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CHRISTIANS AND RECREATION.

II

BY J. T. BUDD.

DISPLACEMENT.

“ I NSTEAD of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree.” On these words the Rev. Dr. Jowett recently wrote a suggestive article, entitled “ God’s Ministry of Displacement,” in other words, on the expulsive power of a new affection, or, as some would put it, the mighty power of a new Inhabitant, “ Christ dwelling in the heart.”

When a man is absorbed in solving an intricate problem, or a preacher immersed in preparing a searching discourse, or an author writing an entrancing story, or treatise, petty fault-finding letters coming in daily, and trivial interruptions, which in hours of comparative idleness would vex and worry, almost cease to affect the mind, and fail to distract a soul occupied by noble and enriching ideals and aspirations. The Field-marshal who is directing divisions in a great aggressive movement, and who sees that his wounded are being cared for, does not include in his list of casualties those suffering from mosquito bites !

THE MINISTRY OF OCCUPATION

for adults, and for many people in hours of leisure, has not been given a place of pre-eminence in helping those who tell us they only seek to “ kill time.” Amusements, perpetually provided, even when pure and exciting, do not in the long run, satisfy. England needs a new soul, high-toned pronouncements—spiritual precepts in healthy practice. How many of our self-sacrificing soldiers have spoken about amusements lavishly and kindly provided, and have said of them, “ We have been fed-up with such.” Men can be satiated with pleasure ! They really want as well, something substantial for spirit and mind. When their higher nature is approached, they instinctively *respond*, as well as when the senses and passions are touched.

Then take the case of many lads, soldiers in peace times, how comparatively little is done to reach their better self, by people in

general, when the men are off duty. There are, of course, grand exceptions where Soldiers' Homes have been instituted. Because of idleness and want of wholesome occupation, men readily visit wet canteens, and succumb to the temptations of the public-house, and alas, are led, too, to visit demoralizing dens of iniquity.

The Ministry of Health Bill, which has been introduced in the present Parliament, embraces the vital matter of housing, but we trust the Government will also deal in a masterly way with provision for supplying the needs of the mind as well as the body. We want on an elaborately munificent scale, educative lectures and classes which will appeal to the higher instincts of men and women; women to wisely teach girls, and men sanely to teach lads, of the power of their physical nature, and of the *sacredness of pure thoughts and actions*. Early in life they learn evil from one another. Wise parents must forestall unholy temptations.

CANADIAN WITNESSES.

Think of the splendid physique of sober, clean-living Canadian boys when they first landed here. Tens of thousands of these had never been inside a drinking saloon and had never seen a drunken woman until they reached Christian England! Boys in this country are allowed to enter public-houses when over fourteen years of age, the very time of adolescence—fourteen to eighteen—when they should be shielded from temptations. Our franchised sisters, who will now have a wealth of power and influence, will see to it, we doubt not, that social purity questions, in their varied aspects, shall not be shunned nor skurried over in Britain's future House of Commons! They will see that legislation shall rectify past disastrous provisions, on questions of morality for men as well as for women, securing equal laws for both. If governors or lords won't act, six millions of noble women will haste to the rescue of their weaker sisters. The war will not have been in vain if pure homes, and cleansed streets, and an undefiled atmosphere are the direct results of bloodshed, agony and tears.

SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY.

Promoters of pure Re-Creation must recognize the tripartite nature of boys and girls. What magnificent work may be done by the Church Army, the Y.M.C.A., the S.C.A., the Y.W.C.A. and workers in all Churches, who have laboured in huts and hostels in

Belgium, France and the East as well as in England, Ireland and Scotland, when these huts and buildings, no longer needed for war purposes, are brought back and established through the country. Sane, godly leaders, men and women, will be needed to control and guide all who enter such. Those who conduct classes, Bible, educative, musical, recreative, will need patience and sympathy, self-sacrifice, tact and godly wisdom.

Philanthropic and patriotic souls have found that serving others enriched their own lives. We long to see such going a step further, and consecrating every gift and talent to Him Who loved them unto death—becoming “new creatures in Christ Jesus.” Individual Christian men and women—one by one—must see to it that righteousness and God’s Kingdom are not any longer neglected, or disaster will overwhelm England’s indifferent soul.

English family life needs to be guarded. Early marriages need careful scrutiny. Engagements ought not to be regarded as a mere trivial enjoyment. An *engagement ceremony*, such as some continental people adopt, would prove a splendid preliminary safeguard to marriage itself. Public opinion on all such matters must be expressed through the right agency. *There is a place* for wholesome enjoyment, for needed recreation. Where ministers and consecrated individual Christians present a full-orbed, satisfying Christ, all secondary things will fall into their right place. But we do not think it is the business of the Church to provide amusement for the *world*. Too many of the world’s amusements receive sympathetic recognition from half-hearted Christians. They think too superficially. Some amusements require close examination. We can refer only to a few.

THE THEATRE AND THE STAGE.

We were once talking to two ladies about theatres; they thought we had no right to indulge in criticism about a subject of which we knew nothing from personal observation. But do not playbills, photographs of actresses and actors, ordinary conversation, and illustrated newspapers’ reports and critiques, afford abundant scope and light to enable one to form a judgment? Must we frequent public-houses, or get drunk, in order to secure sufficient material to advocate total abstinence from intoxicating liquors. Must we spend nights in a gambling saloon, in order to point out the dangers

associated with cards, whist drives, and bridge, and that the mania for gambling for money is as intoxicating as the effect produced by drinking alcohol as a beverage? If successful at card games for money, one is encouraged to go on and risk losing a fortune; if unsuccessful one is goaded to try, and retrieve one's losses! So-called debts of honour often end in depths of degradation. If needs be, we could give an alarming instance from personal knowledge in the fall of a young Scotch banker, and the ruin he brought on others!

THE CHARACTER OF PLAYS.

In a large proportion of plays, as they come from the printer to the performer, witticisms abound, concealing more than they tell, yet telling what they conceal, observations which could not be repeated in a drawing-room by any man anxious to preserve his reputation. If the theatre, *as loved to-day*, is so good, pure, educative and illuminating, why do some Christians make so many excuses for it; why does the Lord Chamberlain absolutely refuse to licence some plays in the interests of morality; or why should a censor of plays insist on passages being expunged before some plays are produced in public?

Why are lying, intrigue, bigamy, domestic infelicities, family quarrels and jealousies between husband and wife brought into requisition in order to form *amusement for young people*?

We shall never support a good cause we may be advocating by a bad or unfair argument. Too often religion on the stage has been represented in the person of an "Abinodab Sleek," a strait-laced Pharisee, and if an act of meanness and parsimony was brought on it was connected with some deacon, or ranter, or clergyman. There is a change in this respect. Quite recently a well-known actor sent for a clergyman hurriedly to come to his theatre. When he came, the manager told him he felt his responsibility towards the audience, and asked him to say a few words to them. The minister gladly did so and ended with prayer!

Whilst this is praiseworthy, we can't help asking, why did General Smith-Dorien not so long ago take action against a theatre, and why did the proprietors amend their ways, scenes and words, in order to prevent the General's action going on? The boasted general improvement in plays and acting is largely, we fear, in the imagination of *conscience-troubled Christian supporters of the theatre*!

MIXED ACTING AND EXCITEMENT.

“Take the two great divisions of the drama—tragedy and comedy. Tragedy deals as a matter of course with the crimes of men, and either has a fatal issue, or a fatal issue narrowly escaped, and a termination which has been skilfully concealed! Comedy deals with the foibles, the faults, and what are termed the lighter sins of man. How are you going to make a popular entertainment, unless you mingle these in a most dangerous way? It never was done, and it never will be done, because the excitement cannot be produced. We affirm on the testimony of a theatrical man, that four out of every five in a theatrical audience consist of persons between fifteen and thirty years of age, and such persons fond of excitement will not pay to see a play in which there is little or no provision for the stimulation of the passions. The inexorable law that they that live to please *must* please to live, has kept the theatre down, and will continue to do so.” The Romans and Greeks did not permit mixed dancing. It was reserved for Christian Britain to so do! The idea that whilst such mixed acting continues the stage can be reformed, is a mockery and a snare! Some Christians pay only occasional visits to playhouses. They say “We discriminate, we only go to see good, pure, elevating plays.” Yes, quite so, but when you *do* go, are you not known as a theatre-goer? You cannot put a label on your arm, as you enter the door of a theatre, informing other citizens that you go only to see good plays! *Your influence is that of a theatre-goer*, and nothing else. Responsibility does not end with pure motives.

Whilst some plays may be more or less unobjectionable, you cannot take isolated cases of theatrical representation, as though they could be separated from all the surroundings of the playhouse or music hall in general. There are, of course, good actresses and pure actors; men who desire to have a pure stage, but they run great risks in order to please. The character of all recreation, as of anything else, must be decided, not by a single point in connexion with it, but by its *general tendency and results*.

CHRISTIAN SANCTION.

The character of those who take part in any secular or musical gathering, and the nature and spirit of the words sung or expressed, must to a great extent determine the propriety of extending to

such entertainments, Christian sanction. At the same time we must take care not to "create artificial sins, there are quite enough of real ones already." We heartily endorse words of a consecrated writer who has recently said that "table games, card games, and costume games are all to be judged by the *people who play them*, rather than the people judged by the games they play. Never play anything which must be put away when the clergyman or minister comes in, or anything that would make you ashamed before the Lord at His coming." It is hardly necessary to observe that there is hardly any recreation, no matter how useful, pure, innocent and elevating, which may not be perverted by being carried to excess. "Let your moderation (in good things) be known unto all men."

BALLS AND DANCING PARTIES.

These involve lavish expenditure of time and money, and usually turn night into day, the mind and body being over-excited when they ought to be at rest. The reaction next day must be injurious. These gatherings minister to pride, love of appearance and dress, and appeal to unworthy passions. Personally, we see no objection to girls dancing in the daytime in the open air, by themselves, but we can find no countenance in the Scriptures for *mixed* dancing. We are certainly told by Solomon that there is "a time to dance," but is it a permission, or simply a declaration that there *is a time* when people do dance? He also says there is a time for killing men and a time to die. There are twenty-three passages in the Bible which speak about dancing.

(1) It was a religious act both of the true and of idol worship. (2) It was practised exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or after great victories. (3) It was performed by maidens only. (4) It was usually performed in the day-time in fields or groves. (5) Men who perverted dancing from a sacred use to purposes of amusement were regarded as infamous. (6) No instances of dancing are found in God's Word in which the two sexes united in the exercise as an act of worship or amusement. (7) Lastly, there is no instance upon record in the Bible of social dancing for amusement except that of the "vain fellows" devoid of shame; of the irreligious families described by Job, which produced increased impiety, and ended in destruction. There is also the case

in the New Testament of Herodias, which terminated in the *rash* vow of Herod and the murder of John the Baptist !

The excitement, surroundings, desires, ambitions and *familiarities* of the ballroom are injurious to health, morals and modesty, and do not tend to humility of spirit, or domestic felicities. As the result of its conversation, attractions, dress and gaieties, do men grow stronger in body, happier in mind or purer in heart ? Simply to ask, what "harm" is there in any amusement, is not the question to be put by followers of Him who "went about doing good."

A ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP AND DANCING.

Writing on this subject a Roman Catholic Bishop said : " It is impossible not to regard dances as offensive to Christian modesty and fraught with danger. The attitudes and movements in these dances are manifestly incompatible with a due regard for propriety and decorum. But they are young persons, it will be said, simple and pure-minded, who engage in these dances. I answer—the enemy can find access even to pure minds ; he is too malignant to allow such a favourable opportunity to pass ! Others plead the usages of society ; but we have been warned not to ' conform to this world.' On such occasions a style of dress is witnessed which is painfully indelicate. That a modest young lady should so appear in her own family in such a state is indeed surprising, but that so dressed she should expose herself to the gaze of the miscellaneous gatherings of a ballroom is simply inconceivable ! To such girls I must say, ' You are not your own, you have been purchased at a great price, glorify and bear God in your body, your members are the temples of the Holy Ghost.' " We fear too many young Christians to-day forget St. Paul's admonition, " In like manner that women adorn themselves in modest apparel . . . through good works." The Food Controller has *rationed* many articles ; apparently the Dress Controller has also adopted his policy !

HORSE RACES AND BETTING.

It is said that the Puritans of England frowned on all amusements, even of a simple character, and that consequently others of an injurious character sprung up, and hence, in part perhaps, the terrible reaction in the reign of Charles II. We ought to take delight in seeing all God's creatures happy. We do not envy the man who could

never be amused at watching a two-months-old kitten chasing its own tail!

Horse-racing and its *inseparable adjuncts* of the bookmaker, the betting man, and gambling, risks much, with little practical advantage towards breeding horses for farm purposes. During the War, we read letters on this subject in *The Times*, addressed by Newmarket lovers and others, to the Government, but they were not convincing. The Government compromised, not for the first time, about what is injurious, but with no great advantage!

Fortunes, reputations, characters, have all been lost on the racecourse, aye, and life itself, when the object—Money—has missed the owner's grasp! Listen, not to our opinion, which some might say was biassed, but to that of one of the *most successful turf men* of his day. He says, "My campaign on the turf has been a successful one, still, all the success has not prevented frequent disgusts, and I derive anything but unmixed pleasure from this pursuit, even when I win by it. Besides the continued disappointments and difficulties incident to it, which harass the mind, the life it *compels* me to lead, the intimacies arising out of it, the associates, and the war against villainy and treachery, being haunted by continual suspicions, discovering the unworthiness of one's most intimate friends, the *necessity* of insincerity and concealment—sometimes when one feels one ought, and would desire to be most open; then the degrading nature of the occupation, mixing with the lowest of mankind, and absorbed in the business for the sole purpose of *making money*, the consciousness of a sort of degradation of the intellect, the conviction of the deteriorating effects upon the feelings and the understanding which are produced, the sort of dram-drinking excitement of it—all these things and these thoughts *torment me*, and often turn my pleasure into pain!"

Is not this the *bitter wail* of a successful, but disappointed man of the world, who knew he had a character to form, an intellect to cultivate, a soul to save, but who preferred to sink all, *and fill his purse*, rather than to build a character; to gratify his passions rather than enrich his mind, and who *stifled conviction*, until he almost forgot there was a hell to be shunned and a heaven to be gained! It was vanity and vexation of spirit.

Every Christian man or woman, who directly or indirectly associate themselves with that which begets and inflames the

spirit of gambling—which proceeds from a spirit of selfishness—lays a train of blasting powder, which at any moment a spark may explode, with disastrous effects. If only young lads who read some of our daily papers with “latest tips,” and servant maids who put their sixpences to back favourite horses, and promoters of whist drives and bridge parties, of raffles, games of cards, which are directly *associated* with gambling, could only hear the *bitter wail* we have quoted, we wonder if such would awaken and alarm the conscience, and save Christian Churches at least from any complicity with such dangerous, unhealthy, and unscriptural methods of raising money for “good and charitable objects”?

SPIRITUAL BUT NATURAL.

Soul-winners, who are winsome, and therefore win some, know that there is nothing that gives such deep-rooted joy as seeking to point lost ones to One mighty to save (3 John 4). Life is meant to be a glad sweet song. But even such people need hours of relaxation and change. Some enjoy concerts of praise, as well as concerts of prayer. Most Christians depend for recreation on books, music and conversation, coupled, especially for the young, with tennis, golf, cricket, swimming, driving, walking in the country or by the seashore, or up grand Scotch or Swiss mountains, at suitable times. Singing, reading, debates and conversation are specially adapted for long winter evenings.

As to reading, of course we may become so absorbed as to become selfish. The author of a book, its nature, the design of the writer, the spirit of the characters described, must guide us as to the propriety of giving away, or reading such books. We need to discriminate. Happy intercourse, too, is essential between young people. Such occasions ought to be provided, wisely guarded. Dr. Saleeby reminded us recently at a Conference on the “Moral Reconstruction of Society,” that parents must not shelve their responsibility, but exercise discipline and control; that they must not be dictatorial, but seek to win the confidence of their children; that prayer must be learnt *first* at a mother’s knee, not at school; that fathers must not be institutions nor mothers jealous! A real home, results in the ties of a happy family. More thinking is needed to-day, not so much emotion. We must think out our convictions. We need to watch the stories our children read, and the songs they

sing. But to abstain from good reading or good singing on Saturday will do the soul as little good as abstaining from good meat on Friday.

CONSECRATION.

An Irish minister's sane words, recently written, are worth remembering. He says: "If some lovers of classical music did but know the enthralling joy of some simple Gospel hymns, and the uplifting rapture of some psalms of praise, I think their lives would be richer. To live a consecrated life means constant self-denial, and when things that *might be allowed* are so mixed with *evil*, as to baffle us to disentangle them, when liberty may be a snare to others, when amusement may endanger those who contribute it, when recreation threatens to become the *business* of life, when Christ is dishonoured, or the Spirit grieved within me, then—without judging others, it is best for me to walk in the narrow way, and to walk it with a smiling face!" These words of our friend, the Rev. W. Y. Fullerton, are like apples of gold in pictures of silver. "The self-sacrifice in which we have devoted ourselves to God's service, made us also entirely our fellowmen's. For every Christian who gives himself entirely to His service, God has the same honour as His Son; He uses him as an instrument of blessing to others." But we must take prayerful care, that we do not relapse into mere receivers instead of transmitters, of being absorbers instead of radiators of Divine Grace!

On earth for Christ this day, each day, are we
 On earth that Christ in us on earth may be.
 As He in Heaven our surety doth appear,
 And we by faith in Him to God draw near,
 So would He now by miracle of grace,
 In us through us, draw near to our poor race.
 God *make each life*, through sacrifice, a way
 Whereby the Christ may reach some soul, each day!

J. T. BUDD.

