

Our Contributors.

DESTRUCTIVE, OBSTRUCTIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE MEN.

BY KNOXONIAN.

In one of his recent books the late Dr. Austin Phelps tells us that

In every great revolution of opinion three classes of men are the chief belligerents. They are the resisters, the destructives and the reformers. The resisters are the men who hold on to things as they are. They resist change because it is change. The destructives are the men who would break up society to get rid of its abuses. They are the men of one idea. The reformers are men of balanced ideas, who look before and after. They are tolerant of evils which are curing themselves. They labour patiently for bloodless revolutions.

Fortunately for the human family, great revolutions are seldom needed and seldom take place in civilized countries. In times of ordinary progress, however, a keen observer can see three classes of men at the front just as distinctly as Dr. Phelps sees them in great revolutions. These may be classified as

DESTRUCTIVES,
OBSTRUCTIVES and
CONSTRUCTIVES.

The destructive men, as Dr. Phelps observes, are always ready to destroy things for the sake of putting an end to real or imaginary or grossly-exaggerated wrongs. They fix their minds on something that they consider wrong in either Church or State, and in order to put an end to that wrong they are willing to wreck the State or blow the Church into fragments.

Now it must be confessed that the methods of a tempestuous destructive, if carried out, are singularly effective. If you sink a steamer in mid-ocean because the air in her staterooms is not good, you certainly rid the world of the foul air. If you cut off your finger to get rid of a wart, the wart certainly goes. Destroy a congregation to get rid of a choir or an elder, or a minister, and the riddance certainly comes but the congregation as certainly goes. Overturn a farm by an earthquake to get rid of Canadian thistles, and the thistles will certainly die, but you may have some difficulty in raising crops on a farm with the lower side up. Wreck Canada to get rid of a difficult political problem, and the problem will no doubt be abolished, but the Dominion will be abolished along with it. Destructive methods are always effective in the same way that an overdose of arsenic or strychnine is always effective—they remove the disease by killing the patient.

The role of a destructive is always comparatively easy. It requires neither brains nor sense. A mental imbecile can burn a house or break a gold watch just as easily and quickly as Socrates or Plato could. A healthy crank can disturb congregations faster than John Hall can build them. There is no merit in destroying a good, useful thing to get rid of an evil connected with it. If that is the right way to get rid of evil, the whole world should have been destroyed several thousand years ago.

How would it do to try the destructive method on the destructive himself? There is always some evil in him. Quite frequently there is a great deal. Supposing society should blot him out of existence to remove the evil. Society might not lose much by the operation, but the destructive might possibly object to taking his own medicine.

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are not so belligerent as the destructive. They merely stand in the way and try to stop things. If they tried to stop only those things that ought to be stopped—and there are a good many things in the world and Church that ought to be stopped at once—they might do fairly good service, though not always service of the highest order. To put an end to an evil is a good thing to do, but it is a better thing to put something good in the place of the evil. Our Saviour came to this world to put an end to sin, but He put righteousness in the place of sin. The trouble with a genuine obstructive is that he merely obstructs. He does nothing, suggests, helps nothing. What would the world and the Church come to if a majority of people turned obstructives?

That is a fine paragraph in Principal Grant's review of "Canada and the Canadian Question" in which he defends his eloquent countryman, Joseph Howe. Mr. Howe did obstruct the Confederation scheme in Nova Scotia, and so far as his own Province was concerned, defeated it. With one exception every Confederationist was routed at the polls.

But one province could not turn the scale, and the scheme went on. Mr. Howe appealed to England, but he might as well have appealed to the man in the moon. The Imperial authorities were in favour of the scheme, and would, of course, do nothing. Well do we remember the graphic and almost pathetic description given by Howe of the scene in the House of Commons, when, after months of weary working, he succeeded in getting his case before the Imperial Parliament. There was barely a quorum present, and those who were there scarcely took even a languid interest in the matter. Just a little colonial squabble everybody seemed to think. That night Joseph Howe went to his lodgings with his hopes crushed and his heart well nigh broken. The only power on earth that could keep his Province out of the Confederation compact would not interfere. What was Howe to do? Go home and call Nova Scotia to arms? Principal

Grant says the people would have risen to a man—that man was probably Tupper, the only Confederationist who managed to get a seat. To the honour of his memory, Joseph Howe refused to lead his people to bloodshed. He knew what very few men know—when to stop obstructing and begin building. He did what only a statesman can do—he accepted the situation, and when he could no longer serve his people by obstructing he served them by getting better terms. Any mule could have obstructed to the end, but a statesman could see the scheme had to be tried. Joseph Howe could not stop the train, but, like a wise man, he got his people on board and secured for them the best seats.

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are men of the highest order. They may have to act as destructives occasionally, and sometimes as obstructives, but their main work is to build. Constructive men in the State develop and build up the country. Constructive men in the Church open mission stations, found colleges, organize congregations and carry on every kind of work that is carried on. They are out of all sight the highest order of men. Dr. Chalmers was, perhaps, the best specimen of a constructive Presbyterian that this century has produced. The highest order of constructive mind is one that forms plans that can be successfully worked.

The Church parliaments are coming on. Just read the reports carefully and see these three classes of men at work. The destructives will be ready to tear up everything that does not suit them in every particular; the obstructives will object to everything that does not square with their ideas, no matter how good it may be, and the constructives will try to push on the good work on old and new lines. Now just see if that will not be so next June.

PRESENT-DAY PAPERS.

THE CHURCH AND POPULAR AMUSEMENTS.

BY REV. EDWIN P. INGERSOLL, D.D.,
Pastor of the Pilgrim Congregational Church, Brooklyn.

There is a narrow pass in Mammoth Cave which is called "The Fat Man's Misery." Very like that to one who has both glow of life and glow of conscience is the subject of "Popular Amusements." There are two points to consider.

First. What position should the organized body, called the Church, assume in regard to them? I answer: In its creed and in its covenant, it should say nothing. The spirit and principles of the Gospel offer every blessing and exclude every evil under the sun. But there are times when certain evils have become so widespread and seductive that the Church is bound to assume an attitude not only of disapproval, but of opposition. At its door should be a test of character and of conduct and of opinions in regard to views of right and wrong. If a man, however orthodox in his creed, holds sentiments or indulges in practices which are against the pronounced moral sentiment of a Christian community, he has no right to Church membership, and so the Church may properly specify, may be bound to specify, even in regard to popular amusements.

Again. What is the relation to those popular amusements which are acknowledged to be wholesome? I answer: The Church touches the springs of spiritual life. It doesn't come to take charge of everything. It shines like the sun, it falls like the rain, to quicken the "seeds of the kingdom." It has places of worship, and endowment of talents, and endowment from on high, with which to do this, but its mission is not to build walls long and wide enough to house everything which is right and proper.

These ought to exist as the result of Christian training, but not under the church roof. Why? Because they are not in close keeping with its primary aim. Refreshing concerts, with ozone in them, instructive lectures, with or without pictures of nature or art, are in touch with the aims of a Church, and do not desecrate it. But gymnasiums and museums, though ever so important and animating, belong under other roofs. Though they belong in a true and noble sense to the Christian, there is a fitness in their having separate places. While this is true, I have no sympathy with the belief which makes some things secular as separated from Christianity. The Sabbath was given as a sample for all days. The Lord's Supper was given to show us how all life ought to be lived. "All occupations of men are consecrated to reveal Him, and all relations between men to testify of Him." Of the Lord's Supper it is written "This do in remembrance of Me." Of all life it is written "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do in the name of the Lord Jesus." And yet, I repeat it, there is a fitness that the church edifice should not furnish place for everything. But in the second place, what is the privilege of the Christian in regard to popular amusements?

It is his privilege and duty to have recreation. The Muses sing the praises of social life, but in so doing they are but reiterating the plain truths of Nature and Revelation: they are simply interpreting the petition of human nature.

Man in society is like a flower
Blown in its native bud. 'Tis there alone
His faculties expand in full bloom:
Shine out. There alone reach their proper use.

So eminently social is Christianity that the bridegroom and bride, and the family in its varied relationships, are among the clearest types of Christ and His followers. We

are social beings; we demand recreation from the cares of life, and no human institution recognizes this fact so distinctly and fundamentally as Christianity. There is nothing in the spirit or commands of our holy religion that shuts us out from any recreation or amusement which is not hurtful. More than this, they are demanded. No man can live, pray, or love aright who does not obey the call of Christ to his social nature. Men should be like rivers—here a shingly shore where they may play like children; yonder a steep, rocky bank, under which they can wait and cool themselves, and so gather their forces together for the busy mills below. Taxed energies need rest. Plodding buries the imagination. Bury imagination and life loses its zest. Give it uncontrolled wing, and life is shorn of its vigour and directness. Let us blend the currents of mirth and morality, of amusement and Christian activity. Why not seek a pure world of happiness by giving prayer and recreation the same fountain head?

Some have imagined that a keen relish for amusements is the result of "The Fall." But no new faculty was then given. It is in us, because we have the stamp of God's image. It cannot be crushed out and have manhood left. Crushing it out would be demolishing one of the fairest citadels of our nature. You cannot scold a man up into virtue; you cannot legislate him up into a Christian; you can win him up; but it must be by the way of his social powers. The need of recreation is intensified by city life. The healing balm of the fields was needed by the busy, pleasure-loving Nebuchadnezzar. He had run wild, away from the thoughts of earnest life. In the fields he got well. In the city life of to-day some run wild by the rebound from over-work; others because they have no intensity of employment.

Now in regard to so-called "popular (public) amusements," shall the Church antagonize or encourage them? Is it right to love? Yes! No! It depends upon the object, the associations, the tendencies. So in regard to amusements. We may safely assert the following principles:

First. No amusement is right for any one of us which unfits us in a positive way for the duties of life. Amusements must be the servants, not the rivals or masters of labour. When an amusement gives out a keener relish for daily toil, rests body, brain, and soul from work, for work, it is wholesome. But if it tends on the morrow to make one languid and dreary, fretful, and dissatisfied with the realities and duties of life, it is positively wrong.

Second. While we have a doubt of mind or qualm of conscience with regard to the right or wrong of an amusement (no matter what others think), it is sin to engage in it. "Yes, but if it makes me seem uncivil and peculiar, am I to decline amusements in which reputable people engage?" Certainly. If your associations are with people who have no respect for conscientious scruples, the sooner you leave them and seek civil society, the better. Doing what seems right is the surest path to what is right. Fashion, custom, talents, smiles, compliments or ridicule have no right to tamper with that awfully sacred thing, conscience.

Third. Any amusement is against Christian life in which thoughts of God, of passing time, and of heavenly life seem intrusive, and are troublesome. If under any amusement we become worldly, are gradually won away from the Bible and prayer and church-going; if it leaves us in an excitement which drives away sleep, that craves again the amusement for its own sake, it is baneful to all that is best within us. "O but that is a matter of opinion." No, it is a principle. Ask your physician. It never belonged simply to opinion; it never will.

Fourth. Another principle enters into this question. The Gospel of Christ is glad tidings of joy. "All things are yours." Yes, "God giveth us richly all things to enjoy." But if my liberty in regard to "enjoyment" is a "stone of stumbling," then I am bound as a Christian, and bound as a human being (for becoming a Christian does not create obligation), to give it up. Giving up what to me is innocent (though not essential) for the sake of another is one of the noblest exhibitions of manhood. "Out of the sayings or deeds of any man, of any time, who loudly proclaims 'the rights of liberty,' match, if you can, this sublime and noble sentence of Paul, in which he asserts the rights of Christian conscience above the claims of Christian liberty." And yet that same self-denying apostle drew a horizon line between my brother's weak conscience and my brother's stubborn bigotry. A morose ascetic could starve me. A narrow crank could make a very time-server of me. Against such Paul stood. Some men of his day claimed as a matter of conscience that young converts should be circumcised. "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour." A principle was at stake. Conscience said "stand for the principle," and "stand" he did, and so ought we. We may refrain from what is permitted. At our peril we refrain from what is required. The twelfth chapter of Hebrews throws light upon this subject: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." There are hindrances which are not sins. There are "weights," allowable in themselves, perhaps with blessings in them, which for some clear reasons become impediments in the battle for life. They are generally the abuse of something which in itself is legitimate. Only a resolute and vigorous Christian conscience will decide upon them fairly. "Christian consciousness" is a phrase very much in vogue nowadays. But what is called that is not worth a rush-light, unless it is the first-born of Christian conscience. By the test of a Christian conscience, if we find some amusement of which we are very fond is becoming a snare, let us have done