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CHRISTIAN YOUTH ASKS ABOUT RECREATION

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Text: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no occasion of stumbling, neither to the Jews, nor to the Greeks, nor to the Church of God."

Within the twentieth century more time and thought have been spent on conjuring up ways for people to spend their leisure time than during any other period of human history, save perhaps during the heyday of Greek civilization. In those far off days the theater, the athletic games and the open spaces afforded the people ample opportunity for amusement, recreation and pastimes.

Today the world has gone "pleasure mad" and is fulfilling the Scriptural prophecy of St. Paul that in the "last days" men shall be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." (II. Tim. 3:1-5). Some Christians in reacting against the pleasure-loving spirit of our times have felt that no pleasures can be engaged in and still retain God's favor. To many other equally spiritual followers of Christ, there are legitimate pleasures which God is pleased to have His children enjoy. Perhaps we should stop and observe that "vice is perverted virtue," that abuse does not demand disuse. In other words, if the Christless crowds have perverted and abused the good things, that is not always sufficient ground for us to abstain from that which in itself is neither good nor evil, except as we who use it make it good or evil.

Is Recreation Christian?

God seems to be in favor of it, according to Old Testament prophecy. In Zechariah 8:18, we have a picture of the Millenium; and one of the characteristics of the Millenium Age will be the abundance of childlife and their unhampered opportunity for legitimate play. "And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof . . . should it be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts." (v. 5, 6). If play, rightly conducted and directed, is marvellous in God's eyes, why should it not be so in ours?

Recreation literally means "to recreate." All play or pleasure in which Christians engage should have that effect upon their lives. Any form of pleasure which degrades the body, dulls the mind or deadens the soul to spiritual realities is sinful and, therefore, can have no place in a Christian life.

One Gospel minister has put it this way: "The play spirit is a wholesome, healthy, normal, legitimate element of human life. If you have lost all desire to play, you are overdoing Heaven. God wants us to have everything that will make our lives permanently happier and brighter and richer and better."

Right recreation "re-creates" physical vitality, mental alertness to and soul apprecia-

tion of, the good gifts God has bestowed upon us. Paul told young Timothy that God has given us "richly all things to enjoy." (I. Tim. 6:17). Therefore, it would appear that recreation can be Christian and achieve those purposes for which God intended it.

What is Wrong with That?

So often we hear people say, "What's wrong with that?" They usually so respond when some form of pleasure in which they are indulging is condemned by friend, relative or Christian worker.

"What's wrong with card-playing?" someone will ask. The answer is aptly given by a Congregational minister. "I have two indictments to bring against the card table. The first one is, it is a thief of time. Ever since that pack of cards (euchre deck) was first invented to while away the spare hours of an idiotic king, down to the present, it has wasted more valuable time than any other one agency in our civilization. I know of young men in college, who would sit down early in the evening to play cards and play until long after midnight, and would go into their classes the next day without their lessons and go home in disgrace . . . Card playing is one of the chief sources of creating dissension and bitterness in social circles . . . Said a lady who had been for years an expert bridge player, 'For trickery and dishonesty you can put up the average card club against the lowest gambling joint.' With the made up signs and tricks, by which partners inform each other of their hands, it has created a suspicion and dishonesty in social circles that have been demoralizing . . . The second indictment against the card table is that it is one of the most prolific sources of gambling. Eighty per cent of the gambling in this country, outside of the race track and the pool room, is done with the euchre deck, and gambling is one of the blighting curses of our day.

"Someone else interposes, 'We will all agree with you in regard to the blight and curse of gambling, but what has that to do with card playing in the home?' Said Quinn (the converted gambler), 'There are some things I know from personal experience, and one thing is this: The parlor card table is the kindergarten of the gambler's hell' . . . During the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893 a committee of the Civic Federation interviewed 100 professional gamblers. Eighty-seven out of the hundred declared they played their first game of cards at home, with the consent of their parents.

Is There Any Harm in This?

Not a few in our times are allured by the dance as a means of amusement or recreation. "Is there any harm in this?" some will inquire. One general observation is that those who are either card-players or dancers cannot be depended upon for the Lord's work. The reason is not far to seek

The same Congregational minister speaks very pointedly on this subject. He declares that the ball room 'is one of the most prolific sources of immorality. Seventy-five per cent of the girls in houses of shame trace the beginning of their downfall to the dance . . . A mission worker in Los Angeles, who before he was converted was president of the Dancing Masters Association of the Pacific Coast, declared that out of 200 fallen girls with whom he had talked in his mission work, 160 traced their ruin to the dance.

"Why is it that the dance hall is such a breeding place of vice? The late hours, the customary scanty attire, the close physical contact, not allowed elsewhere outside of the marriage relationship . . . When you eliminate all the accessories of the dance and seek to discover the real secret of its fascination, you will find that it is passion, animal passion, passion, passion, and nothing else. When Wu Ting Fang was ambassador from China to this country he was invited to attend a fashionable ball in Washington. He was horrified at the conduct. He said, 'We have nothing in heathenism to equal that.'"

What About the Movies?

There are many who would not think of playing cards, or going to a dance, who say that they cannot see that the movies are so bad, especially if you pick the right kind.

If one asks what is wrong with the motion picture machine as an invention, we will have to confess there is nothing wrong with it. It has possibilities of being one of the greatest blessings that has come to us through the skill of science. It is the use to which it is put that determines whether or not it will bless or blight, uplift or undo, develop or destroy body, mind and spirit.

The educational film can speed up amazingly the rate of learning. Our men in the Armed Forces have had some forms of their training presented to them by motion picture in such an effective manner that their training time has been reduced by one-half in many instances. As an educational instrument, the movie can scarcely be surpassed. But right there lies its greatest threat to our times. When this powerful instrument is put in the hands of the wrong crowd with wrong objectives, the results are disastrous.

Let us learn from those who have made thorough investigation into the movie industry for commercialized entertainment. Dr. Orville S. Walters, M. D., writes: "A tabulation of Independent Filmscores' evaluations for 1941 shows that of 339 pictures reviewed, five were designated a 'outstanding for family,' fifteen were considered suitable for all three classes of audiences and six were pronounced suitable for children and youth. Thus, only 26 pictures, or less than eight per cent of the whole, were found acceptable for children.

"Five films were marked acceptable for young people and 111 additional for mature

(Continued on Page 7)

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