

Our Contributors.

The Limits of Amusement in a Well Ordered Life.

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Few subjects deserve more careful treatment at the hands of the preacher of today, than that of amusements and their place in a well ordered Christian life. Our young people must have amusements, and if so, it is a serious question of the what? when? and how much? John Wesley solved the difficulty easily. He would not have the young people in his schools play at all, lest they should grow up frivolous. It is needless to say that his rule in this direction was a failure. The rule was preposterous, contrary to nature. God has certainly put the play element in human nature and no doubt, for a wise purpose. It is there not to be eradicated but to be regulated. In any wise ordering of life it must be provided for, guided, controlled, and so regulated, that it will prove a blessing and not a curse.

It is the wise and gentle Shakespeare who says:

"Sweet recreation barred, what doth ensue
But moody and dull melancholy
Kinsman to grief and comfortless despair?"

Forceful suppression of the play element is a moral and physical injury to young and old. If the young love it for its excitement, the older ones of us love it for the sweet relief it gives from the strain of work. It has its place to brighten, sweeten and strengthen life.

In catering to this play element, the children of this world are wiser than the children of light. Satan is more cunning than learned divines and has exerted all his skill to get hold of the whole department. To invent innocent amusements and to keep innocent amusements innocent, is a public benefaction and a blow at Satan's kingdom. I would like to see a good symposium on the subject, "What are the best amusements?"

Luther had a fine, hearty, playful nature and is competent to put in a word. He says: "The best exercise and pastimes are music and gymnastics, the former dispelling mental care and melancholy thought, the latter producing elasticity of body and preserving health." His music and muscle theory has much to commend it. Just make the interpretation wide enough and you can bring under these two words nearly all that is wholesome in the way of recreation.

The ethics of amusement is a subject too large to be dealt with in a few sentences. Is it *right* for a Christian to dance? Is it *right* for a Christian to play cards? Is it *right* for a Christian to go to the theatre?

What pastor is not familiar with such questions? The fundamental ethical question to be asked concerning all such things is not, is it right for the Christian, but is it right for anybody?

Having settled the fundamental question of rightness, we can bring in Paul's argument,—it may be right but is it expedient? And also his further argument that there is a Christian life in which such questions never arise, so full is it in itself.

The Christian religion is not a policeman. We cannot make a religion of mere restrictions. A restriction that does not carry the moral sense of good, commonsense people will prove an injury instead of a help. Enactments, denunciations against amuse-

ments, in themselves not morally wrong, tends to make religion odious.

Many amusements (like many other things) are innocent save in the matter of excess or abuse. Any teaching that is really helpful must consider carefully where the restraint is to come in—must point out where the danger and evil emerge and put on the restriction where it will carry the judgment and commend itself to the conscience of right thinking people.

John Wesley discerned the evil that came through the love of dress and display—the extravagance, vanity, the envy—and he determined to check it. He interdicted ribbons and prescribed a simple style of dress. He drew the line of his restriction too far back and the restriction soon became a dead letter.

So in amusements that are not essentially evil we must be careful to put the restriction in the right place. Of course as the temptation to excess in amusements is peculiarly great so must our watchfulness over them be great and we should be ready to stop a good way on his side of sinful excess.

I hope I shall not be thought impertinent if I indicate here where restraint comes in; if I lay down a few principles to guide as to the innocency or evil of an amusement.

1 At the outset it is evident that any allowable amusement should be free from all fraud, falsehood or impurity.

2 It should tend to refresh and invigorate mind and body. It should not exhaust us, but prepare us better for the daily duties of life. It should be a tonic, not immoderately exciting but yet promoting cheerfulness and dispelling gloom and care.

3 It should not be irrational so as to lower one's self-respect by silliness or folly.

4 It should be taken in good company and wholesome surrounding and associations.

5 It should never be indulged in at the expense of loss and pain to any fellow creature. The old fable of the boys and the frogs teaches this wholesome lesson. Can we take pleasure out of that which is pain or peril to others? Our recreations should not be selfish, much less cruel.

Now it would be profitable to take these principles and apply them to the popular amusements, recreations and games of the present day, but it would lead us too far afield, therein the patient must minister to himself, must bring his own good sense and Christian consciousness to bear on the amusements in which he allows himself to indulge.

The Christian should certainly live on such a plane, have in him such a spirit, that he cannot be absorbed in the pleasures and recreations of life, and will only feel inclined to take such amusements as comes fairly within an honest consecration to the supreme Master of his life Christ Jesus.

Is the Young Man Absalom Safe?

—2 Samuel 18 29.

BY REV. JAS. RATTARY.

This was the question of an anxious parent. All day long David the king had been watching on the wall of Mahanaim, waiting for tidings from the widespread battlefield where his armed men were fight-

ing treason and rebellion. His heart was torn with conflicting emotions. For the rebel forces were led by his own son, whom though he had proved a renegade, David yet loved with a deep and unquenchable love. So far as the inspired narrative informs us we can discover no good trait in Absalom's character, yet surely there must have been something lovable about him to have called forth such love on David's part. Surely we have more here than the doting of a fond father. But so far as the story goes we cannot discover it. We only see on the one hand a worthless son, vain, ambitious, unfilial, unscrupulous—on the other a father's deep, unquenchable love. And David's heart must have been torn by conflicting emotions as he waited through the hours for tidings from the battlefield. For should his troops be defeated that day it would mean the final and complete triumph of rebellion, the passing away of the kingdom from himself, his exile, perhaps his death at the hands of his own son, whereas should his men be victorious it might mean the death of Absalom. It was a hard position for a man and a father to be placed in. All through the passage we see his anxiety manifesting itself—in the pathetic request which he made of his three generals before they went to battle. "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom,"—in the eagerness which he displayed when the sentinel beside him on the wall told him of the messengers' approach—in which he said of Ahimaaz the foremost runner. "He is a good man, and brings good tidings, and sometimes it has come to pass in the providence of God that evil men have carried good tidings. There was really not much in that. But we see how David was searching for every crumb of comfort he could find, and eagerly feeding it to his soul. We perceive his anxiety, too, in the question with which he greeted the messenger. His first question to each in turn was that of his text: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" No, he wasn't safe. Even while David spoke the words, Absalom was lying dead in a dishonored grave. In yonder pit of the woods, covered up with a pile of rough stones, the body of the king's son, the man who had been so fair to look upon, but who had possessed so little of moral comeliness, lay entombed. David's anxiety couldn't shield him, his love couldn't save him. That which David feared had fallen upon him, and the strong man who had borne himself so bravely through the long strain of the long day utterly broke to pieces. He could restrain himself no longer. The fountains of his nature were stirred to their lowest depths, and his sorrow found vent in that exceeding bitter cry: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son." In that hour of supreme grief David is very human, and comes very near to us all. We lose sight of the king, the statesman, the warrior, the minstrel. We see only the father stricken, murmuring for his son who would return to him no more for ever. And what about Absalom's soul, for even that wayward youth had a soul of some kind about him somewhere. Where was it now? Whither had it gone? What was its destiny? It was with God, to whom the souls of all men return, and God judgeth righteously.

But this though an old question is yet ever new. It is a live question, a question for to day and every day—is the young man safe? There are perils so many in the world, physical and moral, to body and soul. I speak of moral peril now. Are our young people usually safe? It is a question in