



Leisure is gone — gone where the spinning-wheels are gone, and the pack horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons. Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam-engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them: it only creates a vacuum for eager thought to rush in. Even idleness is eager now — eager for amusement: prone to excursion-trains, art-museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels: prone even to scientific theorising, and cursory peeps through microscopes. Old Leisure was quite a different personage: he only read one newspaper, innocent of leaders, and was free from that periodicity of sensations which we call post-time. He was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion — of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis: happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves. He lived chiefly in the country, among pleasant seats and homesteads, and was fond of sauntering by the fruit-tree wall,

and scenting the apricots when they were warmed by the morning sunshine, or of sheltering himself under the orchard boughs at noon, when the summer pears were falling. He knew nothing of week-day services, and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing — liking the afternoon service best, because the prayers were the shortest, and not ashamed to say so; for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port-wine, — not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure: he fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible; for had he not kept up his charter by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?

Fine old Leisure! Do not be severe upon him, and judge him by our modern standard: he never went to Exeter Hall, or heard a popular preacher, or read *Tracts for the Times* or *Sartor Resartus*.

Comments on Prose Passage 1

Students were asked to discuss the attitudes of the speaker to both the leisure of the present and the leisure of the past. They were also required to discuss the style used to present both the past and the present. There are, then, four tasks: defining the attitudes to the past and to the present and discussing the style the passage uses to present “old Leisure” and contemporary leisure.

If you take the time to enumerate the required tasks of the question with care, you usually find that the question offers you an organizing scheme for your essay. This scheme may be mechanical, but it’s foolproof; it’s safe. If you can invent a more interesting and original way to organize your paper without losing sight of all the required tasks, do so. If not, take the secure road. Here, you can begin with a well-developed and specific paragraph on what George Eliot thinks about the leisure of her day; your second paragraph can discuss (at even greater length, because the passage is chiefly about “old Leisure”) the leisure of the past. The third paragraph can deal with the stylistic devices used to describe modern leisure — for example, diction (words like “eager,” repeated three times, or “rush,” or the “cursory peeps” which undercut any claim to genuine intellectuality) — and the contrast of these words suggesting haste with the diction of old Leisure, suggesting a more quiet and more slowly paced time (“slow waggons” vs. “trains,” “sauntering,” “sheltering”). The fourth paragraph can go on to the other devices of style used to