their mothers to go without their parents once or more times weekly.

In short, the frequency of movie attendance of high school boys and girls is about equal, business class families tend to go more often than do working class families, and children of both groups attend more often without their parents than do all

is about $0.035, and the population in 1923 about 38,000. Attendance estimates secured in this way were raised by one-sixth to account for children under twelve who are tax-free. The proprietor of three representative houses said that he had seven admissions over twelve years to one aged twelve or less, and the proprietor of another house drawing many children has four over twelve to one aged twelve or less.

These attendance figures include, however, farmers and others from outlying districts.

The question was asked in terms of frequency of attendance "in an average month" and was checked in each case by attendance during the month just past.

Lack of money and young children needing care in the home are probably the two factors influencing these families that do not attend at all; of the forty-one working class families in which all the children are twelve years or under, eighteen never go to the movies, while of the eighty-one working class families in which one or more of the children is twelve or older, only twenty reported that no member of the family ever attends.

"I haven't been anywhere in two years," said a working class wife of thirty-three, the mother of six children, the youngest twenty months. "I went to the movies once two years ago. I was over to see Mrs. —— and she says, 'Come on, let's go to the movies.' I didn't believe her. She is always ragging the men and I thought she was joking. 'Come on,' she says, 'put your things on and we'll see a show.' I thought, well, if she wanted to rag the men, I'd help her, so I got up and put my things on. And, you know, she really meant it. She paid my carfare uptown and paid my way into the movies. I was never so surprised in my life. I haven't been anywhere since."
As in the case of the books it reads, comedy, heart interest, and adventure compose the great bulk of what Middletown enjoys in the movies. Its heroes, according to the manager of the leading theater, are, in the order named, Harold Lloyd, comedian; Gloria Swanson, heroine in modern society films; Thomas Meighan, hero in modern society films; Colleen Moore, ingenue; Douglas Fairbanks, comedian and adventurer; Mary Pickford, ingenue; and Norma Talmadge, heroine in modern society films. Harold Lloyd comedies draw the largest crowds. “Middletown is amusement hungry,” says the opening sentence in a local editorial; at the comedies Middletown lives for an hour in a happy sophisticated make-believe world that leaves it, according to the advertisement of one film, “happily convinced that Life is very well worth living.”

Next largest are the crowds which come to see the sensational society films. The kind of vicarious living brought to Middletown by these films may be inferred from such titles as: “Alimony”—brilliant men, beautiful jazz babies, champagne baths, midnight revels, petting parties in the purple dawn, all ending in one terrific smashing climax that makes you gasp”; “Married Flirts—Husbands: Do you flirt? Does your wife always know where you are? Are you faithful to your vows? Wives: What’s your hubby doing? Do you know? Do you worry? Watch out for Married Flirts.” So fast do these flow across the silver screen that, e.g., at one time The Daring Years, Sinners in Silk, Women Who Gave, and The Price She Paid were all running synchronously, and at another “Name the Man—a story of betrayed womanhood,” Rouged Lips, and The Queen of Sin. While Western “action” films and a million-dollar spectacle like The Covered Wagon or The Hunchback of Notre Dame draw heavy houses, and while managers lament that there are too few of the popular comedy films, it is the film with burning “heart interest,” that packs Middletown’s motion picture houses week after week. Young Middletown enters eagerly into the vivid experience of Flaming Youth: “neckers, petters, white kisses, red kisses, pleasure-mad daughters, sensation-craving mothers, by an author who didn’t dare sign his name; the truth bold, naked, sensational”—so ran the press advertisement—under the spell of the powerful conditioning medium of pictures presented with music and all possible heightening of the emotional content, and the added factor of sharing this experience with a “date” in a darkened room. Meanwhile, Down to the Sea in Ships, a costly spectacle of whaling adventure, failed at the leading theater “because,” the exhibitor explained, “the whale is really the hero in the film and there wasn’t enough ‘heart interest’ for the women.”

Over against these spectacles which Middletown watches today stand the pale ‘sensations’ of the nineties, when Sappho was the apotheosis of daring at the Opera House: “The Telephone Girl—Hurricane hits, breezy dialogue, gorgeous stage setting, dazzling dancing, spirited repartee, superb music, opulent costumes,” Over the Garden Wall, Edith’s Burglar, East Lynne, La Belle Maria, or Women’s Revenge, The Convict’s Daughter, Joe, a Mountain Fairy, The Vagabond Heroine, Guilty Without Crime, The World Against Her (which the baker pronounced in his diary, “good, but too solemn”), Love Will Find a Way, St. Plankard. These, it must be recalled, were the great days when Uncle Tom’s Cabin, with “fifty men, women, and children, a pack of genuine bloodhounds, grandest street parade ever given, and two bands,” packed the Opera House to capacity.

Actual changes of habits resulting from the week-after-week witnessing of these films can only be inferred. Young Middletown is finding discussion of problems of mating in this new agency that boasts in large illustrated advertisements, “Girls! You will learn how to handle ’em!” and “Is it true that marriage kills love? If you want to know what love really means, its exquisite torture, its overwhelming raptures, see——”

“Sheiks and their ‘shebas,’” according to the press account of the Sunday opening of one film, “. . . sat without a movement or a whisper through the presentation. . . . It was a real exhibition of love-making and the youths and maidens of [Middletown] who thought that they knew something about the art found that they still had a great deal to learn.”

Some high school teachers are convinced that the movies are a powerful factor in bringing about the “early sophistication” of the young and the relaxing of social taboos. One working class mother frankly welcomes the movies as an aid in child-
rearing, saying, "I send my daughter because a girl has to learn
the ways of the world somehow and the movies are a good safe
way." The judge of the juvenile court lists the movies as one of
the "big four" causes of local juvenile delinquency, believing that the disregard of group mores by the young is de-
initely related to the witnessing week after week of fictitious
behavior sequences that habitually link the taking of long
chances and the happy ending. While the community attempts
to safeguard its schools from commercially intent private hands,
this powerful new educational instrument, which has taken
Middletown unawares, remains in the hands of a group of
men—an ex-peanut-stand proprietor, an ex-bicycle racer and
race promoter, and so on—whose primary concern is making
money.22

Middletown in 1890 was not hesitant in criticizing poor shows at the Opera House. The "morning after" reviews of
1890 bristle with frank adjectives: "Their version of the play
is incomplete. Their scenery is limited to one drop. The women
are ancient, the costumes dingy and old. Outside of a few
specialties, the show was very "bum." "When Sappho struck
town in 1900, the press roasted it roundly, concluding, "[Mid-
dletown] has had enough of naughtiness of the stage. . . .
Manager W—— will do well to fumigate his pretty playhouse
before one of the clean, instructive, entertaining plays he has
billed comes before the footlights." The newspapers of today
keep their hands off the movies, save for running free pub-
licity stories and cuts furnished by the exhibitors who adver-
tise. Save for some efforts among certain of the women's clubs
to "clean up the movies" and the opposition of the Ministerial
Association to "Sunday movies," Middletown appears content
in the main to take the movies at their face value—"a darned
good show"—and largely disregard their educational or habit-
forming aspects.

Though less widely diffused as yet than automobile owning
or movie attendance, the radio nevertheless is rapidly crowding
its way in among the necessities in the family standard of liv-
ing. Not the least remarkable feature of this new invention is
its accessibility. Here skill and ingenuity can in part offset
money as an open sesame to swift sharing of the enjoyments of
the wealthy. With but little equipment one can call the life of
the rest of the world from the air, and this equipment can be
purchased piecemeal at the ten-cent store. Far from being
simply one more means of passive enjoyment, the radio has
given rise to much ingenious manipulative activity. In a count
of representative sections of Middletown, it was found that,
of 303 homes in twenty-eight blocks in the "best section" of
town, inhabited almost entirely by the business class, 12 per
cent. had radios; of 518 workers' homes in sixty-four blocks,
6 per cent. had radios.24

As this new tool is rolling back the horizons of Middletown
for the bank clerk or the mechanic sitting at home and listen-
ing to a Philharmonic concert or a sermon by Dr. Fosdick, or
to President Coolidge bidding his father good night on the
eve of election,25 and as it is wedging its way with the movie,
the automobile, and other new tools into the twisted mass of
habits that are living for the 38,000 people of Middletown,

22 Cf. Ch. XI.
Miriam Van Waters, referee of the juvenile court of Los Angeles and
author of Youth in Conflict, says in a review of Cyril Burt's The Young
Delinquent: "The cinema is recognized for what it is, the main source of
excitement and of moral education for city children. Burt finds that only
mental defectives take the movies seriously enough to imitate the criminal
exploits portrayed therein, and only a small proportion of thieves can be
traced to stealing to gain money for admittance. In no such direct way
does the moving picture commonly demoralize youth. It is in the subtle
way of picturing the standards of adult life, action and emotion, cheapen-
ing, debasing, distorting adults until they appear in the eyes of the young
people perpetually bathed in a moral atmosphere of intrigue, jealousy, wild
emotionalism, and cheap sentimentality. Burt realizes that these exhibitions
startle children prematurely. (The Survey, April 15, 1928.)

23 One exhibitor in Middletown is a college-trained man interested in
bringing "good films" to the city. He, like the others, however, is caught in
the competitive game and matches his competitors' sensational advertise-
ments.

24 Both percentages have undoubtedly increased notably since 1924, when
the counts were made.
25 In 1890 the local press spoke of an occasional citizen's visiting "Paris,
France," and "London, England," and even in 1924 a note in one of the
papers recording the accident of some Middletown people finding themselves
in a box at a New York theater with a group of Englishmen was captioned
"Lucky they weren't Chinese!" The rest of the world is still a long
way from Middletown, but movies and radio are doing much to break down
this isolation: "I've got 126 stations on my radio," gleefully announced a
local working man. Meanwhile, the president of the Radio Corporation of
America proclaims an era at hand when "the oldest and newest civilizations
will throb together at the same intellectual appeal, and to the same artistic
emotions."
readjustments necessarily occur. Such comments as the following suggest their nature:

"I use time evenings listening in that I used to spend in reading."

"The radio is hurting movie going, especially Sunday evening." (From a leading movie exhibitor.)

"I don't use my car so much any more. The heavy traffic makes it less fun. But I spend seven nights a week on my radio. We hear fine music from Boston." (From a shabby man of fifty.)

"Sundays I take the boy to Sunday School and come straight home and tune in. I get first an eastern service, then a Cincinnati one. Then there's nothing doing till about two-thirty, when I pick up an eastern service again and follow 'em across the country till I wind up with California about ten-thirty. Last night I heard a ripping sermon from Westminster Church somewhere in California. We've no preachers here that can compare with any of them."

"One of the bad features of radio," according to a teacher, "is that children stay up late at night and are not fit for school next day."

"We've spent close on to $100 on our radio, and we built it ourselves at that," commented one of the worker's wives. "Where'd we get the money? Oh, out of our savings, like everybody else."

In the flux of competing habits that are oscillating the members of the family now towards and now away from the home, radio occupies an intermediate position. Twenty-five per cent. of 337 high school boys and 22 per cent. of 423 high school girls said that they listen more often to the radio with their parents than without them, and, as pointed out above, 20 per cent. of 274 boys in the three upper years of the high school answered "radio" to the question, "In what thing that you are doing at home this fall are you most interested?"—more than gave any other answer. More than one mother said that her family used to scatter in the evening—"but now we all sit around and listen to the radio."

Likewise the place of the radio in relation to Middletown's

other leisure habits is not wholly clear. As it becomes more perfected, cheaper, and a more accepted part of life, it may cease to call forth so much active, constructive ingenuity and become one more form of passive enjoyment. Doubtless it will continue to play a mighty rôle in lifting Middletown out of the humdrum of every day; it is beginning to take over that function of the great political rallies or the trips by the trainload to the state capital to hear a noted speaker or to see a monument dedicated that a generation ago helped to set the average man in a wide place. But it seems not unlikely that, while furnishing a new means of diversified enjoyment, it will at the same time operate, with national advertising, syndicated newspapers, and other means of large-scale diffusion, as yet another means of standardizing many of Middletown's habits. Indeed, at one point is one brought up more sharply against the impossibility of studying Middletown as a self-contained, self-starting community than when one watches these space-binding leisure-time inventions imported from without—automobile, motion picture, and radio—reshaping the city.

28 Cf. N. 10 above.
27 Less than 1 per cent. of the 341 girls answered "radio."