



ENJOY IT: Lockdown's gift to us is time. You can put your own shape on the day – that might mean rising late and spending the day in your PJs

This lockdown offers the opportunity to perfect the Art of Constructive Idleness

JANUARY – long, dark and cold. The time of year you discover there's too much month at the end of your money; you waylay the postman to intercept the bank statement and the only warmth comes from heated domestic arguments.

Having splurged shamelessly over Christmas, January is a month of thrift and short commons. You've lost many pounds sterling and gained many pounds weight. And to crown it all, the added misery of another lockdown. But look at it this way – you'd be in self-imposed purdah elsewhere because you can't afford to take risks – and besides, everywhere's closed. What a saving!

Lockdown couldn't have happened at a more appropriate time, when the weather's so bleak you wouldn't put milk bottles out and you're glad to be cocooning at home, sleeping in your own bed. I see lockdown as a liberation, an opportunity for rest, recuperation, reflection and pleasing oneself.

Lockdown's gift to us is time. You can put your own shape on the day and if that means rising late, mooning around in your jimjams eating toast, scanning the newspapers and having a long bath in the afternoon, secure in the knowledge that nobody can visit, so you don't have to vacuum. Pure self-indulgent bliss. Because you're worth it. People complain about never having time to think. Well, now's the time – and plenty of it. This is called the Art of Constructive Idleness.

With every shoppportunity shut, those suffering withdrawal symptoms from lack of retail therapy, there's always virtual shopping on the internet – a world of 'stuff' at the touch of keyboard. Browsing costs nothing so long as you don't click.

Are you morally strong enough to resist the longing for shoes to go nowhere in? This is called the Retail

Anita ROBINSON



Resilience Test. Warning: there is a high failure rate. You might care to follow on with a session called Popular Culture Survey, in which you cast a critical eye over afternoon television schedules, watching ordinary people make exhibitions of themselves on competitive gameshows. Everything's very shouty and hysterical, with raucous laughter, punching the air, whooping, windmilling, bear-hugging and blubbering in everything from 'Bargain Hunt' to 'Strictly'.

Sadly, 'University Challenge' has become very casual, with nobody but Paxo in a suit and students dressed from thrift shops lolling casually in their seats. Warning: this survey is extensive and may require many afternoons

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and evenings of your time. Should others, wondering if there's going to be any dinner query this, just tell them, "I'm working." Speaking of things culinary, you might care to curate your extensive collection of unused cookbooks, re-discovering forgotten favourites, retrospectively regretting time wasted making your own puff pastry, then doing fried egg and oven chips for dinner, because comfort food is a vital psychological constituent of lockdown living.

You'll note that so far, I've made no constructive study provision for men. I'm of limited use here. Much of the Loving Spouse's leisure time was spent 'tidying the garage', but what he did in there is a mystery, since despite his crashing about for hours, it always looked exactly the same chaotic mess to me. Who knows what way a man's mind works? Not many families can boast a two-car garage that in 30 years never had enough room for one.

Lockdown gifts us large tracts of leisure. Time to read (if one can concentrate), doze (inadvertently) and ponder such oddities as why in television features from care homes the cameras always focus on close-ups of arthritic fingers knitting and varicosed ankles in shuffly slippers?

Naturally, in these stressful times, it's important to keep abreast of current affairs, none of them welcome. I'm afraid my attention is drawn more to wondering where Laura Kuennsberg buys her coats and weather-girl Cecilia Daly her elegant little dresses.

Nine days in. Only 33 to go before we're paroled on the grounds of exemplary behaviour. That's if repeat offenders don't blow it for all of us. Perhaps lockdown's taught us how precious autonomy and freedom are and how dependent we are on the integrity of others.

ON THIS DAY

JANUARY 5 1921

Official Burnings

THE following official message was issued yesterday from Military Headquarters, Cork: 'As a result of the ambush on the police at Midleton, it was decided by the Military Governor [General Strickland] that certain houses in the vicinity of the outrages were to be destroyed as the inhabitants were bound to have known of the ambush and attack, and they neglected to give any information to the authorities. ...Previous to the burnings, notice was served on the persons affected, giving them one hour to clear out valuables but not furniture.' A report from General Headquarters, Dublin confirms: 'As a result of an ambush on police at Midleton, County Cork – a martial law area – one policeman was killed and two later died) and the houses of seven inhabitants...were destroyed by orders of the Military Governor.'

Police ambushed

BALLYBAY, a town of about 600 inhabitants in the centre of County Monaghan, was the scene of a brisk and fatal engagement between the Crown forces and civilians on Saturday night. It appears that the local police force had recently been strengthened by the addition of some Auxiliary policemen and about 9 p.m., fire was suddenly opened on a police patrol from a number of gateways. The bodies of Constable Malone and also that of a young civilian named James Somerville were found on the street.

Attack on Bishop's Ban on IRA

IN A remarkable letter addressed to the Bishops who have attacked the IRA, dated January 1st, Miss Eithne MacSwiney, sister of the late Lord Mayor of Cork, states: 'The effect of the edict of ex-communication issued by the Bishop of Cork [Daniel Coholan] and approved by certain bishops, would be to drive the Catholic manhood in Ireland from the Catholic Church and, with them, their mothers, wives and children. Their religion did not teach them it was a crime to fight for the freedom of their country and the ex-communication would not make them surrender the freedom of their country.' The letter continues: 'If the Bishops of the Catholic Church in Ireland attack the IRA and call acts of legitimate warfare by criminal names, they would... give the idea that the Catholic Church in Ireland was a supporter of evil English government.' (De Valera's return to Ireland from the US at Christmas 1920 did not signal any reduction in violence. As IRA ambushes and British reprisals continued, the threat by some bishops to excommunicate IRA activists prompted a sister of the late Lord Mayor of Cork to warn of the possible alienation of ordinary Catholics from a 'pro-British' Church. In fact, the bishops were divided on this issue.)

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