

June 1, 1990 (Vol. 5, no. 19)

Dear Colleague:

As summer approaches, let me offer two happy images in this the concluding letter of volume 5. The first takes us back to July, 1667, when Samuel Pepys and a group of friends went for a walk on Epsom downs. They encountered a shepherd and his boy, who was reading the Bible to his father. What an image out of the timeless past, Pepys thought. "So I made the boy read to me, which he did with the forced tone that children usually read, that was mighty pretty; and then I did give him something and went to the father and talked with him... He did content himself mightily in my liking the boy's reading and did bless God for him." Quite apart from the human charm of this picture, I can't help but wonder at the prestige and extent of literacy in seventeenth-century England. Here, among a flock of sheep on the downs, the little boy of a hired hand was showing off. Why can't children all over the world show off this way?

The second image is important to our estimation of the quality of life in a city. It asks the question, Have you snoozed in a city park lately? "Sleeping in the park in a city is the height of true civilization," writes someone (anonymous) in *The New Yorker* (Nov. 13, 89). "First, you need a city that has enough bustle and clatter and tension to make a person yearn for a calm green spot, and then you need a first-class park with a well-enforced dog ordinance, and then you need a civilized person capable of dropping his guard and his pretenses and flopping down on the ground and falling asleep with his mouth open and snoring like a yodelling walrus." The writer says Manhattan lacks good parks for the connoisseur of the afternoon nap. In European cities, they are plentiful: for instance, the Villa Borghese in Rome, a sheltered corner of Queen Mary's Garden in Regent's Park in London, and, perhaps best of all, Orsted's Parken in Copenhagen.

What should a civilization aim at? "A city so exciting it wears you out and so secure you can sleep in it."

Have a good nap,

*J. F.*