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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

The Christian Law of Recreation.

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The subject of amusements and pleasures is one that is perplexing to many Christian minds. We do not allude to those who go to either of the extremes of making pleasure the chief end of life, or of altogether avoiding it as sinful. No sound and honest mind is likely, in its aims to go so widely from the mark. But as to the kind and amount of pleasure in which it is proper for a Christian to indulge, and to encourage others, particularly the young, to indulge, good men are often seriously in doubt.

It must be confessed that we cannot make out a complete list of those pleasures which religion sanctifies, and of those which it forbids. While some could easily be referred to one or the other of these classes, others, such as the gratification of the natural appetites, must either be set down as indifferent,—as those which may be good or evil according to circumstances, or as proper within certain limits, and wrong only when carried to excess. We say then that the forms of lawful pleasure in all cases are not prescribed, and cannot be. What is proper for one may not be for another in different circumstances. A king may justly do some things which a subject may not. The diversities of age, of sex, of condition, and of tastes and pursuits, create corresponding wants and duties. The identity of the Christian life consists not in its forms, but in its spirit. Recreations and amusements, therefore are not to be regulated in all cases by any outward classification, though this may often be done, but rather by going back to first principles. If these are well understood and always kept in mind, the application of them will, in the majority of cases, not be difficult.

We are created for the service and glory of God, and for the enjoyment of Him and of His heavenly kingdom; also for such service of other beings, and such enjoyment of other things as are consistent with these. Now in contemplating any recreation or pleasure, our first duty is to inquire whether it will lead us to God and His service, or from both; and if that is not clear, if it seem to stand in the relation of indifference, then to inquire whether it will prepare us in mind or body for the service of God and of humanity.

We have a complex nature—moral, æsthetic, intellectual and physical, all created for the same end. These rank in the order here stated. The lower ought always to be subservient to the higher. This is the Divine order. We may in certain circumstances sacrifice the body for the sake of the soul, but never the soul for the sake of the body. When it is possible, all these should be kept in the most perfect state, the highest (the moral nature) for its own sake, or rather for its being the direct organ for embracing God, the others for their being subordinate parts of the mental economy, and instruments for the use and benefit of the first. The devout spirit is greatly increased in power when it is supported and aided by a strong intellect. Therefore it is our duty to cultivate, as far as we may, the intellect, in order to enlarge the sphere of our Christian influence. But we have no moral right to sacrifice our moral interests to intellectual greatness. For a similar reason, it is right for a good and enlightened man to strengthen and preserve his physical constitution. But he should not do this to the detriment of his intellect or heart. The body is to be the servant of the mind; the animal life, the mere physical support of the spiritual.

The mind needs recreation. It is a bow that is to be unbent as well as bent. Recreation is often better than rest. It gives the mind more elasticity and animation, and does not interfere with rest. If it also improve the moral state, so much the better. If it have no such sensible effect, but leaves that state as it was, it may still be useful in reinvigorating the natural powers and so contribute in the end to greater usefulness.

But suppose the recreation be such as to weaken the religious affections, as to tend to worldliness; or that it tend to withdraw the mind from higher contemplations, to check the

development of its energies, to stupefy it and blunt its sensibilities; its unlawfulness then becomes so plain that no earnest and sincere mind can be kept in doubt about it.

We may always, if we will, apply some such test as the following: "Can I, on the whole, serve God and my fellow-men better and more effectually in consequence of taking this or that recreation?" Will the machinery of my whole nature be thereby put in better working order for the duties of the Christian life? If a clear and decisive answer can be given in the affirmative, we may be sure that the recreation is right and lawful; if it cannot, then it is unchristian to indulge in it. The whole matter may be summed up in a word; enjoy any pleasure in which Christ can be enjoyed, or in consequence of which you can serve Him better.

Letter to an Absent Church-Member.

The following letter was prepared for absent members by the pastor of the Fifth Baptist Church in Philadelphia. With a change or two to suit the different circumstances of members, it would be a very useful letter to many a church-member away from home:

DEAR FRIEND:—We greet you in the Lord. Your absence from us leads us to address you. Jesus Christ died to save your soul; and since this is so, do you confess that you are not your own? Do you realize that your time, your talents, your money, your influence and your personal service are all the Lord's? If so, what disposition are you making, day by day, of another's property? Please study with prolonged thought and prayer Matt. xxv. 14-30. Since Christ has redeemed you with his own precious blood, I seem to hear him say to you, "all this for thee; how much for me?" Are you away seeking money? I hope it is for Christ. Are you in pursuit of health and renewed vigor? I hope his cause is to reap the benefit. He knows your purposes. May it prove that they are such as to insure to you his blessing.

First. If you are absent from us but temporarily, as upon business, or a journey, or a visit, it is important that you watch for opportunities of doing good. Jesus did so, and he is your pattern. Unless you are making a great mistake you are away on his business. See to it that you be not occupied with your own affairs to the detriment of his. There is surely some design in this your absence from the church with which you customarily worship. God has sent you, it may be, to shed light upon some blinded soul, or in some darkened hamlet or home. Have your eyes open, therefore, and speak for him the timely, affectionate and pointed word.

Second. If you reside within two miles of our church what detains you away? Your frequent absences occasion solicitude. Are you sick or infirm? then we extend to you our heartiest Christian sympathies. Does a growing family hinder you? Trust the young child to your husband for an hour or two and come to church. Are you growing indifferent? it is a cause for alarm. Are you going frequently to some other Baptist church? then would it not be well to ask for your letter and join that church? Your covenant is with this church; and a covenant is something very solemn and to be performed! Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. You are permitted to pass by a dozen Baptist churches to attend the one to which you belong; only so you attend!

Third. If you are one of those who have been absent from us for months or years,—permit us to ask, Is there a Baptist church near you? If so why have you not joined it? Perhaps it is weak and poor, and has an uninteresting pastor and you do not fancy things. Is that a good reason? Are Christians governed by fancy, or by principle? That church is very dear to the heart of Christ and it ought to be dear to your heart. In slighting that people you slight him. You also slight us. Jesus shed his blood for them.—Are you in sympathy with Jesus in these matters? As you value Christ and heaven, I entreat you to answer this question honestly. If there are peculiar reasons for retaining your connection with us, while the harvest is perishing at your door,—permit me to inquire whether these reasons are based upon mere

feeling, or upon solid religious principle.—Should you take your letter, and God should return you within a few months, or even weeks to reside in our neighborhood again, we shall most joyfully welcome you back into our fellowship. But while you are away, will you not give yourself to the strengthening of the weak places in Zion?

Fourth. If there is no Baptist church in your region, you should aim to originate one. Begin with a prayer meeting. Yourself and one other, even if that other be an unsaved soul, will constitute a meeting. When three assemble you are on the high road to success. A Sunday school comes next. And soon, if you only put faith and works together, God will send you a Baptist preacher, and you may found a church. Believeest thou? All things are possible to him that believeth. The Baptist church in Allentown, Pa. was thus originated in 1859 by a Baptist sister from Philadelphia. They now have a good meeting-house, and a settled pastor. Instead of joining a pedobaptist church, or loitering in a pedobaptist meeting, she went to work on the original New Testament plan. Go thou and do likewise, and thou shalt have a crown in heaven. A young man from the east went to the Pacific coast. There, instead of hiding himself "among the stuff of worldliness" he so zealously aided a feeble mission church by his money and his work, that the missionary of the place was heard to say: "That young man is the right arm of my strength. I know not how we could succeed without him." Have you this spirit?

Carefully prepared statistics prove that the absent members of the best trained evangelical churches in this country range from one eighth to one third of the entire membership. What a waste! What a ruinous and wicked waste, unless it be that these absentees are all abroad on errands for the Master! In that case, what a power! In New Testament times, the disciples that were scattered abroad "went everywhere preaching the word!" Acts viii. 4. May it be so with you. Until you take your letter, therefore, to some other Baptist church, allow us to consider you our missionary at large. Send us for tracts, and we will forward them by mail prepaying the postage. If you are able, send the money to pay for them. If you are not, we will send them gratis: 25 cts. will buy a fine package; \$1 a large bundle. Do the work of a missionary, and report to us by letter at least once in three months. One or two of the members will assist the pastor in conducting this correspondence with absentees. Keep us constantly advised of your post-office address. And may God bless you! But remember! he blesses only those members who honestly and habitually try to bless others!

Your affectionate pastor.

A Romanist's View of Baptism.

Dr. Dollinger, one of the great theologians of the Romish church, the professor of ecclesiastical-history in the University of Munich, in his recent work, "The Age of Christianity and the Church," thus writes of baptism:

At first Christian baptism commonly took place in the Jordan; of course, as the church spread more widely, also in private houses.—Like that of John, it was by immersion of the whole person, which is the only meaning of the New Testament word. A mere pouring or sprinkling was never thought of. Paul made this immersion a symbol of burial with Christ, and the emerging a sign of resurrection with Him to a new life; baptism is a "bath." Of the Ethiopian's baptism it is said that both he and Philip went down into the water, and so the evangelist baptized him.* There was no longer preparation for baptism; only the universal condition of faith in the kingdom of God and its founder was required. The apostles had no hesitation in admitting

* In Luke 11: 38; Mark 7: 4, *Baptizeth* means dipping or taking a bath, not washing the hands. In the first passage it alludes to the pharisees' custom of cleansing themselves from any impurities, possibly contracted after returning from market. It is not said that the three thousand converts of Pentecost were all baptized the same day, but only "on that day were added three thousand souls." (Acts 2: 41.) i. e., their conversion and belief took place on that day; they were baptized on the following days, of course, gradually, and accordingly the fact of their baptism is mentioned without any time being assigned. Rom. 6: 4; Col. 2: 11, 12; Eph. 5: 26; Tit. 3: 5; Acts 8: 38.

multitudes to baptism who knew very little of Christian doctrine, whose faith was but a very undeveloped sentiment, rather a desire than a fixed consciousness. The act of baptism took place by question and answer. The postulant was asked if he renounced Satan and gave himself to Christ? Thence Peter says that, as of old the believing and the unbelieving were separated by the flood, which to the former brought salvation and was a seal of Divine grace, so now is baptism not a cleansing of bodily filth, but the answer of a good conscience toward God. (1 Peter, 3: 21.)—There is no proof or hint in the New Testament that the apostles baptized infants or ordered them to be baptized.

"Church Music."

The above is part of the title of an article in a late number of the *Theological Eclectic*, translated from the German of Hagenbach. What the author says on the subject of the music of public worship is worthy of a more extended circulation than it is likely to get out of the religious newspaper.

On the question, "Who shall sing?" the article says:

"It is a commonly established principal, that the song is to be sung either by the whole congregation, or by the choir, but not by single individuals. Solo parts, performed by single male or female singers, trench upon the rightful boundaries of religious culture. They belong to the Sacred Concert, to the Oratorio, where they certainly can subserve some devotional purpose; yet in these the devotional element is but the secondary consideration, and the artistic the primary: in religious worship this is reversed. The fundamental basis of a Protestant Ecclesiastical song is the choral. Besides this uniform element of the choral, special choirs, with their more artistic harmonies, compose that variable element which, particularly upon festival days, conduces to the elevation of religious worship. But even in ordinary public worship, to assist in the singing of the whole congregation, a stated choir, alternating with congregational singing, will be found to aid materially in the ennobling and animating of church song. It would be well, in a perfected system of worship, for the choir, at the opening of every religious service, to receive the congregation with a greeting song. If this is not always practicable, it should at least be done on occasion of formal public worship.

The selections of pieces to be sung by the choir should be in harmony with the superintending will that presides over the whole worship,—that is of the minister himself. A judicious pruning and keeping down of all brilliancies is needful throughout, where by such displays the devotional spirit would be more injured than aided. Care should be taken to prevent the performance of those artistic counterpoint musical combinations, in which the congregation perceives only a senseless confusion of tones with which they become wearied; of those "song-serpents" which twist themselves out into endless convolutions. The worst is, when the personal character of such a choir stands in no organic relation to the congregation, and the singing is only a part performed from time to time by strangers, (especially unsuitable is that element which is drawn from the opera.) Therefore the effort of a church to gather to itself its own church choir is to be greatly commended. The real position of the choir is to be the leader of congregational singing. It should stimulate the congregation by setting before it a good pattern."

What this writer says upon the question, whether the congregation shall sing one part or four is undoubtedly just. It is altogether best that the whole congregation shall sing the melody or leading part, perhaps even where there is no organ to render the harmony. The amount of musical cultivation needed for four part singing, that the harmony be not positively offensive, is too great to be attained by the congregation. But all may learn the melody with comparative ease. The tunes should be selected of course with reference to the wants of a congregation. They should be chorals of moderate compass.

How true, also is this remark: