

THE WORLD'S OPINION OF DANCING CHRISTIANS.

BY REV. ALBERT BARNES.

The people of the world—the gay, the fashionable, the proud, the vain, the sober, and sedate—will form their opinions of professing Christians; and will, as they have a right to, express freely their sentiments. I blame them not for this. I commend them for it, and consider the fact that they will do it as one of the best safeguards of the purity of the church.—I would, therefore, that every professing Christian, indulging in the practice on which I am commenting, could hear the remarks made by the very community of worldliness which it seeks to please, and know the real estimate in which they hold them. It may be well to specify in a word or two the opinions which they form of such a professed Christian. They are such as these:

1. They do not regard you as a serious Christian—as one imbued with the importance of eternal realities, and anxious mainly that you and your family should be prepared for heaven.

2. They do not regard you as a consistent Christian. They profess to know what Christianity requires, and they do not often judge amiss. They see a marked inconsistency between the vows which you took when you became a member of the church and your present conduct: they cannot reconcile it with their views of consistency to sit down and partake of the body and blood of Christ, and then go and join in the dance with the thoughtless and the gay. They know that religion demands a different place; and though they profess to have no religion for themselves, they have a keen eye to mark the inconsistency of a professed christian life.

3. They never speak of you with respect for doing it. They speak of you as disregarding the solemn vows you have made; as not understanding religion; as dishonoring the Christian profession; and as having no claim to respect as a professor of Christianity. You never heard a man of the world speaking respectfully of a Christian in a theatre, in a ball-room, or in a gay and splendid party. They have no love for religion, but they know what consistency is; and as much as they hate religion, they will always speak more contemptuously of the inconsistencies of its professors than they will of religion itself. There is a way of commanding respect of even a vain, giddy, frivolous, proud, and wicked world. It is by a consistent life; by a serious, and meek deportment; by integrity of purpose; by deadness to the world; and by the seriousness, gentleness, tenderness, affection, and love to which religion prompts.

4. They do not regard you as a Christian at all. On this point I may venture to appeal to the world. There would be no hesitation in expressing their views, and no ambiguity were those views expressed. They may esteem you and love you on many accounts, but it is not because they regard you as Christians. They may admire you for your wit, or your accomplishments; for the elegance of your dress, or your manners; for your intelligence or your beauty; but they never so far forget themselves as to regard you as a Christian.—They may value your society because it augments their happiness, or because you seem to keep them in countenance in their frivolity, but they never think of you as having any true love for the cross of Christ, or any just views of the nature of religion. Too well they understand the nature of religion to suppose that it will lead its votaries to such vanities and frivolity, and when they wish to refer to those who are true ornaments of the Christian profession, and who resemble their Saviour, they never think of referring to you; it is to another and a different class—the meek, the gentle, the spiritual-minded—to those who are at home by the bedside of the suffering, not to those who mingle in the mazy dance; to those who love the place of prayer, not those who aim to shine in the brilliant halls of fashion. And if, perchance, these same votaries of the gay world have occasion—as they often do—to refer to those in the christian ranks who are a scandal and an offence to the Christian name—having the form of godliness but denying its power—it is to those who are willing to forget the solemnity of their own christian vows, and to mingle with those who profess no better things in the scenes of vanity and folly. Make the honest inquiry the world over, and there would be one opinion on this subject. They never think of you as such. They may regard you as amiable, accomplished, fascinating, intelligent—but they have one opinion on the question whether you are Christians, and among

all the votaries of vanity the world over, it is to be presumed that no one can be found who will speak of you as having any religion.—Living, they regard you as a dishonor to the christian name, and they will have no other respect for you when you die. For themselves, they expect if they ever become Christians, forever to abandon such scenes of vanity; nor does it recur to them that true religion and the scenes of the ball-room are compatible with each other.

“Abide with us.”

Most natural the exclamation. The benignant stranger had kindly sought out their grief, and at a moment when the dispersed and terrified disciples hardly dared to trust the convictions of their own feeble faith, or to name Jesus of Nazareth, lest they should provoke the obloquy and derision which attended it; lo, his heart responds in sympathy unto theirs, and humble as they are, they may freely unfold all their hopes and fears. How soothing were his assurances “that Christ ought to have suffered these things,” how strengthening his proofs from “Moses and the prophets,” to their dismayed minds. No wonder they clung to one who had given gladness for mourning—no wonder “they constrained him to tarry.”

So does our blessed Redeemer still join himself to doubting, fearing hearts, as “they walk together and are sad;” and so does he still open to them the Scriptures. As they commune together, a light flows in upon them, they scarcely know whence, a comfort, they know not why. Oh Christian! sweet was the counsel of thy friend, and tender his words of sympathy; but give not all the glory to earth, for Jesus was with thee. He tempered complaint by resignation, and thus gave a gentleness to sorrow; He showed why thou oughtest to suffer; and he it was who directed thy thoughts to the time when thou shouldst enter into “His glory.”

Turn then and say to such a Counsellor, “Abide with us!”

Happy the family where he abides! They are clouded perhaps by cares and anxieties, but sunshine is within the vapors, tinging their dull folds with richest glory. Tender love, quiet patience, gentle forbearance, and “charity that thinketh no evil, and seeketh not her own,” form an atmosphere, which is felt by those who understood neither its elements, nor their source. Hopefully they begin the day, patiently endure it, peacefully it closes. Thus each receiving his daily bread of faith, hope, and charity, they proceed onward tranquilly, still cherishing that honored guest until they enter where “Christ abideth forever.”

“Abide with me, gracious Redeemer!” the Christian may exclaim, “my heart is all unclean for such an inmate, but thy presence will purify it. It is dark, but thou art light; it is troubled, but thou art peace; enemies will assault, but all is safe if thou art within. Mysteriously wilt thou communicate thy graces to mine, which are ready to perish, and thus love will grow so vast, that like thine own it can take a world in its embrace; hope so clear-eyed that it can discern the brightness beyond the cloud; and faith so strong that it can exclaim, “Though he slay me yet will I trust in Him!”—Episcopal Res.

Sympathy for Sailors.

It was a rough night, a very rough night; and I was just retiring to rest, when in an awkward attempt to carry three books into an adjoining room, I let one fall to the ground.—Picking it up, and examining the open page, to see if it was soiled, my eye fell on the following paragraph: “I saw a boy climb to the main top-mast; he had been ordered there to secure a loose tackling; he would not have gone there could he have helped it. The night was dark to pitchiness; but, by the light of the binnacle, I saw enough to tell me that a tear was rolling down his cheek. There was no moment for delay; the order given must be executed, so away went the boy. It was a boy that had entertained me with everlasting stories of his mother and his home; and who told me of the dread he had that he should never return to them. The boy went up. I watched him: he had gained the first steeple, now flew to the second; had put his foot upon the yard, and grasped the tackling, when—when—but my brain reels; for what I heard was a sudden fall, and then a gurgling in the waters!”

Nothing could have been more in character with my thoughts, than this affecting narrative,

for I was at the moment reflecting on the dangers of the billow-tost mariner in seasons when landsmen, tucked up in their warm blankets, repose in comfort and security.

Very little rest did I obtain that night; for the wind howled and raged as if it had a quarrel with the earth. The thunder, too, roared, the rain descended, the lightnings flashed, and I thought of heaving billows, and shattered ships, and shipwrecked seamen. While the storm lasted, oh, what sympathy I felt for sailors!

The morning came, the storm was over, the sun shone upon the ground, and when I seated myself at the breakfast table, my sympathy for sailors was well-nigh gone. Thus it is with us all: subjects which ought to lay hold of our very souls, and wring from us strong compassion, are only reflected on when some arresting fact or unusual circumstance, brings them vividly to our transitory remembrance. The debt we owe to sailors is great, yet how little we regard it! No wonder that our proverbial neglect of seamen should have called forth the honest rebuke:

“God and our sailor we adore  
In times of danger, not before:  
The danger o’er, both are alike requited—  
God is forgotten, and the sailor slighted.”

Old Humphrey.

The Ministry a Work.

Some suppose that the pastoral office is a play; that a minister has nothing to do. He might cultivate a farm, or be a blacksmith, or manufacture cloth six days in a week, and preach on the Sabbath: But, notwithstanding the opinion of some, the ministry is a work. A great amount of preparatory study is requisite, ere one enters the sacred office. Ten years is quite little time enough, in which to prepare to become a public teacher, and then the foundation is merely laid. The young man from the seminary has no trunk full of sermons. Few are supplied with more than enough for two Sabbaths. He enters a profession which, more than any other, makes demands upon his physical and intellectual resources. Every week new subjects must be investigated. He that thinks to turn off his hearers with extemporaneous effusions, will soon find a lean audience. Most persons have some power of judging correctly of a minister's performance. Though there are those that seem to think that sound is substance.—He that cannot write a sentence correctly, may perceive when others write incorrectly; and the very individuals who say a man may work at an ordinary employment six days out of seven, and preach the other, will complain bitterly if their minister does not bring forth the fruit of much study. Indeed the generality of hearers soon forsake the ministry of him who does not devote his time to investigation. Few people are aware of the great labor necessary to produce even an ordinary discourse. A New England doctor of divinity having preached an ordination sermon, one of the delegates remarked to him, at the dining-table, “Well, doctor, you have given us a very good discourse to-day, but I think I could write as good a one myself.” The doctor shrewdly replied, “Try it.” Let every hearer, who thinks he can make as good or better sermons than his minister try it.

The Faithful Christian.

What a delightful sight is one whose heart is wholly given to God! Unlike the great mass of men, he has seen through the shallow outside of this world—you cannot tempt him with its pleasures, or terrify him with its threats, or deceive him by its false charms.—He has tried these things and found them vain. And now, unseen things fill the largest sphere of his vision. He thinks of the holy city of God, and longs for its pure pleasures. He dwells upon its sacred employments, and pants to have a heart full of sympathy with its spirit and its work. He thinks of the wise and the good—the holy that have gone up there from age to age, and of those exalted beings who have never been subject to the ills of our probationary state, and it is the earnest desire and prayer of his heart, that he may become so pure as to be fit for their happy society.—He looks deeper into his character and heart than to mere outward actions, and is not satisfied unless the inward, secret springs of thought and feeling are pure. It does not satisfy him that he may please men; he pants to please God. His life is a bright omen and pledge of heaven to come, for a heart weaned from the world, and full of the love of God, is not only a type of heaven, but a living predic-

tion of its reality. He walks with God here below, as though God were always in sight.—His soul is full of reverence, full of worship, full of love. His days glide quietly and peacefully away, whether prosperity or adversity is his lot. In every joy he is thankful yet humble, and he is borne up under every trial by the sustaining power of a good hope and a glad heart. He lives for Heaven, and it shall be his portion; for he is “pure in heart,” and he “shall see God.”—N. Y. Evangelist.

“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth,” of all the varied forms of kindness and of good. Stand in your lot and work around you; in your own home, in your own neighborhood, your own town, county or State; and if God enlarges the ability and opportunity, “break forth upon the right hand and upon the left; but don't wait for a large field; cultivate the spot you have, and help your neighbors.

Don't forget the prayer meeting and the Sabbath school, nor “to good and communicate;” for “with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

Remember that to put a sound gospel tract into a family, is like giving them a draught of the water of life; to put there an evangelical volume, is like furnishing them a “water-pot of two or three firkins;” nay, some volumes might rather be likened to a reservoir; but to supply them with the Bible, is to open a fountain of living waters by the very hearth-stone. It is like planting a perennial spring in the traveller's track across the great Sahara.

Liberality Essential to True Religion.

Practical liberality is essential to true religion. “With such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Heb. xiii. 16. Love that will make no sacrifices is of no value. Self denial is the peace and measure of true virtue. Pious liberality which partakes most largely of this ingredient, is therefore the strongest expression of a religious spirit,—you have conscience to pay your debts; you do well; but do not the publicans the same? If you cannot part with your property to promote the happiness of the world—if you cannot pity the poor, or pitying will not relieve them, your religion is vain.—“Whoso hath this world's goods, and shutteth up the bowels of his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him.”

No command in the Bible is more common, or more urgent, than that “to do good and communicate.” And do you expect salvation without obeying this? you may as well hope to be saved in the habitual transgression of any other command. The sacrifice of property to God in token of homage, in acknowledgment that we hold all things under Him is one of the appointed forms of worship. Not a more essential part of worship is prayer.—The portion which belongs to God as our liege Lord, must be paid into his treasury. To use that part ourselves is robbery, is sacrifice.—“Will a man rob God? Can that man hope for salvation?”—Dr. Griffin.

“The Lord's own Time.”

An individual, a few years ago, attended an inquiry meeting, and was asked whether he felt any anxiety for the salvation of his soul? He replied in the affirmative, and remarked that “he always thought he should be brought into the kingdom.” His pastor asked him “when?” He replied that he did not know, but he supposed that it would be “in the Lord's own good time.” Some ten years after, his former pastor met him and inquired, “is the Lord's own good time for your conversion come yet?” He replied, “No.” This person, living without hope and without God in the world, is one of a numerous class, who are waiting for God to come in his sovereignty, and arrest them as he did Saul of Tarsus.—They live on contentedly in their sins, waiting for a miraculous display of Divine power.—Under the delusion of honoring the sovereign grace of God, they live in the neglect of the commands of Christ. The inquirer above mentioned was asked by his pastor, “How long it would be before the Lord's own good time would come?” He replied he could not tell. His pastor told him there need be no mistake on that subject. God now commandeth all men to repent. The present moment is the Lord's own good time. Behold now is the accepted time; and now is the day of salvation. The sinner cannot be justified in delaying a single moment to come to Christ.—The Lord's own good time is the present.—Puritan Recorder.