

AMUSEMENTS.

The following address was delivered by the Rev. John McNabb, Beaverton, before the Sabbath School Convention of the Presbytery of Lindsay, held at Uxbridge on the 23rd February, 1881, and published by request of the Convention:—

"The attitude which Christian people should maintain in relation to amusements and pleasures."

The elements that enter into the being of man are many and varied. Possessing as he does a physical, mental and a moral constitution and a susceptibility of devout affection towards God, the world in which he is placed is well fitted to gratify his propensities and desires whether for good or for evil. He will find temptations enticing him to evil and powerful influences drawing him towards the good, but to what influence he shall voluntarily yield depends on the strength of his moral nature invigorated by Christian principles.

The line of demarcation between that which is right and lawful and that which is wrong and prohibited is very clearly drawn in the law which ought to regulate and control christian life and conduct. And where there is even an approximate realization of the true ideal of Christian life there will be little tendency to overstep the boundary line between that which is lawful and that which is prohibited. The craving after many forms of questionable amusement arises not so much from ignorance of their questionable character as from the absence of higher delights and spiritual enjoyments. Let me see the person who lives in close fellowship with God; who enjoys much of the life of heaven on earth; whose soul is filled with the comforts of the Holy Ghost and I am sure the much contested question of amusements will trouble him nothing as far as his own enjoyment is concerned. But enjoyment in the favour of God does not imply, nor do we advocate exclusion from all forms of recreation which agreeably entertain the mind. There are many forms of amusements perfectly lawful and the most devout may engage in them in consistency with an elevated spiritual character. It is not piety towards God or righteousness and love towards men that will lead any man to an unqualified denunciation of all forms of recreation; but too often a spirit of asceticism, of prejudice, of fanaticism and sickly; sour sentimentalism. With such spirit an active, vigorous, healthy, practical christianity has no sympathy.

There may be many forms of recreation which you cannot enjoy and which you would cease to read in the catalogue of legitimate amusements. Your education, your training, your age, your prejudice, the influence with which you are surrounded, your position in Society and many other considerations may account for this. There is a certain groove which you follow and any deviation from that will be regarded by you, it may be, not only with distrust, but as subversive of christian morality. It is not principal that always rules but prejudice bearing the name of principle. While we readily see in the chart given by the beneficent Creator for our instruction and guidance a broad field of enjoyment and recreation we cannot close our eyes to the clear statements and principles of prohibition. "Thus far thou mayest go but no further." There is a mark that must not be passed—a line that must not be gone over.

I can conceive some species of amusements lying very close to the boundary line, some partly on one side and partly on the other. Look at that form of amusement, it is partly on one side and partly on the other. How can this be? The answer is, not only is the nature of the amusement to be considered, but also the circumstances, the society, the object, the motive, the influence and other considerations. That which stands wholly on the prohibited side of the line, or the part that stands on that side of the line no circumstance or consideration can make lawful. They are wrong, they are sinful. But what attitude shall we ought to maintain towards amusements of the former class. It would be an infringement of christian liberty and violation of the law of love to deny the right of private judgment and christian discretion in this matter. We cannot authoritatively say "you must have nothing to do with these forms of recreation." But we may counsel that it is wisest and best to keep at a distance from the line. It is the part of the wise to keep as far from danger as possible, if you engage in these exercises or amusements there is danger—for the temptation is strong, that you will step over the line.

I might be desired to specify those forms of recreation or amusement that certain circumstances render legitimate, those that are purely innocent and those that are absolutely wrong. But this would be almost an endless task, and perhaps I am incompetent to do such a thing. I think it is best that definite tests and principles should be laid down which shall be applicable to all forms of amusements. However, I may be permitted to specify a few. Some of the amusements, pleasures and entertainments that engage the attention of many I cannot denounce as absolutely wrong. A social gathering of friends of congenial minds, of congregations, of societies, might very innocently pass a few hours in musical and literary exercises (call it Concert or Social or whatever you please) and prove not only a source of enjoyment but mental improvement as well. To take the Sabbath School children and others into the open field and allow them and encourage them to enjoy themselves in innocent amusement would not only be justifiable, but productive of good results. In regard to the question of private or domestic dance my feelings and sympathies lead me to discontinue and discourage it, for its tendency is to create that form of dancing which I unhesitatingly condemn. I give it as a christian advice that it is best and safest to refrain from the practice entirely. To witness or engage in theatrical performances of a purely moral and intellectual character, if we should have such, would never be condemned by the sense of the christian world. Gymnastic exercises and sports of various kinds are not without their influence for good on the physical constitution.

But turn to the other side of the question of amusements. We have no hesitation or difficulty in condemning as wrong and Anti-Christian all forms of amusement that partake of the nature of gambling. There are many species of gambling and some have lifted up their sacrilegious acm within the

Sanctuary of God. This is amusement gone mad. It is simply abominable and should not be tolerated in a christian congregation. It is gambling.

All forms of amusements or pleasures where money is involved and betting practised, such as horse-racing, boat-racing, raffling, billiards, card-playing and all games of chance are wrong and subversive of morality, equity, love and christian rectitude.

To patronize or engage in the plays of the theatres of the day (not the ideal theatre to which I referred) cannot be right. The immoral and often the blasphemous plays enacted; the vulgar and uncouth attitude which actors and actresses often assume the immoral and indecent costume often worn are repulsive to the sense of christian refinement, and the whole tone of the theatre is most demoralizing, stimulates and excites evil passions. We would pronounce unqualified denunciation on this form of amusement. Shun it, for it is the enemy of God and of your highest interests.

The Ball-room promiscuous dancing is unquestionably among the forms of amusement prohibited. Among the many lines forbidden in the seventh commandment according to the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly is dancing, and also stage plays. This form of amusement brings in its train undue excitement, late hours, extravagant and perhaps immodest apparel, envy, jealousy and vanity. "unchaste movements and contacts." The society is miscellaneous. The most vile and morally filthy are found within those Halls of revelry. A sense of propriety as well as loyalty to the Divine Master should lead all who have any regard for Christ to shun the Ball-room.

I have thus given a few examples of the forms of amusement that are right and some that are wrong. I did not attempt to exhaust the catalogue for the amusements in point of number are legion. But let these examples suffice for the whole. I have to say in connection with this enumeration I have made that if any christian brother or sister should think that some of these amusements placed on the right side of the line should be on the prohibited side, that in deference to their convictions those who may be of a contrary mind should refrain from participation in them. The grand principle of self-denial so beautifully and tersely laid down by Paul should be exercised. Be not the cause of giving offence to any of the members of Christ's body.

This question of amusement should be dealt with in the spirit of Christ. Much injury may be done to the cause of the Redeemer by being punctiliously exacting. Prejudice and a misconception of duty do a great deal of injury by imposing a yoke which render religion repulsive and not attractive. If you cannot enjoy entertainments which may be to many sources of much enjoyment and pleasure do not condemn or restrain them in their enjoyments so far as these are of a purely innocent nature. It may seem superfluous to give such a caution. Is this not what every one will do? It depends on the spectacles you wear. If you wear blue everything will appear to you blue and you will incessantly be giving the warning of danger. But if you wear the pure white crystal of practical christian knowledge and experience you will see things in their true colour and call them by their right names.

If you should not be able to enjoy yourself in engaging in those forms of pleasure that are innocent your influence for good will be enhanced by encouraging and directing so far as you can those who enjoy their innocent recreations and not by dissociating yourself from the social life while that life does not come in contact with the moral tith of the world.

[CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.]

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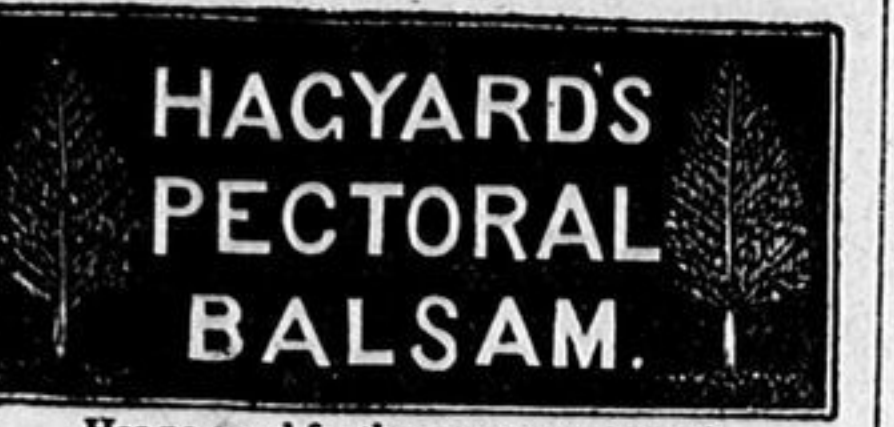
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