

SECOND EDITION

... THE ...
Church
... AND ...
Amusements



A Paper

Prepared by the REV. RICHARD HOBBS, by request of the London Ministerial Association, and read before that Body. Also presented to his own people in the Town of Wingham.

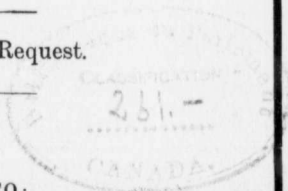
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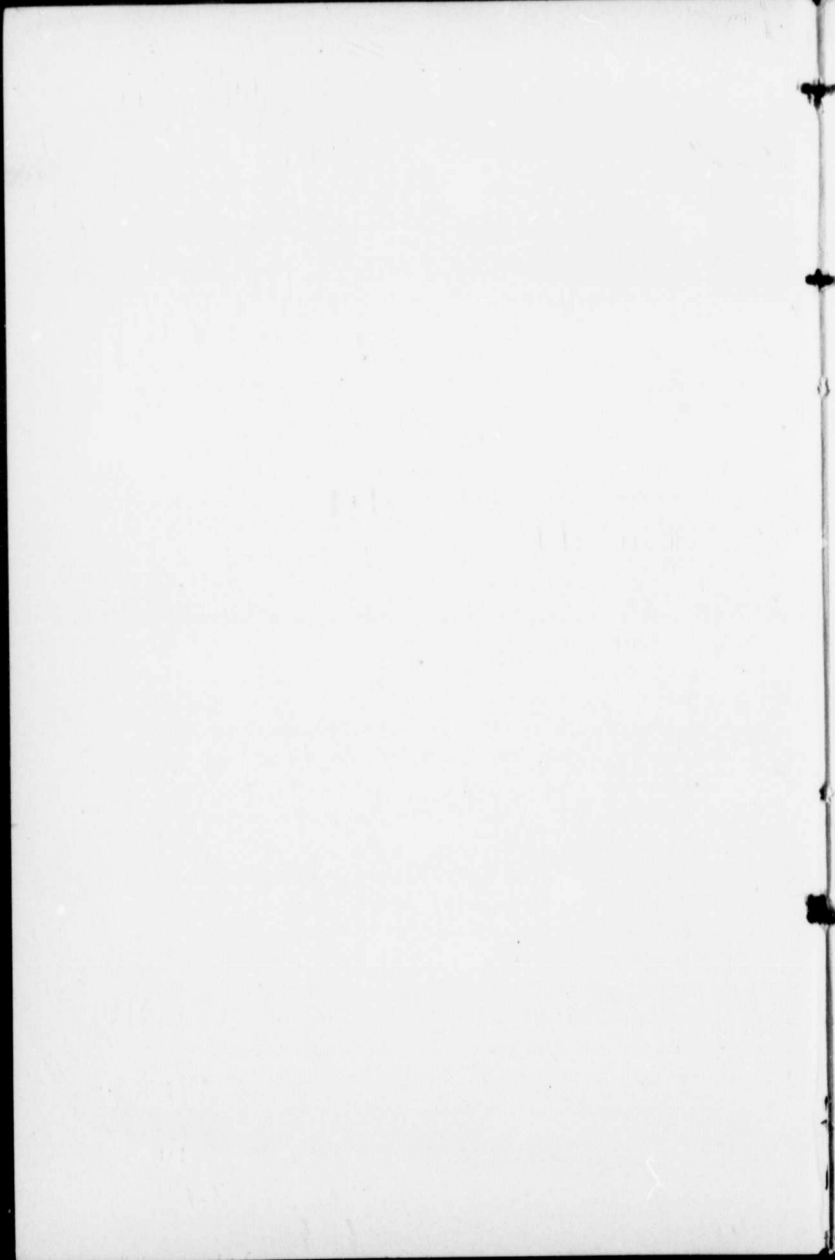
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THE CHURCH AND AMUSEMENTS.

THE subject assigned to me does not seem to be very definite. I take it for granted, however, that the object of the Committee in assigning me this subject was to elicit my personal views on the question of amusements, or the relation of the Church to amusements, or perhaps, what I think the attitude of the Church should be towards this *intensely* important, interesting and practical subject. It seems to be pretty generally known, that I take a very decisive stand on this question—many think an unreasonable stand, and that I render an unjust verdict against many of the amusements and so-called recreations of the day. Hence, with certain mental reservations, I feel myself happy to be permitted to speak for myself, touching those things whereof I am accused. Be it remembered then, that our subject is—"The Church and Amusements;" or, with a little change—"The Relation of the Church to Amusements."

Before a body of Christian ministers, no time need to be spent in defining the Christian Church. Only let us remember that when, and as often as we may speak of the Church in this paper, we mean the *Christian* Church—that religious body, or assembly, selected and called out of the world by the doctrines of the Gospel of Christ, to worship the true God in Christ, according to His Word. It may be a very small body—the faithful of some one

family—"the Church that is in thy house," or it may include the whole elect of God. Indeed, I should say, that the essential nature of the Church is the same, whether studied from the standpoint of the individual member, or from the standpoint of all its members in the grand *aggregate*.

The *first* thing, then, which we must seek to understand in our study of this subject, is the *essential* nature of the Church. If this question shall be well defined and clearly understood by us, we shall have but little trouble in settling the amusement question. It must be known to us all, that the fundamental idea of the Church of Christ is that of *separation, disjunction* and *disunion* from the world. This idea will be seen from whatever standpoint we may study the Church. We see it in the call of Abraham—the father of the faithful; we see it in the Church in the wilderness; we see it in God's revealed plan and purpose in the settlement of His people in the land of Canaan, even at the expense of the extermination of the Canaanites, in whose land they were to dwell; all impress us with the same idea. The teaching of Christ himself is unmistakable on this question—"I have chosen you out of the world." "Ye are not of the world even as I am not of the world." "If ye were of the world the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The teaching of the Apostles was just as clear and pronounced on the question of the separation of the Church from the world, as that of the teaching of the great Teacher himself. The Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 6: 14-18) exhorts and questions as follows—"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what

fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the Temple of God with idols? for ye are the Temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' The Apostle James asks—"Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." The Apostle John says—"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The same Apostle goes on to show us how, and in what respects, the children of God are manifest the children of the devil—all proving most conclusively that no sort of separation can be more marked, or complete, or perfect, than that which, in the very nature of things, exists between the Church and the world—between the one who serves the Lord and the one who serves Him not. The one is the child of light and of the day; the other is the child of the night and of darkness. The one is dead in trespasses and sin; the other is alive unto God through Jesus Christ, and having his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. How such a *pair* can *play* together, so as to reciprocate one another's spirit, is the problem I would like you to solve!

Following the idea of the separation of the Church from the world, comes the idea of the *consecration* of the Church of God, or of setting it apart for, and a dedication to, a *sacred* use. The Church of God is called unto holiness—not unto uncleanness. She is called upon to be holy as the Lord God is holy. God has sanctified unto Himself a peculiar people, who are to be zealous of good works. Being called upon to bear the vessels of the Lord, she must depart from all iniquity and be clean. She must cease to do evil, and learn to do well; to abhor that which is evil and to cleave to that which is good; to abstain from all appearance of evil, or, more properly, from every *form* of evil. If we would know what the attitude of the Church should be towards the amusements of the day, we must study the Church from the standpoint of her *consecration*. As we have already said, she is *separated* from the world, and *dedicated* to a sacred use. The Church is called upon, to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” She is declared to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. “Go work to-day in my vineyard,” is the commission coming from the Lord of the vineyard. The *imperative* which actuated our blessed Lord, should actuate the Church—“I *must* work the works of Him who hath sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.” Perhaps, barely one-third of the world’s population have as yet heard the sound of Jesus’ name—and yet, alas! alas!! the Church is off playing with the world.

There is one point more in relation to the Church which will help us to settle the amusement question, namely, her source of supply. “My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” The

heavens may well become black with astonishment over the committal of two evils, of which the Church of God is guilty to-day—in “forsaking Him, the fountain of living waters, and hewing them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Just think of a soul who should be able to say, “All my springs are in Thee,” going to a broken cistern for his supplies! This is certainly what the Church is doing, when she goes to any worldly amusement for her pleasures. It looks to me like a plain contradiction and an outrage to the nature of things.

But before saying anything further by way of application, perhaps we had better consider for a moment or two the other part of our subject, namely, *amusements*. I should judge, the Committee would have in its mind another word, as properly belonging to this subject, namely, that of *recreation*. This latter word, however, as I understand it, relates to the healthy exercise of the body, while *amusements* stand more especially related to the mind. That is, what recreation is to the body, amusements are to the mind. As a rule, however, these two words are used synonymously. There is a very strong plea made to-day, even by Christian people, in justification of the various sports of the day in favor of *recreation*. Our boys and girls must have recreation—hence the existence of a score of clubs, and dancing parties, of one kind or another, for the purpose of *re-creating* the life and vigor of our sons and daughters, and clerks and tradesmen. Now, my experience and observation leads me to conclude, that at least 95 per cent. of the so-called recreation, is *dissipation*. Yes, they must *ride* to school—to the shop—to the office—to the factory, and even to the playground, in the day time; and at night they must *ride* to the dance

hall and skating rink, and spend hours there to *re-create* themselves, and then ride home again—all in the name of recreation. *What a sham!* and the Church will have it so, and that's another *sham!*!

As to the relation of the Church to *amusements*, as I see it, there can only be one answer—"He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." Such is the declaration of the Great Head of the Church. I know of no *organized recreation* or *amusement* that can be said to be "with Christ," or that is calculated in any way to "gather with Him." But it must be evident to all, whose judgment is *spiritual*, that the very *contrary* is the result. I know of no amusement that is carried on, and conducted under Christian auspices. And tell me—Is there any organized amusement known to any of us, that *could* be conducted and carried on under the auspices of the Church of Christ? I know of none. Do they not all come under one or the other of the Apostle John's three counts—"For all that is in the world, the lust of the *flesh*, and the lust of the *eyes*, and the pride of *life*, is not of the Father, but is of the world?" (John 2: 16.) Are they not all included in Paul's summary of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5: 19-21): "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, *revellings*, and such like: of the which I told you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" And yet the Church of God is asking, even to-day, what harm is there in dancing? And even ministers of

the Gospel are declaring that there is no harm in dancing, whereas, if they would study Paul's *Komoi—revellings*, in the above text—they would see that the Apostle shuts out of the kingdom of God *revellers*, dancers to music, with wine and, perhaps, a sumptuous supper thrown in. Hence you see the Apostle Paul condemns the very thing, that almost to the very letter corresponds to a modern ball or dancing party, and reckons it with the works of the flesh ! The Church and the theatre is an incongruity ; the dancing party and the prayer-meeting is a contradiction ; and to associate the carnival with the Lord's Supper is blasphemy !

You will see by this time, I think, the ground I take on this question. To me the essential nature of the Church—the work of the Church—the unspeakable joy of the Church, with the endearing relationship that exists between her and the Great Head of the Church, for she is the bride, the Lamb's wife, with all her springs in God the fountain of living waters, “and he that hath the Son hath *life*, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” I say, this to me forever settles the question of the legitimate relationship of the Church to the amusements of the day. The Church and the world *cannot* walk together. The one *must* yield to the other before they can *walk* in company. I need not tell you how it usually operates !

I said just now, that I know of no organized amusement under Christian auspices. I do not think that such a thing could be, in the nature of things. All the organized amusement clubs I know of are essentially *worldly*. Your *sugar-coated charity* ball, or *calico* ball, and *charity* concert, will not and cannot hide *worldliness* and *lustfulness*. I am not sure that your Y.M.C.A. can hide the worldliness of the

various clubs operating under its auspices. I know this, that I would not want a boy of mine to be connected with any club, that would take him away from home and home duties to compete with some other club in some other town, at all hours of the day and night, with headquarters at the tavern! *No* adjectives can make such amusements Christian.

Is it not plain to us all, that both the Church and the world are going almost wild over amusements? Is it not as clear to our observation as it is to that of Judge Ferguson, expressed at the Ponton trial some time ago—when he declared that “the majority of young men of the present spend their time in frivolity and pleasure seeking, whereas, when he was young, a great number devoted their leisure to reading and study, thereby laying the foundation for future prominence and usefulness.” The wonderful advantage of *meditation* have become a lost art. Oh, that our young people, and older people, too, would seek and plan to be *alone* for an hour or two of their waking hours. Serious thinking is destroyed by the superabundance of *club* life. Surely the church and its ministry must become pronounced against this growing evil. I notice now and again, that some minister is called upon to preach on the question of amusements, and he usually stops where I begin. They all tell us that there is harm in our amusements, *if*—yes, if our amusements interfere with our duties, to home life—school life—business life—and Church life—there is harm in them. If we are not careful in safeguarding our company, homes, health, and character, and place of our amusements, there will be untold harm accruing to us, even from that which may be harmless in itself. There is no *if* in worldly amusements for the Christian. “Be not conformed

to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove that what is good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," is the specific command of the Word of God. I have lived long enough to know, too, that the home dance, and the home cards, etc., stand in the same relation to the dissipations which follow in their wake, as that of moderate drinking to drunkenness. Hence my advice to our young people is—Never be found on the devil's territory and never play with his tools. "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" I have learned further, that the world itself condemns just as strongly as I do, the idea of Christians coming to the world's entertainments for their enjoyment and pleasure. I know it is argued, that by being too strict, we debar a number of well disposed people from Church membership. But surely we have lived long enough to know, that there is a more serious side to this question, viz., That a better class of people utterly refuse to become members of a *worldly* church—serious people will not join a *dancing* and *card* playing church. I have told my people over and over again, that I would not give five cents for a whole church full of such members for carrying on the work of the Lord.

Now, then, in closing, "to the law and to the testimony." In condemning these worldly amusements as strongly as I do, I am asked by what law am I governed, in pronouncing the verdict of guilty against every Christian who goes to the world for his pleasures. I am free to say that I do not go to the *decalogue*, though I think the very first commandment—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"—condemns every lover of pleasure who gives God second place. I do not go to the *Sermon* on the mount, though I think

the command—"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven"—condemns every professing Christian who goes to worldly amusements for his enjoyment. The law by which I condemn all Christians who mix up and mingle and *play* with the ungodly, is "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that hath made us free from the law of sin and death." No Christian can drink of the spirit of the world and seek its pleasures and attend its amusements without *outraging* the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Though concerning the letter of the law, they may be blameless, as a pastor I see the above effect produced in the spiritual life of my flock, by the amusements of the world. Hence, my utter condemnation of anything and everything, which interferes with the *life, development* and *fruitfulness* of those over whom the "Holy Ghost hath made me an overseer." I see that these *organized* amusements are "the grievous wolves that do not spare the flock." I see in the amusements of to-day the destructive *sword* coming upon the land, hence, as a watchman, I must blow the trumpet and warn the people, and sound an alarm even in God's holy mountain. The fact that some other watchman does not see the sword coming, is no argument against the one who does.

