

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Recreations.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF RIPON.

THERE is a good deal in the choice of a word. This paper is meant to suggest thoughts as to our "amusements," as to the way in which we spend what we call our "vacations." The latter is a most misleading term, unless we are taking a "rest-cure," and even "amusements" gives a lower and much more limited idea than "recreations." The nearest synonym is "refreshments," as used by Dr. Arnold when in his school-prayer he pleads for God's help and presence "in all our work and in all our refreshments." Both these words lift the matter to a higher level, for they suggest what must be to every true man the real question: How are we to provide that our tired powers of mind and body may be braced and renewed for fresh effort? This is precisely the problem of "Recreation."

We need first of all to have a right direction, a true aim. We find it in that word of the Psalmist when he prays that God would "knit his heart"¹—that is, "make-one" all the varied forces of his inner life, so that they may be drawn into one line, turned into the same channel, made subservient to "the fear of God's name." Our reasonable craving for rest and amusement needs to be brought under this supreme control, so as to save the loss caused by deviation from the true course as marked out on the chart of life. Even in our recreations we must identify ourselves with God's purpose, by letting His fear control our plans.

Recreation looks two ways. There must be a *forward* look, or it is not needed; there must be a *backward* look, or it is not deserved. In our Lord's resting times, as described in the central Galilean ministry,² we find (1) that they follow seasons

¹ Ps. lxxxiv.

² I have tried to bring this out in "The Ministry of our Lord," published by Longmans.

of earnest labour and severe strain, and (2) that they prepare the way for a time of renewed service.

This thought recalls to our minds the Divine ideal of rest, as expressed in the law of the Sabbath—that is to say, the principle of one day in seven set apart after the Divine example, and separating the working days of each week. We cannot rightly measure Divine action in human words, but we are content to know that, so far as we can express it, God “rested the seventh day,” and that we must “rest from our works as God did from His.”¹ That is why we find what at first sight seems to be a positive command enshrined in a code of moral precepts. The Fourth Commandment expresses a moral principle, which we must take into account in all hours of rest and recreation.

No man can enjoy a holiday, with a proper sense of enjoyment, who does not come to it from a spell of honest hard work. The sluggard and the shirk cannot experience the full delight of recreation, and such creatures do not deserve to do so. *Work done* is the first essential of true rest.

And, further, I appeal to those who put their back into their work, whether the purest joy of a good holiday is not the healthy anticipation of renewed labour. The classes in society who “neither toil nor spin” are far fewer than some social reformers allow themselves time to imagine; but when such idlers do exist, they are not merely “cumberers of the ground,” for they are themselves missing the truest and purest joys of life. Our ideal of rest lacks fulness if we know nothing of the buoyant foretaste of restored power for service, felt in the midst of well-earned rest.

Look more closely into the life of our Lord. Picture, for instance, the scene in the little vessel on the waters of Galilee. See the Master resting in the stern with His head on the steersman’s cushion. His disciples, as St. Mark tells us, had taken Him “even as He was” (ὡς ἦν), in loving haste, without time to prepare for the voyage. Then compare Gospel with Gospel,

¹ Heb. iv. 10

and we soon see the reason why. We can trace back a long day, or days, of special strain that had just ended. There was the attempt to interrupt on the part of His friends, the vile charge of league with Beelzebub, the new method thus forced upon Him of teaching by parables—how simply and forcibly the story runs that, after a time of such new and trying crises, “leaving the multitudes, they took Him, even as He was, in the boat,” and very soon “He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.”

Later on, He calls the Twelve to “come with Him apart, and rest awhile.” In His case, as in theirs, there was a reasonable craving for recreation. A period of active ministry, in our Lord’s case, had been broken into by painful tidings: the disciples had just returned from a fresh venture of service. The news of John’s murder by Herod had interrupted His own mission-circuit through Galilee; the Twelve had gathered round Him to tell their new experiences on their first mission apart from their Master. How significant, then, of human insight and sympathy is the invitation, “Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile.” They had a common need, and shared a common relief.

And yet, on both these occasions, if we follow them to the eastern shore, it was a time of rest made wholesome by a relish of helpful service, and was but an interval of helpful restoration for future toil. These are important principles, and vital to a wise adjustment of our seasons of rest and refreshment.

It is well to remember, in passing, that recreation may be found by means of wise method in our work. Change of work is rest. We seem to use different brain-cells in the varied fields of head-work, just as we use different muscles according to the kinds of bodily exercise in which we engage. This may be hopelessly unscientific, but it supplies a very good working hypothesis. The farmer will tell you the same thing about his land, and the due succession of crops. Mother earth will not go on for ever growing potatoes or turnips. What it will grow, continuously and successfully, is *weeds*. He has his green crop,

corn crop, grass crop, all in due rank, and so does the best for himself and for his farm. The doctor gives similar advice about food. A well-ordered diet is not a mere matter of faddy epicureanism, it is a matter of health. A true diet depends almost as much upon *how* you eat as upon *what* you eat. Act upon the same principle with regard to work, *wherever it is possible*, and work itself will automatically supply a very real measure of refreshment.

One word for those who think that they can live without any kind of rest or amusement. I give it in the form of a story told of good John Wesley. He founded a school at Kingswood near Bristol, and laid down most methodical rules of work and discipline. There were to be no games, no holidays! A very slight knowledge of human nature, especially of school-boy nature, will enable us to forecast the result. Difficulties arose, and the discipline of life at Kingswood was leading to anything but a desirable formation of character. Wesley was sent for, and I give you his decision in his own now famous epigram, "This must be mended or ended." There may be a few hardy natures that can thrive for a time on work alone, but they are preparing for themselves a tedious old age, when work must be left behind, and are not cultivating wisely or fully the powers with which God has endowed them. Happily, such beings are *rari nantes in gurgite vasto!*

Let us now turn to what are commonly known as "recreations." They have a great deal to do with the character and value of our work. After all, grown-up life is but a continuation school, fitting us for an ever-future service, so that the playgrounds of life, like the playgrounds of our schools, are powerful factors in moulding the character and determining the destiny of the workers of each age. What, then, are the chief tests of true and helpful recreation, which all earnest men and women should apply to their habits and conduct in days of rest and refreshment?

1. The first test is that suggested by the word itself. It is undeniable that many amusements work out anything but recreation. Pleasure does not necessarily recreate. I will even

go further, and say that inactivity of mind and body does not, as a general rule, brace and invigorate for future labour. There are, doubtless, exceptional cases of extreme prostration, but I am convinced that half the people that indulge in "rest-cures" had far better bestir themselves, and be doing something in the way of moderate exercise of body or mind. Human nature, like all other kinds of nature, "abhors a vacuum," and resents it in the end. "Vacations" must be regarded as a relative term.

Now all reasonable beings will allow that late hours, hot and crowded rooms, and pursuits involving feverish excitement, are anything but helps to making good that waste of tissue, that loss of tone—and sometimes of temper—which a holiday is meant to restore. Here, then, we have a primary test. Are our holidays so spent as to send us back strong and vigorous in body, and with that healthy tone of mind which makes us brave to face old difficulties, and buoyant at the thought of renewed work? Or do they leave us slack, flabby, effeminate, out of condition for work, something like the schoolboy of Shakespeare's day :

"Creeping, like snail, unwillingly to school."

What a difference it makes to our "comrades in arms," who are fighting with us the great battle for God, when a companion returns and brings with him a breezy atmosphere of readiness for renewed service! Such a man or woman is like a moral tonic, and generates hopefulness and courage in facing the many perplexing tasks of daily duty; his freshness is contagious, and inspires his fellows with good hopes of success. As old Virgil has it, *Possunt quia posse videntur*.

Certainly, then, to the Christian workman the choice of holiday occupations and holiday companions is a matter of sacred concern. There are places and plans of amusement which can only "drive devious" our thoughts and habits from that line of life which our Christian profession has clearly marked out. In our vacations different kinds of energy are generally brought into play, and we must be careful to direct them along the right line of purpose. All must be "knit to fear God's name." "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

This is specially true with regard to our bodies. Bodily discipline should not be relaxed beyond what is necessary for needful rest and refreshment. In holidays we should keep a hand on ourselves where we are conscious of weak self-indulgence, for if bodily discipline be carelessly forgotten, our bodies will reassert their mastery, and it may cost us a hard fight to "keep them under" again.¹ Even holidays should be days of sane and manly abstinence.

2. A second test is that of *Progress*. There was a good word said in a recent article in the *Times* on the life of our two older universities, that it is very desirable to "vary our play by doing a little work." I am afraid that the reference was to term-time; we may, at all events, apply it to our vacations. They should bear the stamp of growth and progress, not of idleness and self-indulgence. Stagnation is not true rest. Our minds cannot lie entirely fallow, even if we wished, and it would be a great mistake to do so. Two old adages just express my meaning: "The best way to keep a bushel free from chaff is to fill it with wheat"; and as Dr. Watts, with his happy knack of stating great principles in very homely words, has said:

"Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

We know how it is with any piece of machinery. Take the splendid engines that drive our liners across the Atlantic, or take the little donkey engine that works a common pump: if you leave them for any time unused and uncared-for, what an amount of cleaning and coaxing, of easing and oiling is required before they will run as smoothly and powerfully as before. If you keep a motor-car, you will be wise, after a period of inactivity, to test its readiness for service before you risk an important engagement upon it. Just so, even during our holidays, powers of mind and body should be kept in exercise, *just going quietly ahead*, and then full pressure for renewed work can at once be restored.

¹ ὑπαπιάζω καὶ δουλαγωγῶ. 1 Cor. ix.

At the same time it is true that the more thoroughly we can throw off the ordinary associations of work, the more quickly and fully we shall recuperate our energies. This is one great boon which vacations confer. They give us time to make pleasant excursions into fresh fields of labour and study, which we can only glance at over the fence as we pass along the hard highroad of daily toil. Time would fail me to tell of the varied forms of recreation that may be found in the wider study of literature or art, in the culture and pursuit of manual handicrafts, as well as in the healthful game, or the invigorating sport on moor or fen, by stream or pool or rock-girt channel. There are endless and varied interests to suit all tastes, interests which can divert our thoughts and restore our energies, and yet can further our steps along the path of progress.

There can be no better field than that great *Theophany* which lies around us in the works of Nature. "In His hands are all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, and He made it, and His hands prepared the dry land." "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all, the earth is full of Thy greatness." At such time enrich your knowledge, and so confirm your faith in God's *Word* by learning more of the witness of His *Works*. Read the Lives of such men as Charles Kingsley and Frank Buckland, men who saw God in everything, and you will catch the inspiration which they felt from the nearness of God in all His wonderful creation.

Time is too short and precious to allow of even a short vacation being wasted. I remember hearing of a young man who refused to do some helpful service on the ground that he was "off duty." I don't blame him for what he *did*, or rather refused to do, but I blame him for what he *said*. He acted on a wrong principle. We are never to be "off duty" in the service of God. There is always something to learn and something to do, even when we rest from our labours. *Arcum non semper tendit Apollo*. Yet the Christian's bow, while unbent, must never be unstrung.

We must seek ever to be "growing unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Even in recreation, never forget the true aim of life. I give it in the words of Long-fellow :

" Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way,
But to live that each to-morrow
Finds us further than to-day."

This test of progress is still more true of spiritual training. Least of all must this come to a standstill, nor will it do so if we have formed the habit of a devotional attitude of mind, and in seasons of rest keep our hearts with diligence, and maintain our settled times of definite communion with God.

3. I come to a third test—that of *Unselfishness*. We have been signed at Holy Baptism with the sign of a cross, and that sign should be marked on all that we do. Have we ever noticed how the difference between a selfish and an unselfish man comes out in sport and in game? Have we never felt the need of signing the cross on our own recreations? Fishing and shooting, football and cricket, are unfailing touchstones of character, and the shadow of the Cross may fall across even our days of rest and pleasure, without in the least detracting from their reasonable mirth and joy. On the contrary, it will add depth and permanence to them.

Wherever it is possible, recreation should tend to knit together the various classes of society in friendly fellowship. I recall in my younger days such things as the village cricket match, the meet of the hounds, the local regatta, in which men of all sorts met in committee, in good-hearted comradeship, and friendly contest, squire and peasant rubbing shoulders, and social barriers being lowered without any forced constraint or sense of patronage. The selfish isolation of many modern amusements is tending to diminish this blending of interests, and has much to answer for in our present state of social divergency. The isolation of classes is one of our greatest national dangers, but the active exercise of an unselfish spirit

can still do much to lessen it, and to maintain the healthy spirit which Macaulay describes as that of Ancient Rome :

“ Then none was for a party,
Then all were for the State :
And the great man helped the poor,
And the poor man loved the great.”

For “ the Romans *were like brothers* in the brave days of old.”

The difference between love and selfishness lies largely in this—selfishness loves isolation, or at best seeks companionship for what it can *get*. Love seeks companionship for the sake of fellowship, and for what it can *give*. Let us apply this to our recreations.

4. One supreme test remains : all others meet in it. It is the *Presence of God*. Absolutely essential is that Presence in our work : not less essential is it in our recreations. The habit of recalling ourselves to thoughts of God in play-time is even more important than to do so in work-time, for we are then more apt to forget Him, and to think that here at least we may be less serious—as though, forsooth, the realized presence of God must needs becloud our joy, or (to use the familiar phrase of childhood) “ spoil all our fun.” As a matter of fact, there is no better motto for a day’s recreation than the prophet’s words, “ Prepare to meet thy God,” for God delights to prevent us with blessings of goodness, and if He does not meet us in any occupation, we ought to find no pleasure in it.

We should beware of any such ideal as this—*with God* in hours of devotion, *with God* in the day of trial, *with God* in the routine of work, but in times of pleasure—away from all conscious thought of Him to make merry with our friends. Let us not be unreal, transcendental, unpractical. Many can testify that they do make the presence of God the test and the pledge of enjoyment. But let us take the evidence of one who was a recognized master of innocent mirth and marvel—the Reverend Dodgson, better known as “ Lewis Carroll.” “ Alice in Wonderland ” was published while I was an undergraduate in Cambridge. From the gravest old don to the most callow freshman, all

delighted in it. Have you read "Sylvie and Bruno"? Did you, as usual, skip over the preface? It is, unfortunately, not included in the later and cheaper editions, but it is well worth reading.

Mr. Dodgson is weighing the wisdom and propriety of those lighter studies which led him away from mathematical research, but which have enshrined in the hearts of both old and young the name of "Lewis Carroll." This leads him to consider what is the real test of allowable recreation. For instance, he takes the case of the theatre. "If the thought of sudden death acquires for you a special horror, when imagined as happening in a theatre, then be very sure the theatre is harmful for *you*, however harmless it may be for others, and that you are incurring a deadly peril in going. Be sure the safest rule is that we should not dare to live in any scene in which we dare not die."

This is the true test of lawful and unlawful pleasures. Some pleasures are clearly such as no earnest Christian man can engage in. But there are others in which it is not so easy to decide, and where we cannot draw a hard-and-fast dividing line. But we can always apply this principle for ourselves—"I will go to no place where I feel that I must leave God outside the door. I will take part in nothing, be it work or pastime, on which I cannot ask God's blessing, and in which I cannot at any moment recall the thought that He is by my side."

Believe it, the consciousness of God's presence need not dull the keen edge of enjoyment, nor hinder the full play of youthful vigour, for, though it will often temper the spirit of our pleasures and check the unseemly act or word, it will enrich their blessings, and elevate their influences, by helping us to follow the light of that wise epigram, "Pleasure consists not in getting all we can, but in doing what we ought."

