

F 7. 1 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

You will see on page 2 that F 7. contains a short book of 12 chapters & a concluding summary. The first three chapters fit well the F topic What Can We Learn That Could Make Us Happier, but you may wonder why I put the whole book in this section. So let me try to justify right away my decision to do so. There is an old saying "If ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise". That I believe to be a foolish saying. I got through several years of growing up blissfully ignorant of anything in this book. But the more I learned about the things discussed in this book the happier I became, because I then knew how wrong I had been in much of my thinking before. I had known almost nothing about some issues on which I would have acted, even voted, and would have made things worse for myself and for others because I had absorbed from my environment opinions that I acted upon not knowing enough to realize that they were sometimes wrong. Of course no one can ever know everything about any important issue, yet we all have to act on whatever knowledge we possess and so should always be open to learning more. The more open we are to learning different viewpoints, and weighing and considering them & what they are based on if anything to figure out their relative merits and defects, the wiser our actions can become, and the more satisfaction we can take in that. So I invite you to enjoy this Food for Thought, one chapter at a time, weigh and consider it over time along with everything else relevant. Some of it could make your personal life happier and some could make you happier about your impact on public decisions.

S O M E F O O D F O R T H O U G H T

In a Dozen Small Spiced Morsels

**Formulas
for a
Happier You
and a
Better World**

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PREFACE: WHAT LED ME TO WRITE THIS BOOKLET?

When I was a boy, an Uncle used to leave on a little table in the living room a copy of a publication called ELBERT HUBBARD'S SCRAPBOOK. He hoped that anyone resting in the comfortable living room chairs would read something in it. The book was a collection of writings that Hubbard had selected as having contributed to his own thinking over his lifetime. Hubbard had himself been influenced, as most of us are, by many well known and some generally unknown people. My uncle wanted his visitors, and not least his son and nephews, when the latter visited, to satisfy their curiosity about this scrapbook by reading some of its short essays. That I did.

Whether the scrapbook concept had anything to do with it or not, from my college days on to the present I made a habit of writing down in a little notebook my thinking as it had been stimulated by current events or by what I had heard or read recently. This was very helpful in slowly developing my own thinking and even my philosophy of life. Readers might try it too.

On a recent birthday a cousin gave me a little booklet LIVE and LEARN and PASS IT ON containing a wide variety of one-liners from people from 5 to 95 years of age. Now in my 80s, I realize that I have had a long time in which to learn something helpful and important enough to pass on. I hope I have learned the right things not the wrong ones. I have had opportunities to pass some of it on during a long college teaching career. But the classroom had to be devoted largely to training students in academic subjects. It was not to a very large extent a place to pass on whatever general wisdom I may have accumulated as I lived.

So recently I have been asking myself, what have I really learned that I ought to make a further effort to pass on? What should I try to help others learn sooner than I did? And how can I do that?

The present booklet is my attempt to pass on, while I am still able to do so, some of my thinking in the hope that at least some of it will be helpful to others.

You will find that this is an upbeat little book. It should make living more enjoyable. And it should help you see how some problems that plague society can be handled much better than they have been, and so make a better world for you and for your children.

Throughout my own life I have benefited so much by weighing and considering the ideas of other people. Whether initially agreeing or disagreeing, many I found sooner or later had both merits and demerits that helped my own thinking. What did not help my thinking was to accept or reject ideas out of hand because I agreed or disagreed. What did help was to slowly and carefully weigh and consider different ideas, over time.

Some of the ideas you find in this volume may not be new to you, for they are indeed not novel. But sometimes the commonplace is dismissed as what everyone knows. The real trouble is that it is dismissed rather than being geared into our lives and hence given the living importance that it should have. I invite you to consider how important are some things we know, but to which we do not pay enough attention. Wisdom does not always come in novel packages, but in living up to what we know.

Underlying these essays is a conception that will become more meaningful as you read them. Life obviously involves activity of the body and of the mind. And at every point in life, the activity may be wise or unwise in various ways and to various degrees. What is wise is not simply a matter of personal taste, not something about which there can be no argument because one alternative is as good as another. We can choose whatever we want to & are able to do, but cannot determine consequences. There are realities that do that. Wisdom involves learning about them and then choosing what harmonizes with the best in human nature, harmonizes with other people with whom we have inter-personal relations, with society at large, and with the world of nature.

Some ideas in this volume could too easily be rejected out of hand because they are indeed too unfamiliar and thus seemingly radical or impracticable. I invite you to ponder seriously the issues they address, rather than rejecting them too quickly. The world's problems cannot be solved by refusing to entertain new ideas and simply by doing harder everything we have already been doing. The problems are the result of present dominant ideas, actions and institutions. Changes in these are sometimes necessary if the world is to get better not worse. Indeed this in a nutshell is the second general bit of wisdom that the following chapters try to apply in some detail.

It is my hope that most of what follows you will find enjoyable to ponder and stimulative of your own thinking rather than rejecting it as too commonplace or too uncommon. I have chosen what is presented here because it is what I feel that I have learned that is so important that I want to say it to anyone who will listen. And I hope that it helps those who will weigh and consider what seems so important to me.

These essays are offered as food for thought.

I invite you who picked up this book, and whoever else will, to weigh and consider these ideas to nourish your own thinking, your enjoyment of life and your contribution to a better world.

There are a dozen little essays in this booklet ranging from 4 pages to 16 pages in length, plus a Preface and a Conclusion. They are arranged in

the order in which they should be read, although each could stand by itself if need be. If you read only the Preface the first day, then read one essay a day, and the Conclusion in one day, then you can finish in two weeks. Each essay will give you something different to think about each day. Some essays you will likely think about well beyond the two weeks.

A little more clue to the sequence of essays may be helpful. Everything in this world involves two sorts of things, an ideology and a set of social institutions. By ideology I mean all the ideas in our heads, all the values we hold, and our varied emotional attachments to both ideas and values. Social institutions include everything from the family, to community organizations, all business organizations, religious organizations, all the agencies of governments at different levels, etc.

Our individual ideologies influence our individual attitudes, actions, habits and roles in society, and our group ideologies underlie all our social institutions and their operation.

The first three essays are about individual ideologies and their relations to our happiness. But how widespread these ideologies are is also important in the structure and operation of social institutions, as is indicated in the conclusion. The essays on The Good in the World and History, #4 and #5, are to provide some perspective. Essays #6 to #11 deal primarily with social institutions that affect us, though some also mention ideologies. In #12 I pay special attention to what a person might be able to do in addition to trying to improve an institution's behavior since the former possibility might seem remote.

So the essays are quite different. Read and chew mentally on one at a time, preferably in the order they appear.

1. WONDER and PRIVILEGE

We all find ourselves largely preoccupied with the daily rounds of living in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. But now and then, escaping briefly from the hustle and bustle, we find ourselves pondering some important questions: What are we getting out of life? Couldn't we somehow be happier than we are? Before we have more than half answers to such questions we are busy again, too busy to care or to ponder further.

We react to the life around us in so many different ways. It may seem very good, if we are lucky and well situated. It may be very hard if we are not. It may not occur to us that our typical reactions and attitudes are what determines to a large extent the quality of life for us, even more than does our luck or our situation itself. My Mother knew all that, and she tried to tell me, but I was too young to understand its truth until much later in life.

I have known other people also who somehow seem to be happy, who seem to enjoy each day and consider life a privilege even when life could treat them much better. I have wondered whether they have a secret that I could share? What do I know that would help me see more of what they see in life and in the world of nature? And then I found out. You can too.

First I learned to pay more attention than I was accustomed to paying to the outlook of the poet and the religionist on the world of nature. Such people called my attention to, and made me really see and appreciate, the beauty in the natural world that I had usually taken for granted. I had been missing a lot. Now I have learned to get much pleasure from what I used to consider the commonplace world of nature. I began to understand why some people always seem to be happy.

Among the commonplace is the changing round of seasons and weather. We can either enjoy these, or we can deplore their changing nature as we have to adjust to them. In the succession of busy days, even if life is not felt to be a rat race, we are too easily annoyed when we have to put up with bad weather. And we may keep so busy that we barely notice when it is good weather. Yet it doesn't really take much time to enjoy the beauty of nature around us that is free, as we go busily about our tasks. We can even take pleasure in our ability to battle the weather when it is bad.

Sometimes seeing a beautiful sunset might stop us more than momentarily. We do not have a beautiful one every day, but every year there are many that are worth stopping to see and enjoy.

Those who live where the seasons bring changes from summer warmth to winter snows have a whole sequence of natural beauties to enjoy. I am no longer able to participate in seasonal outdoor sports, but I envy those of you who still can.

On many a summer day it feels good just to be alive, even if all I do for a short while is just sit in the shade and enjoy a warm summer breeze. Perhaps the summers are the easiest seasons to enjoy. We can go outdoors without extra clothing. I have learned to relish each nice warm day and especially the big white cumulus clouds floating in the blue sky above. Of course there are those quick summer showers as well as the longer rains, but they are a blessing that keeps the grass green, and they are needed to make our food grow. If there are not enough of them, we want more of them. Of course nature can also show its fury and power in big storms that drive us to shelters.

Cool fall weather can be invigorating. And who can not take time to see the leaves turn color before dropping off? Some people enjoy the Fall season the most of all.

It is hard not to see the beauty of winter landscapes and gently falling snow. Though it is sometimes hard to make one's way through a wintry storm, it feels good to make it and then warm up inside.

Spring brings a rebirth to much of the natural world. The grass turns green again, and some birds return and build their nests. Trees bud and then their leaves appear again. And then we have the beauty of the flowers that blossom and bloom much of the summer.

Of course, stormy weather whenever it occurs can induce more mixed feelings. But nature provides a continuous round of spectacles in which beauty resides, even in some storms.

Appreciation of all this comes easily. But we can miss much of it if we are too busy for such inexpensive enjoyments. We can be happier simply by paying more attention to the beauty of nature and letting ourselves enjoy it fully.

The natural world around us normally evokes other emotions too. There is the wonder of it all. If we really think about it, we will marvel at the adaptation of the plant and animal worlds to the seasonal changes. We can envy birds their ability to soar through the air and to pick their way quickly through the branches of trees before choosing where to alight. We are told that their behavior, and that of all non-human animals, is simply determined by instinct; it is unbelievable, for it is obvious that at every second a bird in flight continuously makes real choices that could hardly have all been predetermined by some instinct. Do we sometimes accept too simple explanations of what is commonplace?

I was quite amazed when I tried to delve behind the world of nature to get a glimpse of these phenomena as the scientist does. So let us now turn to the scientists to see how it all works. They are

continuously probing the natural world to increase our understanding of it. We don't need to be scientists ourselves to be aware of the fact that the aspects of the world that scientists explore indeed boggle the mind.

In fact my mind was boggled at least four times as I got a glimpse of the world according to science: once looking inside solid objects, once looking at the skies, and twice more looking at living things.

Scientists tell us that solid matter appears to be made up of particles too small to be seen separately without a microscope. And that even what an ordinary microscope shows us are not the basic particles. They do not even seem to be sure what are the basic particles, or whether they are not just some form of organized energy. It is mind-boggling to try to conceive of solid matter in the terms in which it is now seen by scientists. The simplest view reduces matter to a constellation of what they call atoms. We have been told that atoms themselves are like little solar systems with a complex nucleus and with electrical charges flying around it. Such a system seems to be controlled by mysterious forces.

Indeed scientists' limited understanding of these matters must be somewhere nearly right, because it is on the basis of their understanding that they have been able to develop most of our modern technology. Our entire economies rest upon these applications of their knowledge. Unfortunately, they have even learned how to change some matter into energy in atomic bombs with frightening explosive force.

When we look into the night sky, at least in the country where city lights do not prevent it, we may be able to see a somewhat milky band of starlight across part of the sky. This is when we are looking through part of a spiral nebula of which our solar system is a part, instead of looking out from the edge of the nebula at the rest of the universe. Some sky objects that appear to us to be stars, are not just suns, we are told, but nebulae made up like our milky way of millions of suns. And there seem to be an untold but extremely large number of nebulae. Astronomers think they know about how far away various nebulae are, and they measure the distance in units called light years: a light year being the distance light travels in a year while traveling about 186,000 miles a second. Some nebulae they calculate to be millions of light years away. All this is absolutely mind boggling. And the suns in these nebulae are huge balls of fire that seem to be moving apart through vast spaces, suns that over billions of years are creating heavy elements such as those that compose our little planet, a planet that has somehow been spun off from our own sun along with other planets.

Other scientists, geologists, tell us that this fruitful earth of ours seems itself to involve big tectonic plates floating on a molten magma underneath the crust on which we live our brief lives, subject as we are to

atmospheric storms as well as tranquil beauties. Whole continents are adrift on this molten magma.

So, behind the commonplace world we see is the amazing and mind-boggling physical world, some of which is too vast to comprehend. Some of what we think of as solid matter is made up of parts too small to see even with a microscope. And our entire continents are floating on molten magma.

As if this was not enough, we are told things about our own bodies and minds which are almost incredible. We take most of this for granted, when in fact it should be regarded as astounding. We think it strange and very bothersome, to put it mildly, when our bodily or mental system does not work normally. We might better regard its normal functioning as almost unbelievably wonderful.

We are said to be made up of living cells. Each cell is a complex system of parts which function together. That enables each cell to function as part of an organ or other part of our body. And that in turn performs a different function for the body as a whole. It is almost incredible how each little part cooperates with other little parts to enable each group of parts to perform some function for the body as a whole. Almost all of this goes on without any conscious direction on our part. The brain seems to regulate the whole system automatically. Blood circulates bringing oxygen and needed nutrients to cells and carrying away waste products. Complicated electrical nerve impulses go to and from the brain and thus seem to direct the operation of the whole system in mysterious ways. If invisible disease agents attack the system, a whole flock of activities takes place automatically to try, sometimes successfully but sometimes unsuccessfully, to overcome the undesired disease agents. That is called our immune system. It is incredibly complex.

The body needs a certain amount of sleep, so we get sleepy, and we set aside our nights for sleep. The body needs food, so we get hungry. We consciously decide what to eat, only partly by taste. From experience we learned that some things are poisonous and others are not. So taste is not enough of a guide to what is safe or to what our body needs.

To perpetuate the human race, there is the sex drive, which is very pleasurable. What comes of it? Usually a single squirming little sperm cell, out of many released by the male, unites with the female cell under the right circumstances. The resulting cell proceeds to multiply. And what a multiplication!! For after a while the cells somehow begin to differentiate their structures and become little bodily organs to serve different bodily functions. A whole little human body develops.

After birth that body is totally dependent upon someone to take

care of it. We are endowed with a desire to take care of it. The random motions of the little bodily limbs come slowly under control of the brain as the body and mind mature a little. But this little bundle of matter and energy that can become human is almost like a miracle, a natural miracle. How can all this come about from a couple of little cells that somehow direct the whole developmental process. And although all this has now produced over 6 billion living people in the present generation, every one of them is somehow unique. That at least is familiar and commonplace, but do we fully realize how mind-boggling even that really is? Scientists have only begun to unravel the determinants of our biological inheritance. They picture it as determined by our DNA, a double helix composed of incredibly complex patterns of chemical genes in 23 pairs of chromosomes.

Let us go back a few paragraphs to where we mentioned that the brain seems to regulate the body automatically. In addition to all that the brain does unconsciously, it enables us to be self-conscious. It enables us to read this and to think. It permits us to decide what attitudes to take toward things, and to decide what we will do. All that we think and do is influenced though not determined by the whole environmental situation in which we grow up and live. Especially important are the responses we get as a child from our parents and others. And as adults we are still subjected to multiple influences. I said that what we think and do is influenced, but it is not determined by these things, because each of us has free will--we are free to decide what to accept and what to reject among these influences. Our attitudes toward everything in life are things we can decide to choose or to reject.

Something similar to what goes on unconsciously in us goes on in all animal life. Each animal is partly regulated by a brain that controls much of its behavior. Some animals we know also have a small element of freedom, in that they choose, like the birds, some of their own actions. Although city dwellers do not see many forms of life in our urban environment, we have access to information about the myriad other forms of life. Some TV programs show us the most amazing forms of sea life, for example. One would never imagine how many and varied the different forms of animal life are.

As for plant life, each plant typically produces so many seeds that, if they all produced another plant, each species of plant could overpopulate the earth. So they don't all survive. It is necessary that only a few seeds produce new plants. Most seeds are and have to be wasted in order that some few hit fertile soil and reproduce. As for plant varieties, they seem to

be almost endless. We have learned enough about plant genetic structures that we are now able to develop new plant varieties ourselves. And then there is the phenomenon of mutation that produces something with a modified genetic structure, and we have not the faintest idea of why and how mutations occur.

You need not marvel only at plant variety. If you are capable of looking afresh at the most commonplace, it too can be an object of wonder. How is it that tiny seeds, nourished underground, can develop such different plants? How can a seed in a favorable environment develop into a tree and determine just where each bud, branch and leaf shall grow to make its pattern unique even of its kind. No two things in nature, even of the same kind, appear to be completely identical. Again, all this is beyond our comprehension. It boggles the mind again.

Here we are, you and I, in the midst of all this. We cannot understand it all, and we know that we aren't even aware of all that exists. But what we are now even dimly aware of boggles the mind many times over. Indeed the mind is overwhelmed if we really ponder deeply the most commonplace aspects of nature.

What a privilege it is to be alive, to be a part of all this, and to be aware of even as much of it as we can be!!! And this is not all.

Scientists have helped us become aware of the fact that there is much more to existence than is registered by our five senses. We know now that our sense of sight enables us to see only a small portion of a large spectrum of radiation of different wave lengths. We know they are right because they have been able to apply this knowledge in ways that enable radio and TV messages to be transmitted invisibly over long distances. And we cannot see the x-ray radiation we use.

Somewhat similarly, we can hear only a small fraction of the range of a different type of wave. As my spirits are rejuvenated by listening to wonderful symphonic or vocal music, I wonder what it might be like if we could hear a wider range of waves. Apparently our senses enable us to be directly aware of only a small part of a reality, a reality most of which is for us both invisible and inaudible. Science has enabled us to discover aspects of reality which we cannot experience directly. This makes the universe appear far more wondrous than otherwise, though even the commonplace is wondrous if we can look at it afresh every now and then.

To be sure, it helps to be able to appreciate all this, and to appreciate the privilege that it is to be a part of it all and to be aware of some of this, if we are reasonably well off in life. For many many people,

life is so hard in any of a number of ways that it is difficult for them to appreciate the privilege of life fully if at all.

When one is wracked with pain, the mind can be completely absorbed by the struggle against it. If the needed opportunities in life have been foreclosed for one reason or another, if one has been treated very badly overall, or if one has made a mess of life in one respect or another, life may not seem so great a privilege. When we are aware of the extent of human suffering, we must admire the almost incredible amount of pluck shown by humans in the face of it. When life is hard, any help is appreciated.

Indeed the aspect of human life which we can appreciate most, if we are lucky enough to stumble upon it and then do develop it, is the felt mutuality which can arise between us, as in friendship or love. This entails another mystery, but about its possibility there is no room for any doubt. Any who experiences it and cultivates it with any degree of success know that it can make life so much more worthwhile an experience as to be without comparison.

Then indeed life is not only wondrous, it is also wonderful. It is more than a great privilege to be a part of it and to experience some of the wonders and the wonderful. It is all the more unfortunate that we humans are sometimes less successful in our human relationships than we are in some technical relationships with non-human nature. For the quality of life for each of us depends primarily upon the quality of our human relationships.

All this is something to ponder. If some of this lies in our minds as we go about the business of living, perhaps life will be a little richer and perhaps we can make it a little better. It can be richer if our attitude makes us more frequently aware of the wonder of commonplace things in nature, if we see nature's beauty more often, if our perspective on the universe boggles our mind a little more, if we remain aware of the depth of its mysteries, and if we are more appreciative of life and of each other. We may try a little more to make life at least a little better for others in one way or another. That is the sort of thing we can do as a result of the privilege of life.

For as privileged as we are to be a spectator able to glimpse a portion of the vast on-going drama of the universe and to be further amazed by life itself, we are further privileged as well as required to have a role in life's drama. Although the whole is overwhelming and we properly recognize that individually we are but a tiny part, we are fully responsible for that part. Our small part is significant for those who are in any way affected by what we do and do not do.

Though we can be overwhelmed by all this as we think about all of it, we also know and can properly feel that in some way we are a product of and a part of a great cosmic process. Though we sometimes feel awe in the face of it, we can also feel at home in it. There are moments when, if we permit it, we can in silence feel ourselves to be one with the rest of nature. And beyond that, we can feel more continuously drawn to what our nature recognizes as good in life. While we wonder how all this can be, and profound wonder is the unavoidable result of deep thought about it, being drawn toward and contributing to the good in life will be recognized as all-important for us, and as our role in the whole process.