Consecrated Recreation.

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The subject of recreation is of no small importance in the Christian life. With many the question is a burning and vital one Conscientious, eager to do right, the matter of recreation perplexes and baffles them. Gladly would we help such honest souls and we ask for their thought.

Recreation—how should we approach the subject and seek its solution? Not as is too often done, in the attitude and temper of an infallable pope, for the spirit of dogmatism is hindering rather than helpful to one who would illuminate this subject for those in perplexity. There are those who would like the unquestionable authority of a "Thus saith the Lord" for every minutest act of daily life. It would suite their taste and increase their appreciation of the Bible if its every sentence began with the words of command "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." With them for religious instruction, a book of rules is more to be desired than a book of principles over which they must bend with thought, and from which they will gain no direction unless they do go with thought. But God was too wise to give us such a guide. So the Bible is not a collection of precepts nor a table of rules, but a mine, through which there runs great veins of golden principles, and these principles we must discover, interpret, and apply for ourselves. In our thinking on recreation this must be remembered, and our search must be for principles not precepts. Nowhere in God's Word do we find the word, "Thou shalt not have a vacation," or the word "Thou shalt have two evenings and one afternoon off in every seven days." There is no verse that runs, "Thou shalt not play at games of chance," none that reads "Thou shalt not go to the theatre," none that ventures the interdict "Thou shalt not go to the dance." In settling the problem of our recreations, the final appeal is not to precepts but to principles, and the strength or weakness of our opposition or defense of certain pastimes is not determined by our failure to present numerous and definite commands

There are occasions when nothing can so readily assist the solution of a moral problem as a definition. This is one of them. What then is recreation? Many pastimes, pleasures, and amusements, pass for recreation. But what is recreation? Recreation, our friends the dictionaries tell us, is the giving of fresh life, the creati g anew. It reanimates, revives, refreshes the body and mind after toil. Recreation—and the word itself tells this if you take it apart—is re-creation. Acquaintance with our own nature makes us aware that life is simply a process, always in operation of waste and repair. With every movement and effort the tissues of the muscles, and of the brain, and of the nervous system, waste This waste is repaired by the circulation of fresh blood supplied by the food we eat, and oxygenized by contact with the air we breath. When the supply and waste are equal, body and mind are in health, and life is a joy. But the power to repair the waste of life, while it varies with different constitutions, is limited in all, and not infrequently comes short, to the injury of body and mind. Here is where recreation finds its mission Its chief task is to equalize repair and waste, to relieve the strain of life with its excessive drain, to call a halt to movement and effort, and prevent the demand upon the system from surpassing the supply. Repairing the mischief wrought by a too strenuous life, in its mission of sympathy and kindness it reanimates the mind, revives the body, refreshes, recreates, and gives tone to the entire system. Re-creation is re-creation.

This definition does too things for us. First, it insists upon the need of recreation. Temperaments cast in a severe, ascetic mould, often object to recreation in any form. But these people forget the high pressure of modern life, with the demands it makes upon human strength, and the consequent necessity of recreation else physical or mental collapse. Were it not for the new lease of life given by a season of recreation, many of God's best people would sink beneath the burden of daily duty, and be unfitted for the service which those associated with them or dependent upon them sorely need. At one time Jesus said to his own, "Come ye apart and rest awhile," and if the motive and method be right, taking a vacation or indulging in some form of amusement, may be a religious duty of the most pressing importance. There is an interesting tradition of the disciple John While amusing himself with a tame partridge, he was asked by a huntsman how he could spend his time in so unprofitable a manner. John replied, "Why does not thou carry thy bow always bent?" "Because," answered the hunter, "if it were always bent, I fear it would lose its spring and become useless." "Be not surprised then," replied the apostle, "that sometimes I should remit a little of my close attention of spirit to enjoy a little recreation, that I may afterward employ myself more fervently in divine contemplation." How many nervous, tired, fretful, people need John's wisdom, to the improving of the health, to the brightening of the life, to the sweetening of the disposition, for how many people are nervous, fretful, sour, and little of use, because the bow is never unbent. "As a religious duty," one of London's first physicians advised a nervous and over-wrought patient to take a rest, and if we think of recreation as a re-creation, in which the tissues of body, brain, and nerve, worn and wasted, in meeting the demands of duty, are given fresh life, it were difficult to fault the prescription.

Our definition of recreation as re-creation does a second service. It lays bare the character essential to pleasures that would wear the name recreation. Nothing that fails to re-create is recreation. Amuse, give variety to life, help to pass the weary hours though it may unless it renews, invigorates or re-creates, it is not recreation. An incisive word is needed here, for much that goes by the name of recreation when tested by this standard must be rejected. The pleasure that saps the strength, the pastime that leaves the brain or body more weary and exhausted and less fitted for the duties of life, the amusement that sends us home at night so tired that several days are needed to recuperate—none of these are recreation. Mental strain, even in the form of a game, is not recreation for the mental worker. Physical strain, though under the guise of a pastime, is not recreation for the manual worker. What the body wants after a day of physical toil is not fresh physical effort, even though you call it an amusement, what the brain wants after hours of mental attention, is not new and added mental strain, even if it be in a game. What both want is rest and refreshment, a recreation that gives pleasure while bringing relief to the parts that the day has wearied. The function of recreation is to invigorate and renew, to prevent the drain and waste in life from exceeding the supply, and if all amusements were judged by that standard for some at least no other test would be required.

Right here another problem enters Recreation has a legitimate place. But are all recreations open to the Christian? Up to a certain point that question is easily answered. All consecrated Christians will readily recognize that no disciple of Jesus may indulge in recreations that are unduly expensive, that introduce one to contaminating companions, that expose the life to special temptations and moral risk. But having said so much there still remain unanswered questions, highly important and greatly difficult. What is the Christian to do when he cannot determine whether a recreation is right or wrong? Again what is he to do with a recreation that he regards as harmless, but which Christian friends regard as harmful?

We speak first of doubtful recreations That there are recreations upon whose moral character Christians often find it hard to pronounce every one knows. Of course all problems should be settled by the Christian in anticipation of Christ's judgment upon them. But the question "What would Jesus do?" does not entirely remove the difficulty of reaching a solution. Indeed, often it increases it, for the desire to do everything that he would do and as he would have it done prompts a thorough weighing and minute inspection of every phase and issue and so adds great seriousness to the problem. What then are we to do with doubtful recreations, recreations about whose character we are not certain? Based upon Paul's declaration in the 14th chapter of Romans, our answer is, they must be left alone. Paul was writing especially of meats offered to idols, which some regarded as clean, and others as unclean. But the principle he lays down is most broad in its application—"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." In that illuminating word we listen to the truth that whatever cannot be done with the clear consciousness of its being right, is to be regarded, at least for the present, as wrong. In the Christian life certainity upon the moral character of an action is essential. Doubt upon the moral character of an action is a call to pause. Until we are certain it is better to wait and refrain. Until we know it to be right we had better act as if it were wrong, standing meanwhile with our faces to the east for the breaking of the dawn. Every man must be fully persuaded in his own mind, whatever he permits or performs being done in the belief of God's acceptance and approval. That is Paul's doctrine, and what wholesome doctrine it is! What an intelligent Christianity the sway of that doctrine would produce! One of the needs of the hour is an intelligent Christianity, in which men have a reason for their attitudes and answers to life's problems. What an intelligent Christianity the sway of that doctrine would produce! What a respect for our position, too, obedience to that doctrine would beget among our associates and friends! With the assurance given that we were searching for light when our decision was announced instead of being scorned as the verdict of sentiment and prejudice it would have the reception of an intelligent conviction. Stringent though it may seem, Paul's principle is the best Concerning doubtful recreations, as concerning all doubtful practices, we cannot do better than heed his word and wait and refrain until clearer light breaks in, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Then there is the other problem. What is a Christian to do with the recreations which he regards as harmless but which Christian friends regard as harmful? To this question the Law of Love dictates our answer. If we lived alone in the world, like Robinson Crusoe, our conduct would need to be guided only by considerations of God and ourselves. But we are not alone in the world, and in determining our course of action we must be influenced not only by the thought of personal liberty, but likewise by the Law of Love. The same problem that we have suggested was before Paul when he wrote the 14th chapter of Romans and the 8th and 10th chapters of First Corinthians. Paul was writing of the eating of meats sacrificed to idols. Among the Christians at Rome and Corinth there were some who thought it wrong to eat such meat, and holding that belief they would have done a grievous wrong in eating it. Those to whom Paul was writing had been declaring that there was nothing wrong in eating such things. They knew that, and therefore they were not disposed to show any leniency of judgment to those who could not see the subject just as they saw it, nor to modify their conduct to suit the weak consciences of these other Christians. What did Paul do? He referred the whole problem to the Law of Love. With "the strong brother" he believes the eating of such meats to be harmless. But what about his example in its magnetic effect upon "the weak brother," who held such eating to be sinful? What if influenced by the example of his "strong brother" he too should eat, and so go against his conscience and sin? If any man thought it wrong to eat such flesh, to him it was wrong; for in that act there would be a deliberate act of transgression, a deliberate preference of mere enjoyment to what was thought to be the will of God. But what if this transgression were committed through the influence of another? There is where Love, the Law of Love, the Love which we bear to Christ puts in its plea. "Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died." "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to the weak. For if a man see thee which hast knowledge sitting at meat in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ." "If any man say unto you, this hath been offered in sacrifice, eat not, for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: conscience, I say, not thine own, but the other's." There you have the Law of Love. With the same problem before him that fronts us Paul went back for a solution to the Law of Love. Believers in Jesus Christ, where else is there a solution? You believe your recreations to be harmless. But your indulgence may lead another to indulge who believes them to be wrong. He says to himself, Brother So-and-So indulges, why not I? He does it and then his conscience sternly wakes and tells him that he has sinned. And what tempted? Your example. Of course you have the liberty to indulge in your recreation. Paul grants you that. But what about the Law of Love, and the right use of influence and the effect upon Jesus Christ, for you cannot injure the humblest and most ignorant Christian and not, at the same time, injure Christ. Certainly you have liberty. But the indulgence in love is better than the indulgence of liberty, and rather than overthrow or destroy or even tempt a weak brother for whom Christ died it were better to restrict our Christian liberty, to refrain from doing things which we can do with the approval of our conscience, to conciliate and consider the scruples of brethren, however little we share them.

There is another word, however, to be uttered. With great emphasis it must be said that such concessions are the concessions of love, voluntary and self-imposed. "The error to be found in much of the teaching drawn from these exhortations is that in the church or community the weak have a right to legislate for the strong, and to prohibit what offends them." But that is utterly contrary to the spirit of the passage. Dictation, the laying down of the law one for another, has no authorization whatever. The whole appeal is to love, and is grounded not on the opinion, prejudice or ignorance of a fellowman, but on those deep and broad considerations of a Christ-like regard for another's welfare. Putting love above liberty the strong brother sacrifices his liberty rather than lead another astray or put a stumbling-block or temptation in his way. In close connection with this is another word: "Let us not judge one another any more." Always pertinent, perhaps nowhere more than in Recreation is there so much need of remembering that golden utterance. Brought up in different social life, possessing our own peculiar temperament and mental make-up, we do not understand each other, and without allowing sympathy to do its work, we criticize and condemn. "But let us not judge one another any more." Because you cannot indulge in recreations that the enlightened conscience of another permits, do not unchristianize your brother with censorious and harsh judgment. On the other hand, if you can participate in pleasures which the enlightened conviction of another rejects, why belittle your brother with contemptuous and satirical remarks and epithets. You are not his conscience and you must not tamper with his conscience. To his own master each standeth or falleth, and it little becomes us to act as judge, jury, prosecutor and sheriff to our brother. He may be mistaken in his judgment, but what he wants "is not your compulsion, but the Lord's light," and that will more quickly come by emphasizing the spiritual, by sacrificing liberty, by showing sympathy and crowning love. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling." All through the problem of the relation of our recreation to others we should bow to the Law of Love.

What we have been pleading for is Consecrated Recreation. Somewhere I have seen the motto: "Christ cannot be King at all unless he is King over all." That is true. Christianity is a bold religion. It looks confidently forward to a time when it will not only cover the globe, but when it will possess every great interest of human life as its own,—business, politics, literature, science, recreation, all under its sway and filled with its spirit. It surrenders to Satan not one real intereat of human life—not one. Our faith is a positive one. Prohibitions do not satisfy. Mere abstention is never its last word on any subject. The ascetic and the monk and the puritan censor of pleasure are not its ideal types of piety. God made us with social natures and all he requires is that we fill our social life with the spirit of Jesus Christ, so that our pleasures are consecrated recreation.

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