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CHRISTIANS AND RECREATION.

BY J. T. BUDD.

WHILST of course taking the Scriptures as our guide and standpoint on this important subject, we will not forget that the Bible is not a book of rules, but of principles, and that whilst we are not the keeper of our brother's conscience, we *are* responsible for our daily influence on others. "None of us liveth unto himself." Influence has been described as the silent preaching of a life; the powerful attraction of an invisible magnet; the malaria of sinners; the perfume of saints.

Christians are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. St. John draws a clear distinction between the love of the world and the love of the Father; St. Paul emphasizes separation in God's people, and in his letters calls for loyalty to Christ, and disentanglement not only from what is sinful, but from all that is doubtful—"not of faith"—and implores his converts to lay aside "weights," as an athlete does who has one object in view, as well as "easily besetting sins."

We must not fail, however, to recognize that there is a ministry of definite helpfulness in wholesome humour and in pure bright recreation. Such refresh the wearied and physically depressed, like exhilarating ozone, or a high Swiss mountain breeze, or a blast from the restless sea. We need home pleasures, not boisterous frivolity, but joyful mirth. Busy men, tired home workers, factory and office souls, lively youths, sprightly girls, as well as children, need pleasant hours. But to-day we need to remember more than ever, and will specially during coming months, that man is not sent into this world *merely to be amused*, that he is a soul and possesses a body!

Young folk *will* seek pleasure away from home if not provided there, and then they go without the restraining influences so much needed. The companionship and fellowship of gatherings sanely and safely conducted—such as Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, and a host of similar Church weekly meetings *are able to provide*—should supplement, not supplant, home ties and associations. To leave home three or four times a week, even for

religious exercises, seems to indicate an immoderate use of what is good. To-day boys and girls are out of hand! The fatherless will need a firmly kind guide! This will need to be remembered especially in villages. In lonely hamlets and small towns the huts and hostels, used during the war, may be erected with prodigious advantage, if placed under the supervision of bright, godly men and women. Christian women of leisure, and disabled officers willing for further self-sacrifice, will have here untold opportunities for service.

CHRIST'S JOY.

It has often been said that Christ never smiled. We do not know of any scripture to warrant this assumption. We do know He was "anointed with the oil of gladness," and we know, too, that little children were not afraid of Him. We do not forget either that He was invited to the joyous wedding feast of a young couple, and that He accepted the invitation, and there manifested forth His glory. Where gloomy thoughts, habits, or dress prevail amongst Christians, such give a corresponding tinge to spiritual life, in which pure mirth is separated as irreverent, and inconsistent with a life of practical holiness or health of soul.

Christ loved children. Children naturally love fun and games. It is said of the restored Jerusalem, "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." Grandmothers can sit all day long with their Bibles and hymn-books on their knees and enjoy both to their hearts' content: like sheep they feed in green pastures, but the lambs skip and gambol with frolicsome delight. We must not expect the lambs of the fold to act as grandmothers before they are well into their teens! Young students and lads, loving God's Word and prayer, derive excellent strength and vigour of mind from cricket or football. Young girls love exercise in the open air, and find its after-effects most stimulating, not enervating or tending to dissipate spiritual energy, like the excitement that results from mixed dancing in heated atmospheres late at night, or that produced by unhealthy, pernicious novels.

WALKING IN WISDOM.

In talking on this matter of recreation, we must exercise great forbearance, discrimination and patience, because the recreations of Christians will be as diversified as their tastes. What is enjoyable

to one would be wearisome to another, and perhaps objectionable to a third. If a man of the world, an intense lover of music, gifted with a splendid voice, becomes a Christian, he won't henceforth dislike music, but his gift will be sanctified. A man passionately fond of literature or public speaking, and another devoted to horticultural pursuits, will preserve their tastes, but their powers and knowledge will be consecrated. Some people will read what they would not sing, personally we would sing whatever we would read—if we had a voice!

Our natural tastes are so different, even when under the control of God's grace, we need to exercise great wisdom and thoughtfulness when we speak of things we consider dangerous; we are all so inclined to contend for victory rather than for righteousness, for self rather than for the truth. We had a friend, a Quaker, a peace-at-any-price man, who would fight and argue so hotly about temperance, and denounce drinking so excitedly, he almost got tipsy with zeal in behalf of the noble cause!

RECREATION A NECESSITY.

All work and no play makes older people than Jack dull. It will readily be conceded that young people need relaxation. Probably some Christian workers who have passed away would be alive to-day if they had cared more for the redeemed body and sought to "prosper and be in health even as the soul prospered" (3 John 2). The question is, as to the nature of the recreation permissible, the amount required, and when it should be enjoyed so as to promote health, spirits and energy.

It is as natural for the young to play as to eat and drink. If the mind or body is kept continually in one groove, always at the same tension, without adequate rest or change in thought or labour, the subject or work will become irksome or "get on one's nerves," one side of the nature will get warped or over-exercised, so that loss of vitality and energy will result. Sleep at night may prove sufficient for the body; our animal nature is satisfied with mere cessation from active physical toil. The mind and heart need very different restoratives. The mind is refreshed and invigorated, not by ceasing to think, but by a complete change of thought.

REMEMBER!

If recreation be a necessity, it must be enjoyed at the right

time. We observe then, first, that the Sabbath day is not the day for amusement. This subject of vital importance—Sabbath observance—would need an entire paper to itself. The *war has not increased* our love for Sabbath rest, though agriculturists and munition workers found it *did not pay* to work seven days a week! The Lord says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” The commands “Do no murder” and “Do not steal” appeal to us by natural instinct; but the command to keep the Sabbath holy, and refrain from unnecessary labour does not appeal *directly* to conscience. Its excellence is not at first so clear. Some one has said that the first tenant farmer had this clause in his lease, “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.” Prebendary F. S. Webster recently wrote a fresh and illuminating article on the Sabbath which we would commend to those who seek to lead others to keep it holy.

Many say that the only time they have for recreation is on the Sabbath day, and that they can't preserve their health without amusement. No man, in the long run, preserves the health he owes to God's goodness by breaking one of His commandments. God tested many during this war to see whether they would obey His voice or not. The heads of Government departments found and had to admit, that women did more and better work in six days than in seven. The promise in Isaiah lviii. 13, 14 still holds good.

The night, we are told, is the “physical Sabbath of the day, restoring strength and repairing the waste and the weakness of twelve hours' toil. The Sabbath is the moral as well as the physical rest of the week, rectifying, adjusting, making up incidental omissions or inequalities in the previous six days, *and in addition* refreshing and restoring the whole moral and spiritual economy of man. Sleep is the way of spending the night, and of recovering from the fatigue of the day; but as the day is not meant by nature for sleep (some self-sacrificing hospital nurses have to sleep in the day-time in rotation), so, sleep cannot be a legitimate way of spending the Sabbath day. The restoration or refreshment of the Sabbath must arise from *withdrawing* the mind and thoughts from its week-day subjects, and so securing a total change of association of ideas, currents of fears and hopes, and anxieties and thought.”

Either the Sabbath day is holy, spiritual, sacred, for holy spiritual ends, or it is a holiday for pleasure and recreation.

If it is a sacred day, what right have we to promote concerts or open public galleries or picture palaces which attract the young, to work musicians, caretakers, porters, railway clerks, engine-drivers and guards, hotel servants and officials, in order that, forsooth, we may enjoy ourselves at other people's expense? *It is pure selfishness.* Sabbath-breaking is one of our national sins for which England will inevitably suffer, if we do not "amend our ways and our doings" (Jer. vii. 2; Hosea iv. 9). The excitement of a Sunday excursion train, and the worse excitement at hotels and house-party entertainments, is not the rest the spirit and mind and body imperatively need.

To-day we have far more holidays, half-days and shorter working hours than we had fifty years ago—and rightly so—but the inroads and encroachments on the Lord's day are insidiously and enormously increasing amongst all classes. One trembles for this land, after the enduring mercy of the Lord during these four years of war! The Church as a body and individual Christians must awake and "sound an alarm."

THE NATURE OF RECREATIONS.

Are we to avoid everything which depraved appetites abuse, and shun everything that extreme followers of fashion pervert? Certainly not! If we despised everything wicked minds abuse, we should give up using dinner knives and a great many useful things. But, and this is our point, if there be any habit or usage or pleasure that gives rise to much that is evil, and frequently leads to serious moral or social or bodily injury, if not to crime itself, such habit or amusement should be abandoned! Must not a Christian, however, go a step farther? However permissible it might possibly be for a Christian to adopt a certain course—*perhaps* safe for himself—if his *example leads others astray*, will not Christ's claim upon him and his love for Christ bind him to stop and not allow his liberty to become a stumbling-block to a weak brother? (Rom. xiv. 15, 16; 1 Cor. x. 23, 24).

The love of excitement is so engraven on our souls it may be regarded as an appetite. "Like other appetites it is not sinful unless indulged in unlawfully or to excess." We may not do evil that good may come. We must not disobey God's commandments, even to keep [people out of the public-houses on Sunday, to give

them fresher air, or cultivate their tastes for the fine arts. Better, far better for them to "rob their bodies of some strength, their minds of some energy, their souls of some pleasures, their families of some enjoyment, than to rob God of that which He claims as His own." So many people forget that man is a soul, and possesses a body and mind.

THE COLORADO BEETLE.

Most of the popular amusements of the present day are so perverted, Christian men and women, for the sake of their own and others' moral purity, cannot countenance them! We have heard a good deal lately about the Food Controller and potatoes, etc. If there were no potatoes in this country, and if we were forbidden to import them, we should consider it a hardship. This occurred some years ago in Italy. Potatoes were forbidden to be imported on account of the Colorado beetle. Foreign potatoes in themselves were unobjectionable, but this insect made such ravages there was nothing for it but to exclude the potato altogether!

Serious evils have become connected with many forms of amusement, so that the only course left to us is to make them *contraband*! You cannot sift out the beetles from the potatoes, so the potatoes must be excluded! Recreation in these times does not require a stimulus, but it certainly does need guidance and control.

SKATING ON THIN ICE.

Skating on solid ice is an exhilarating exercise, but skating on thin ice is dangerous. Whilst recreation is a necessity, many popular amusements need careful guarding or avoidance. In these papers we express only our own judgment. But we wish to make this statement frankly, that speaking broadly, we include in dangerous amusements those which the world, as such, *loves*, and which it is quite natural for the people of the world to admire and enjoy. St. John's words are true: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The reproach of the Cross has not ceased. "If any man *will* come after Me" he will have a cross of obliquy to bear, and must not expect to escape ridicule or scorn.

In our concluding paper we shall examine in detail some facts about theatres, balls, whist drives, races and concerts.

J. T. BUDD.

(To be concluded.)