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Important New Book on Consumption

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Important New Book on Consumption

Grace M. Zorbaugh, Professor in Economic Science

A new book of unusual interest to economists, and still more to home economists, students of home economics and homemakers, is the Consumption of Wealth, by Elizabeth E. Hoyt, professor of economics at Iowa State College.

As pointed out by the author, the study of consumption had to wait, not only until wealth and thereby money spending, had increased, but also until the development of such sciences as psychology, biology and physiology had provided the knowledge without which it was impossible to recognize the principles and laws of consumption. That the time has at last arrived will be conceded by any reader of Dr. Hoyt's book. Here is a live and concrete attempt to answer two specific questions: how do men use wealth, and how can they best use it?

At the outset, she points out the intimate relation of consumption to culture. In the remote past, human consumption struck root when man conceived his first interest in something other than the bare food and shelter consumption of animals. The author shows how this interest is the key to the psychology of consumption—establishes itself, and how the interests of individuals are influenced by the life of the group to which they belong. The setting of a style, for example, stimulates them by starting emulation, but the tendency of a group to conservatism operates as a restraining influence.

A number of chapters deal with various factors in man's environment which affects his interests, hence his consumption. The geographic environment gives some men a bent toward bananas as a food, others toward corn, etc. Accidents of birth and race, the opportunity for material world have differed. The ancient cultures have replied as differently as their attitudes toward the material world have differed. The reply of the western world is characteristic of its attitude: "We are out to conquer the material world!"

Careful study is then given to our actual scales of living in America—a matter of relative size of income, of occupation, country of origin, race—and our standards of living; i.e., the scales and qualities of consumption to which we aspire. The author finally discusses how we may measure and therefore know the value of a people's consumption. The best indications, she believes, are rates of death and sickness. Statistics of per capita production and consumption should also be considered, since material progress gives men greater possibility of choices. But more significant is development of popular education, education being a tool whereby a higher type of consumption may be achieved.

Following her own cue, Dr. Hoyt has been studying at first hand and comparing the cultures of countries in the Orient. Readers of the present delightful book will await with great interest her next contribution to the literature of this movement which envisions for the human race a future best consumption of wealth.

Frank B. Jordan

On the morning of Jan. 28, Iowa State College opened her doors to visitors from all sections of the state who came to attend the twenty-seventh annual Farm and Home Week. Men and women from every part of Iowa came to spend from Jan. 28 to Feb. 2 at the college for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the experiments being conducted here in agriculture and home economics, and to attend the program.

Farm and Home Week was instituted in 1900 and greatly promoted through the efforts of C. P. Curtiss, dean of the Agricultural Division of the college. Mr. Curtiss realized that prominent farmers throughout the state were interested in the scientific methods of farming used at the college and were anxious to visit the college for practical suggestions to improve their own agricultural methods. Working on the knowledge that there was an average for such a week, the program was promoted and has grown to the extent that now hundreds of Iowa farmers and their wives look forward to the event.

Previous to 1923 women were excluded from the program. Since they have been included the attendance has greatly increased from year to year, until in 1928 the attendance reached 1900 people, 800 of which were women. This year the number fell to 1102 probably because of the extreme cold weather throughout the entire week.

The programs of later years have been quite different from those of the first two or three sessions. Courses in animal husbandry and farm crops were given the first two or three years. Now programs in home economics, all phases of agriculture, horticulture, forestry and engineering of interest to the farmer and his wife are given daily.

The first day on the campus, the women visitors were shown through the home economics building and then taken to the Catharine MacKay auditorium where they were introduced to the heads of the different departments who explained briefly what their departments were doing. Later that afternoon the department heads gave the visiting women a tea in Great Hall of Memorial Union Building.

An excellent program in all subjects of interest to the homemaker was prepared for the visiting women. Lectures on health were given by Dr. Caroline E. Ehrlich of the Elmhurst, Ill., Red Cross Foundation, and Dr. D. C. Steelman, state deputy commissioner of health. Lectures on almost every phase of home economies were given by members of the staff of the home economics division of the college. Members of the psychology and physics departments also contributed to the program. Discussion groups in art, textiles, nutrition, equipment, crafts, child care and poultry were offered at some time during each day.

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A number of chapters deal with various factors in man's environment which affects his interests, hence his consumption. The geographic environment gives some men a bent toward bananas as a food, others toward corn, etc. Accidents of birth and race, the opportunity for diffusion of culture, the extent of trade, the methods of getting goods across to buyers—all these are potent factors. How is consumption affected by the production of wealth? Do producers give us what is best for us to consume, or even what we wish to consume? What is the effect of price, or installment buying, of taxation, of the great inequality of incomes? All these, too, unconsciously influence interests.

Is passive consumption, then, our fate? Are we to have only such interests as are dictated to us by such influences? Or is such a thing possible for us as rational, self-controlled consumption? Yes, says the author, if we take that little, poorly nourished thing, Intelligence, out of its swaddling clothes and give it a chance to grow and function. She vigorously outlines a science of consumption for welfare. On one side, it is a technology developing standards for goods and services; on the other, it is an art, the intelligent consumer deliberately discriminating between choices of goods and services in favor of those which yield long-time satisfactions. She shows how this self-propelled trend in the direction of better consumption is supported and furthered by organized movements such as the American Medical Association, the National Motion Picture League, and by the aid of government and legislation, for example, education, the Bureau of Home Economics, and the regulation of international traffic by the League of Nations.

What of the possibility of a best consumption of wealth? The road to the answer is at least pointed out by Dr. Hoyt. It lies in the direction of first learning and then pooling the experiences of all human beings—it lies, in other words, in the comparison of the standards of living of all peoples. To the question: "What is worthwhile to consume?" the ancient cultures have replied as differently as their attitudes toward the material world have differed. The reply of the western world is characteristic of its attitude: "We are out to conquer the material world!"

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