

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

CARD-PLAYING

The following is substantially the answer given by a pastor to a young member of his church who had asked him, "Why is it wrong to play cards?"

Opposition to card-playing is, with me, first of all a matter of spiritual instinct. Ever since I knew the Saviour as mine, I have felt that that amusement which more than almost any thing else is the joy and the passion of the worldly and the vicious, the dishonest and the depraved, must of necessity be inconsistent with high spirituality and unfavourable to growth in grace. I have felt that that which Satan uses so largely to ensnare and destroy men must necessarily be bewitching and destructive, and that that which is the bosom-friend and inseparable companion of the grog-shop, the dance-house, the theatre, and the brothel must, of course, have had like parentage and bring forth like progeny.

Card-playing, promiscuous dancing, and theatre-going constitute the trinity which the thoroughly worldly and the wicked worship. Can that professing Christian whose heart worships at the same shrine be filled largely with the Spirit of Christ? Can any man serve two masters? Can the love of the world and the love of the Father dwell in the same heart? If the things named are not "of the world," what is?

I would not assert that none who indulge in card-playing can be Christians. It may not be inconsistent with the existence of grace in the heart; but I feel very sure that it is inconsistent with a high state of spirituality, and that it is in many ways unfavourable to the growth of piety. Some of these will readily occur to you. It is usually engaged in as an evening entertainment, and as such is sure to absorb the time which ought to be given to the duties of the closet. It is both exciting and fascinating, and so tends to unfit the mind for the profitable reading of God's word and for secret prayer. It is likely to beget feelings that are anything but devotional, and so to disqualify the heart for communion with God.

In addition to these personal considerations, it seems to me to be of pernicious tendency as an example to others, especially to the young, many of whom undeniably are being constantly ensnared and destroyed by it. And, to say the least of it, it is a needless, a trifling, and therefore a profane appeal to God's providential decision. For these, and for other reasons, every Christian ought to say of it, as Paul said of eating meat, when his example might lead others into sin, "I will not do it, while the world stands."

I know that what I have written would not have much weight with those who love this amusement. There are none so blind as those who do not wish to see. The heart has much more to do with the formation of our opinions on such subjects than either our reason or our conscience. Many say, "I see nothing wrong in it." Very likely. It is written of another transaction that "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat." Yes, she did; and she thereby "brought death into our world, and all our woe." She saw no harm in it; but the harm was there notwithstanding.

The true antidote to the love of cards, and all other dangerous or doubtful recreations is the love of Christ. Fill the heart with this and it will expel the other, just as certainly as light drives out darkness, or heat banishes cold. All the sophistries and illusions of a world-loving, pleasure-seeking reasoning are easily dissolved and dissipated by the divine, transcendent logic of John and Paul: "We love him because he first loved us;" "The love of Christ constraineth us."

JESUS LIFTED UP.

Looking in another direction, we find the Church confronted by critical skepticism and scientific doubt, which aim to break down the bulwarks of her faith, and raze her walls of salvation to the ground. But while we survey this frowning evil, let us not be unduly alarmed, or make too hasty concessions but be vigilant and wise in meeting it on broad and sound grounds. Holding to the Bible as our sole rule of faith and practice, we must maintain the supremacy of the Bible by placing it in its right position; and that is, that it is a perfectly completed book. The Bible

of to-day is the Bible of all the centuries of the Christian era, and will be of all the centuries to come. As it came from Him, it can neither be added to nor taken from without incurring the anathema of its Author. But the science which opposes this Bible is but the science of to-day. It was not the science of the last century; it will not be of the century to come. These sciences, of whatever name, are variable and uncertain. Not one is on a fixed and immovable basis. Not one that may not be altered, or set aside by some new discovery, or by some new generalization. It will be time enough to say whether these sciences and the Bible do agree when the perfected circle of science shall be placed on the perfected circle of the Holy Scriptures. Then only can we rightly measure each, and when that time comes it will be found that the circumference of science and the circumference of revelation have one and the same periphery, because they have one and the same divine centre, the same one living and true God.

In the apostles' day there were "oppositions of science, falsely so-called." In every age since then the same assaults have been renewed, but the Bible has calmly held on its way. It waits patiently for confirmation as the ages roll on, and each advance of true science does bring it more into accord with revelation. What the clergy have to do is not to attempt to put on Saul's armour and go forth to fight what they would call a Philistine science with something that they have not proved and cannot wield, but to take the smooth stones out of Scripture, and in the name of the uplifted One so hurl them that even giant defiers of the Israel of God shall fall before the simple truth, slung by the humblest shepherd of the flock. This preaching is now, as in Paul's day, to the Jew a stumbling block, and to the Greek foolishness, but it is still what it was then, and what it will ever be—Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. When the apostles preached this uplifted Christ, they did it not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, lest the Cross of Christ should be of none effect, but with that plainness of men fully imbued with the truth which they heralded, and telling it out in the fulness and directness which all will feel who realize that they are bought with a price, even the precious blood of the uplifted Jesus.

SOLOMON THE PREACHER.

Solomon was a great experimenter on human life. He tried all ways of it. He tried what wealth, what wisdom, what mirth and music, building of houses, planting of vineyards, making of orchards and gardens, could do to make a man happy and keep him so. And he conducted each experiment of this kind upon the largest scale, and carried it to its furthest issue. His position gave him full command of all the means and instruments of human enjoyment, and he exercised that command without limitation or restraint. Whatsoever his eyes desired he kept it not from them; he withheld not his heart from any kind of joy. We are not to imagine that he did all this at the prompting of any higher motive, or for any religious end. He did it as multitudes in lesser spheres and to a more limited extent are doing it—to gratify the devices and desires of his own heart. But he was all the while, though unconsciously fulfilling a high and benevolent purpose of the Supreme, and when afterwards he was brought to the love and service of God, he was directed to put on record, for the guidance and warning of all after generations, a history of earlier experience. It is in this light, regarding them as written for this purpose, that the opening chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes are to be read by us.—*Dr. Hanna.*

ATTENTION.

No book suffers so much from inattentive, listless readers and hearers as the Bible. The familiar words fall upon the ear, often failing to arrest even a passing attention. How many people in an average congregation hear the Scriptures read in the service on the Lord's day, and could not possibly tell, if asked immediately afterward, what had been read, whether Psalm, Gospel, or Epistle!

The listless attitude of mind, in which many of us indulge in church, is largely responsible for this. An honest Scotchman, when pressed for the reason of his enjoyment of the service, said, "It's so comfortable like, I just puts up my legs and thinks of nothing." May not too many of us have to confess that we too

"think of nothing?" Ministers might perhaps do something to win attention to the reading of God's word in the Sabbath services by reading continuously certain portions and commenting wisely upon them, the people following with Bible in hand.

The habit of taking heed how one hears, may, I am sure, be cultivated in children. Visiting some years since in a singularly attractive Christian home, we were invited into the library to join in the Sabbath afternoon Bible-reading, which was customary in the family. There we found the father, mother, and three children, the youngest ten years old. The passage read was the account of Paul's shipwreck. I listened to the familiar story, but was somewhat alarmed when the father proceeded to ask questions as to the details of the narrative, questions which I could not possibly answer because of my careless listening. The young people were eager, interested, and showed that they had learned to give diligent heed to the reading. After a half hour of questions and answers and instructive talk together, hymns and the creed were repeated, and earnest prayer offered. I at least learned one lesson I shall not soon forget. On our return home, the Sabbath afternoon Bible-reading was introduced in our family. Our little people enjoy it, and we find it especially helpful, as it secures attentive listening to the Scripture read.

Let us become first attentive hearers and readers of God's Word that we may be also earnest doers.

THE SIN OF WORRY.

There are men in the world who wear a girdle of fret, as trying as any friar's to annoy themselves. They fancy that in such experience is to be found the highest fulfilment of religious duty and the truest expression of this world's probation. Some one has said that they procure their tickets, and then carry their luggage with them wherever they go, while there is provided a proper and capacious receptacle for all encumbrances. Or, what domestic infelicity this spirit of worry occasions! Mary and Martha are always in confusion—never able to comprehend one another. What business impatience and misunderstandings are inspired by this same contradiction, as it exists in common forms!

The assurance needs to be taken home by every one of us that worry is the deadly foe of the gospel and of common sense. In both the general and the special providences of God, which are revealed to us on every page of the Bible, there are distinct utterances against this tendency, by which we are all plagued. But in addition to these promises, there are positive precepts, which make it most evident that anxiety has in it the very nature of sin, and is the mother of misery. However nervous, depressed, and despairing may be the tone of any one, the Lord leaves him no excuse, for there is God's promise to overbalance all these natural difficulties. In the measure in which the Christian enjoys his privileges, rises above the things that are seen, hides himself in the refuge provided for him, will he be able to voice the confession of Paul and say, "None of these things"—however combined and confederate they may be—"none of these things move me."

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Eternal life is said to consist in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. To impart this knowledge is the work of the Spirit. He enables us to see the glory of God, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. It is this discovery which produces holiness. By beholding His glory we are transformed into His image, from glory to glory. When Christ was thus revealed to Paul he was instantly converted from a persecutor into a worshipper of the Lord Jesus. And this is the history of every conversion from that day to this. It matters not to the blind that the heavens are flooded with glory, or that the earth is clad with beauty; and it matters not to the spiritually blind that God has clothed Himself in flesh and dwelt among us. But when the Spirit opens our eyes, then the beatific vision breaks in upon the soul with all its transforming power; then we become new creatures in Christ Jesus.—*Dr. Charles Hodge.*

Peter McKenzie's advice is good: "If you have a greedy disposition, and the devil comes to you when you are in the act of giving, and tells you, 'You can't afford it,' say to him, 'If you don't keep quiet I'll double it,' and he'll soon give it up."