

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A
LAYMAN.

THE BISHOP OF HURON'S INHIBITION.

THE Bishop of Huron has issued a pastoral, threatening to inhibit such churches and congregations as adopt certain modern modes of raising the wind to keep the sails of the Church mill in motion. What is meant by the phrase "We formally inhibit all churches and congregations within our diocese," we know not. We, however, doubt the wisdom of threatening a penalty that, even if legal, could not be enforced. If no legal penalty can be imposed, we regret the use of language implying an authority that does not exist. The time has gone by when Churchmen were willing to submit to pains and penalties imposed arbitrarily by any dignitary in Church or State. The entertainment offences against which Dr. Baldwin launches his thunder bolts are not, nor have they ever been, recognised amongst ecclesiastical disorders by the Church of Christ. Before then any culprit in Huron could be tried, the Statute defining the offence and stating the penalty, will have to be created. A great statesman said of the quarrel between England and her American colonies, "I cannot draw an indictment against a whole people." Dr. Baldwin will find it beyond his power to indict even a congregation. The offences inhibited are, "Raffling, throwing of dice, games of chance or gambling of any kind, all theatrical, dramatic, or impersonating exhibitions, public or private." Manifestly there is a lack of discrimination in this list. Any practice touched with the poisonous slime of gambling is self-condemned. The effort to help the Church by such foul methods is to harness Satan in the chariot of Heaven. To make a theatrical performance under the ordinary conditions of the stage, so long as certain objections to the theatre exist, an auxiliary to the Church, is a wanton impropriety. That these objections are insuperable and unanswerable we need only point to theatrical posters, which prove that indecency and crime are the great magnets of the modern stage. It is contemptible for those who have any doubts on this matter, to use a theatre to raise money for the Church in the hope of neutralising or atoning for evil by giving to God the receipts of an occasional theatrical performance. Such a sop to the barking dog of conscience is akin to the piety of brigands who give a share of their plunder to the wicked Church of Rome, that accepts money even when stained by crime, that same Church which in Ontario bribed our legislators by votes to secure from them the Ross Bible in order to insult and suppress the Protestant Scriptures.

The clear line of principle ends here. We now enter upon the debatable ground of individual opinion and private feeling in regard to amusements. Upon this wide field certain sects without, and a certain class within the Church, have set up all manner of fences. Within one line we know that eating mince pie at Christmas was made a deadly sin. Standing within these artificial bounds the

builders look over their own barriers with severe, censoring eyes, upon all who are enjoying the larger freedom of God's open meadow. They condemn our lack of spirituality, our retort is, we would they were less troubled with dyspepsia. The history of religion, sacred and pagan, shows that in man there is a tendency to puritanical isolation. To ban recreative pleasures is no mark of Christianity, it is rather one of the special features of the most debased phases of heathenism. "Superstition," says Ruskin, "is the fear of a spirit who is hostile to human pleasure—this is the essence of superstition." The Christian puritan cannot hold a candle to the heathen puritans of India. Prohibition, for instance, had Mahommed for its prophet, while our Prophet and Saviour began his miracles amid the festivities of a wedding, the hilarity of which he heightened by turning water into wine.

The "unspeakable Turk," the filthy, murderous Hindoo, are puritans as regards those pleasures that the narrow code of some Christians condemn. The degradation of these races shows that asceticism is no preservative against immorality or crime. Indeed the argument from history is a demonstration that the high morality of voluntary self-restraint, such restraint as the Lenten season calls for, has no deadlier enemy than the slavery of enforced abstinence from pleasures that are only evils when abused. There is no place so free from amusement, so dead to laughter, or any social joy, as a prison cell, yet no place on earth is so debasing to the moral nature of its inmates. Every jail proves that puritanic strictness may be the ante-chamber of hell.

Dr. Baldwin needs to enlarge his sphere of observation, to cultivate a wider sympathy with human needs, and a tenderer spirit towards human weakness. This is a world of toil, and grief, and anxiety, the well of life, alas! how bitter at times! Our God is a God of fatherly tenderness. He will not chide His children who seek respite from care by the indulgence of those social instincts he has lovingly planted in our breasts to guide us into the pastures of innocent recreation. Hear the glorious voice of the most spiritual of all God's Saints: "It is well seen, O God, how Thou goest in the sanctuary, the singers go before, the minstrels follow after, in the midst are the damsels playing with the timbrels." After breathing the choking air of puritan closeness, it is like the joy of a mountain breeze to hear God's Word, and share the sweetness of its heavenly breadth and gentleness. The God who so heralded His people in His sanctuary, amid song and dance, the unchangeable God, will smile a blessing upon all efforts put forth in His name to sweeten the well of life by the medicinal bough of hilarity. Domestic amusements cannot be evil when based upon that marvellous instinct of imagination, the most potent refiner and educator of mind and spirit, seen budding in children who in infancy display a love of impersonation, and whose chiefest delight is in mimetic amusements, the girl with her doll, the boy with his mimic

sword and drum. Are the little beauties of Huron to be inhibited impersonating "Mamma?" If then, in the midst of social pleasures, public or private, friends and neighbours remember the Father who gives and shares their joy, and gratitude moves them to give to His Church, surely such gatherings and such gifts are sacred. As even the holiest of offices may lead men into sin, it is the duty of the clergy and parents to see that amusements are guarded. Late hours is a growing evil, but even Bible classes are open to this complaint. Temptations are inseparable from human life. Dr. Baldwin attends dinners and evening parties, he is, therefore familiar with the scandalously indecent and ostentatious dressing seen at such feasts, which constitute a far more direct offence against Christian propriety than any ordinary bazar or domestic entertainment held for Churchly objects. When we consider how restricted, how shut in, is the life of our people during the winters of Canada, how incessantly they grind at the wheel of business or household duties, we cannot but regard the innocent recreations organised in connection with our Churches, as worthy of every encouragement, help and sympathy. These gatherings are green spots in the desert of life's monotonous march. To suppress these recreative delights would soon bring on a flood of vice and lunacy.

As to the principle Dr. Baldwin lays down, that sacrifice is the soul of acceptable giving—no one doubts it—it is a mere truism. But money is not alone an offering, not even its worthiest form. Gifts of voice, of musical skill, of eloquent taste, of artistic construction, feminine accomplishments, these with our time and other powers should be reverently laid upon God's altar. Those who devote their gifts to the solacing of humanity are in an eminent sense ministering to the honor and glory of God. The Church is a family, austerity, asceticism, puritanism, morbid fears of offending our Father by enjoyment of His gifts, are foes to family unity and family strength and family influence.

The Catholic Church of England has no law against recreative amusements. But pleasures that lead into grave temptation, that destroy sleep, that waste substance in vain show, that draw the mind from duty, are not recreative amusements. To inhibit those enjoyments that offend no healthy conscience is likely to make the home of the Church not happy, but hateful and repellant. He who gave the Ten, said, "Another Commandment I give." The man who declares, "Thou shalt not" do this, or the other assumes a divine prerogative which is a very fashionable, but highly profane amusement in the present day. Men who presume to make new churches in spite of Christ having founded One for all time, men who use a Ross Bible to supplant God's Word, naturally see no harm in furnishing the world with their additions to God's Commandments. But from Churchmen we expect more reverence. From the Church we look for nobler teaching than puritanism—we expect help to learn the lesson

that all our limitations, its social delusions, its dis- achievements laid before God and His glory and have our money grubbed imaginative of the development of religion.

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