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AMUSEMENTS

AND

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In the Primitive Church and in our Day.

BY THE

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

IN preparing the following discussion, my aim has been to illustrate great principles by the light of early history for practical effect. All the material used is old; much of it is common to historians and antiquarians, and yet so scattered through and hidden in large works not in general circulation as to be practically inaccessible and unknown. The writer has no knowledge of any essay similar to this.

It will suffice to make here a general acknowledgment of the chief authorities freely used, without filling every page with references or quotation-marks for common statements or isolated sentences: Cave's *Primitive Christianity* (London, 1682); Lardner's *Works* (4to, London, 1815, 5 vols.); Bingham's *Christian Antiquities* (8 vols., 1834); Coleman's *Ancient Christianity Exemplified*. Histories: Milman's *Latin Christianity*; Schaff's *Christian Church*; Killen's *Ancient Church*; Gibbon's

Rome; Eusebius; Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece*; Dean Stanley's *Christian Institutions*; Leland's *Christian Revelation* (2 vols., 1818); Earl of Orrery's *Pliny* (London, 1752); Ullhorn's *Conflict of Christianity*, etc.; Renan's *Apostles*; Daillé *On the Fathers*; Schaff-Herzog, *Encyclopædia*; Piper's *Leaders of our Christian Church*; Merivale's *Conversion of the Roman Empire*; *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.

PART I.

**Popular Amusements and Primitive
Christians.**

Popular Amusements and Primitive Christians.

THE QUESTION.

WHAT relation did Christians of the first three centuries sustain to the popular amusements of their day?

Authentic records of the thoughts, feelings and acts of these disciples of the new faith must reflect much light on many portions of God's word, and produce increased firmness of faith and peculiar satisfaction when any interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is confirmed by the concurrent conduct and testimony of professors of the Christian faith nearest to the apostles. True, Hegesippus is quoted by Eusebius as saying in the second century that the Church continued a pure and uncorrupt virgin until Trajan's time; but when the sacred choir of apostles and the generation of those privileged to hear their inspired wisdom became extinct, com-

binations of error arose. Yet Origen's testimony is correct that during these three centuries the Christian religion was defended by innocence of life and honesty of conversation. The Church's testimony was sealed with blood and is profitable for instruction.

Christ's Church, from its nature, is separate from a corrupt world and in conflict with it. Her constitution is written and unchangeable, the same in every age. It is the inspired, revealed word of God. Chillingworth tersely said, "The Bible is the religion of Protestants." Ecclesiastical courts are only ministerial and declarative of these heavenly oracles. Anything contrary to this central and controlling truth binds neither body nor conscience, but whatever accords with its teachings challenges cheerful and complete obedience from every man, and especially from every member of the visible kingdom of Jesus Christ.

In gathering and applying, then, the principles of God's word which must govern his children in deciding what are legitimate amusements for them, it will be profitable to scan the pages of early history, scanty though they be, and collect its testimony on this special point—viz., *What was the*

relation of our Lord's followers, in the first three centuries, to the amusements of a godless world?

Too often is seen to-day a disposition to break down the dividing-line between the Church and the world, so that the Christian may be both in the world and of it. A look at the conduct of the primitive brethren may help to allay this fever for conformity to popular fashions which soon pass away, but tarry long enough to leave behind damaging, if not fatal, injury. It will be seen, too, that the modern Church, in formulating its decisions about worldly amusements, is in agreement with the noble army of martyrs of the first three ages.

HEATHEN SOCIAL CUSTOMS.

What was the general condition of society confronting the Christian during this period?

Our view begins with the Augustan age of Roman glory, literary excellence and increasing corruption. Beauty, culture, art and all Grecian and Roman refinements of fashion and luxury shone with imperial splendor and seductive power. Every temptation of taste, popular custom, former habits and familiar delights smiled on the new-born followers of the crucified One, and tempted them still

to conform to hereditary and congenial fashions. Their refusal, regarded as absurd, excited the astonishment of the multitude, the caustic satire of Lucian and Celsus and of skeptical and dissolute nobles, and the polite but adverse criticism of Pliny. Through the union of Roman religion and politics the fires of state persecution were kindled against a prohibited religion (*non licet esse vos*) and a Church which was an illegal society (*collegium illicitum*).

Strong reasons must have compelled these Christians to their stanch adherence to such unpopular conduct. But God's child found around him no true appreciation of the evil and hatefulness of sin or of the supernatural beauty of holiness. The Grecian religion of beauty, unfettered by moral principles, and the Roman utilitarian faith, just like the creed of the world now, embraced whatever satisfied or pleased the carnal nature, without heeding conscience or any fixed standard of truth. In fact, Oriental sensuality and Greek infidelity sapped the foundation of all religion and all integrity among men in every department of society. The blank skepticism of Cæsar and of Cato may be accepted as a specimen of the destructive opinions of the

greatest and most learned, and prophecies of the early and final overthrow of the feeble safeguard of virtue afforded by the heathen reverence for their ancient deities. Seneca said, "The aim of all philosophy is to despise life. Seest thou yon low withered tree? There freedom hangs. Seest thou thy neck, thy throat, thy heart? They are ways of escape from bondage." "Deos nemo sanus timet"—"No sane man fears the gods." And what a desolate "IF" is that of Tacitus where he says, in the *Life of Agricola*, "IF there is a place for the spirits of the pious, IF, as the wise suppose, great souls do not become extinct with their bodies." In vain the aching heart bends the ear and waits for some comforting answer. None comes better than that dim word of Plato: "We will wait for one, be it a god or god-inspired man, to teach us our religious duties, and, as Athene in Homer says to Diomed, to take away the darkness from our eyes."—"We must lay hold of the best human opinion in order that, borne by it as on a raft, we may sail over the dangerous sea of life, unless we can find a stronger boat, or some word of God which will more surely and safely carry us." No restraint here on passion, and no light on

a dark future. So without wonder, though startled, we listen to Brutus as he stands despairing under the starless skies on that bloodstricken field of Philippi, amid the wreck of an empire, and mourns, "O Virtue! I did think thou wert something, but now I see thou art a phantom." In such rayless night dies the last and noblest Roman of them all. Barren heathenism blotted out aim and hope. Happiness was as uncertain as life. Recklessly all grasped the frail poppy pleasure, and with its shattered stalk in their hands were laid in their tombs with some such inscription on their gravestones as is read on that of a veteran of the Fifth Legion: "So long as I lived, I gladly drank: drink, ye who live!" None could, like the primitive Christian, call death "the birthday of eternity."

Naturally, then, did excessive extravagance, pomp and luxury imperiously rule. In the *Wasps* of Aristophanes and the *Symposia* of Xenophon and Plato we have a sufficient picture of degenerate Attic social life and entertainment. Dancing-girls or hired musicians were introduced into their feasts for diversion because the stupid guests had no power of conversation, says Plato, and no cleverness

otherwise to make the fleeting hour charming. And while, according to prevailing custom, children and married women were excluded from their appropriate sphere in these joys, handsome youths were introduced for the gratification of romantic and sentimental friendships, but with the most unnatural and loathsome results: "God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts" (Rom. i. 24-27). Corrupt though conquered Greece conquered Rome. Difficult is it to conceive the swinish revelry and unblushing immorality that spread from palace to hovel. "Bread and games" (*Panis et circenses*) was the reckless and ringing cry of the populace, and public men were willing to buy place and power by gratifying inflamed and morbid passions. Seneca witnesses that "the desire to sin increases, and shame decreases, every day." Thirty-one theatres and eleven amphitheatres existed in Rome even after the Goths and Vandals had sacked the city. The Circus Maximus had been enlarged to accommodate three hundred and eighty-five thousand spectators of its games; the Coliseum, built by Vespasian, could seat twenty-two thousand, and the wooden theatre of Scarurus hold eighty thou-

sand. Here were gathered, at vast expense, armies of wild beasts, slaves, criminals and professional gladiators to be slain in bloody combats, while even high-born women, as well as the low, reveled in the deadly sport and with upturned thumbs mercilessly demanded the death of fallen gladiators pleading for life. Kings entered the lists, and fashionable women, forgetful of noble womanhood, raged over the ensanguined arena. On the charred walls of Pompeii may still be read the exciting handbills announcing rare sport. Such sport! Euripides, Sophocles and *Æschylus*—poets of the old school—no longer won admiring homage for their noble dramas, but coarse buffoonery and “Punchinello comedy,” ballet-dancers in scantiest attire, and sometimes naked, plays that mocked at virtue and scoffed at gods and were full of unambiguous obscenity, commanded popular favor.

Similar frivolity and excess characterized the banquets and the customary style of dressing and the adornment of private residences. Nero’s famous Golden House was a miniature city. Its halls were overlaid with gold, precious stones and mother-of-pearl; water, brought through conduits from a distance, flowed through golden faucets into

basins of variegated marble; and every appointment seemed created by enchantment and from exhaustless treasuries. Abundant imitations followed, until costly mansions, Babylonian tapestries, Corinthian bronzes, renowned works of art, effeminate entertainments, following one another in degenerate voluptuousness and with disgraceful song and dance, eclipsed the marvels of fancy and hastened the utter destruction of all morality under the treacherous sea of dissipated pleasures and popular amusements. Caligula spent four hundred thousand dollars on a single supper, and the play-actor Eso-
pus a similar amount on a single dish, while some Roman senators squandered five million dollars a year. The wife of Caligula wore a necklace worth two million dollars, and two or three estates were often suspended from the ears of fashionable women.

Tertullian satirizes this prodigality and wonders that a weak and tender neck can carry whole woods and lordships—that vast sums paying monthly interest at the banker's can be weighed at the beam of a slender ear, and a woman carry the weight of so many sesterces at usury. Clemens Alexandrinus says that neither the spoils of the Tyrian

sea, nor freights from India or Ethiopia, nor Pactolus with his golden streams, would suffice for nice affectation and over-curious study of fineness and bravery. Wealth flowed into Rome from conquered peoples. Labor was considered degrading. These public games, theatres, gladiatorial shows, Apician banquets sumptuous beyond imagination, dances, entertainments for exhibition of finery and artistic displays all grew out of a heterogeneous mass of all nations and superstitions, and the degradation of a reckless, immoral and tyrannical government and the nature of the gods long regarded as models.

Here was the outcome of the highest refinement and civilization and culture ever known, or attainable without divine revelation.

HERESIES.

Moreover, every heresy found congenial home in Rome. Not only was all the power and corruption of heathenism encountered, but the strange amalgam of Judaism with the Platonic philosophy from Alexandria. Valentinus of Alexandria and Marcion of Sinope, Montanus of Phrygia and Sabellius, and many others, Gnostics and Mysta-

gogues, were developing the inexhaustible fertility of the Eastern imagination about spiritual subjects. Truth alone could preserve the Church against the enthusiasm of Oriental dreams and repel Cataphrygianism with its wild asceticism. So a fearful contest is entered upon for purity and piety. The Christian was required by the Magna Charta of his Church to be separate from the world and not to touch the unclean thing. He must be holy as God is holy, and in the degeneracy of the age take a decided and uncompromising stand against the prevailing tastes and amusements of society not in harmony with the spirit of the divine code. Even Tacitus, as he calmly surveyed the state of social life, was appalled and could scarcely discover a star of hope, and foreboded immanent wrath from offended gods and the certain dissolution of the corrupted state.

THE CHRISTIANS' STAND.

In these circumstances, what did the early Christians do touching popular worldly amusements? THEY FORSOOK ALL FOR CHRIST. Without shrinking, they discountenanced and rejected all scenic shows, public games, theatres, tragedies, comedies, chariot-races and foot-races and dances, as

violating right moral feelings and the proprieties of Christian life, and as having a hurtfully close association with idolatries and the principles of the world without God. When naiads laughed from every fountain and flitting dryads lurked in every grove, when all natural and spiritual forces were broadened into pagan divinities, it became difficult to participate in the simplest popular amusements without offence to purity and loyalty to Jesus. These fascinating entertainments often shocked humanity, fostered cruelty to men and beasts, trampled by obscenity or appearance of evil on true virtue, and filled precious hours with inane frivolities or kindled in the soul forbidden lusts. Origen, born A. D. 185, tells Celsus, the great enemy of Christians, that there were Christian communities composed of men *reclaimed from ten thousand vices* and shining as lights in the world. It sometimes happened that such converts, overmastered by old habits, revisited some enticing spectacle and fell back to the old filth or suffered from terrible dejection of spirit. Their only safety was in entire renunciation.

Trypho the Jew, in the dialogue reported by Justin Martyr in the second century, reproaches

Christians that, having from a vain report chosen Christ to be their Master, they did for his sake foolishly undervalue and throw away all the enjoyments and all the advantages of this world.

Minutius Felix, a converted Roman lawyer, who died A. D. 208, in a dialogue which he wrote, represents Cæcelius, a heathen, as thus drawing a Christian's life: "You are mopish, abstaining even from lawful pleasures; you visit not the shows, nor are present at the pageants, nor frequent the public feasts; you abhor the sacred games, the sacrificial meats and drinks, crown not your head with garlands nor perfume your bodies with sweet odors; you refuse even crowns of flowers to the sepulchres." Octavius, a Christian, replying, frankly admits all this, and justifies their abstinence because they could not be present without affronting their modesty and offering a distaste and horror to their minds. And, indeed, they reckoned themselves particularly obliged to this by what they had vowed and undertaken at their baptism, when they solemnly renounced the devil and all his works, pomps and pleasures—*i. e.* (says Cyril), "the sights and sports of the theatre, and such like vanities." Accordingly, Tertullian speaks of

a Christian woman who, going to the theatre, was smitten with a demoniacal possession ; and when the evil spirit was asked, at his casting out, how he durst thus set upon a Christian, he presently answered, "*I did but what was fit and just, for I found her upon my own ground.*"

EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS.

One of the most precious and ancient documents we possess is the Epistle to Diognetus, written early in the second century by an unknown author. Christian manners then are thus beautifully described in part: "The Christians are not distinguished from other men by country, by language or by civil institutions, for they neither dwell in cities by themselves, nor use a peculiar tongue, nor lead a singular mode of life. They dwell in the Grecian or barbarian cities, as the case may be ; they follow the usage of the country in dress, food and the other affairs of life. Yet they present a wonderful and confessedly paradoxical conduct. They dwell in their own native lands, but as strangers. They take part in all things as citizens, and they suffer all things as foreigners. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every native

land is a foreign. . . . They obey the existing laws, and excel the laws in their lives. . . . They love all, and are persecuted by all. . . . In short, what the soul is in the body the Christians are in the world. . . . The soul dwells in the body, but it is not of the body so the Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. . . . The flesh hates and wars against the soul, suffering no wrong from it, but because it resists fleshly pleasures; and the world hates the Christians with no reason but that they resist its pleasures."

In the same century Tertullian uses similar language: "We are no Brahmins nor Indian Fakirs, no hermits nor exiles for life. We are mindful of the thanks we owe to God, our Creator and Lord. We reject not the enjoyment of his gifts; we only temper it, that we may avoid excess and abuse. We dwell, therefore, with you in this world, not without markets and fairs, not without baths, inns, shops and every kind of intercourse. We carry on commerce and war, agriculture and trade, with you. We take part in your pursuits and give our labor for your use." But he proceeds to declare that he did not, and could not, frequent their religious ceremonies or feasts in honor of their gods, nor observe

their saturnalia, nor support their fortune-tellers, magicians and astrologers, nor those who vilely pandered to every lust. " 'Tis not enough," he says, " that a Christian *be* chaste and modest, but he must *appear* so—a virtue of which he should have so great a store and treasure that it should show from his mind upon his habit, and break from the retirements of his conscience into the *superficies of his life*."

LOOSE CHRISTIANS.

Then, as now, there were some professed Christians who desired and pleaded for these fascinating amusements. Arguments similar to those advanced by their modern brethren were urged, such as the silence of the Scriptures, the dancing of David (though that was a religious ceremony, performed alone, before the ark of God), Paul's *comparison* of the Christian life with the Grecian games as endorsing them. All these arguments Tertullian met at large in a special treatise. Our Lord's words truly apply here: "It is better to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire."

Clemens Alexandrinus and Cyprian also sturdily couched the lance of scriptural propriety and mod-

eration against all forms of popular public and private entertainments requiring the fashionable, artificial and excessive adornments of body and dress—that wanton tricking out of person and table which opened the door for unholy luxury and damning evil and led to the awakening of ungovernable passions. “But,” replied the wealthy, “it is right for us to use the great estates God has given us, and to live worthy of ourselves.”—“And,” said the ambitious women, “we can honor our bodies without violating our chastity, and we desire to please our husbands.” Nevertheless, the Church insisted that there was a more excellent way; that true beauty consisted, not in the outward braiding or dyeing of the hair or gold or costly array, but in the ornaments of goodness and purity of soul and charitable works for God. All these fashionable displays were counterfeits, producing only adulterate beauty looking forth with the glittering eyes of the serpent; while pure Christian carriage, modesty of garb and mastery of vagrant appetites, the blush of modesty and inward brightness of soul, would adorn with that matchless lustre that would win the favor of God and man. Tertullian beautifully counsels the women

of his time, in front of heathen follies and with their Bible light, "to clothe themselves with the silks of Honesty, the fine vestures of Piety, the purple of Modesty; and, being thus beautified and adorned," says he, "God himself will be your Lover."

As, then, the body and all the carnal appetites must be brought into subjection to the gospel of Christ, all appearance of immodesty or excess or uncomely lightness was lovingly but positively checked. The Church forbade public parades of costliness of dress and jewels, feasts of luxurious delicacies, dainty vanities and debauching wines, and celebrating the solemnities of marriage with light and ludicrous actions, as leaping and dancing. After the close of the third century the Council of Laodicea formally prohibited all these promiscuous dancings of men and women together at marriage-feasts. Against this practice lie the canons of other ancient councils and severe invectives of the Fathers. Chrysostom declared that they were causes of great corruption, incentives to impurity, and that they wholly unhinged the Christian temper, for which reason the ancients were so copious and severe in their invectives against them.*

* Bingham's *Christian Antiq.*, bk. xvi., ch. xi., sec. 15.

CHRISTIAN MODESTY.

For the defence of female modesty the sentiment of the past was embodied by Constantine, the emperor, in a law that matrons should not be forced, upon the account of debt, to come out of their own houses and appear before public tribunals, but that the business should be decided in such way as might not betray the modesty of their sex. The great difficulty—almost impossibility—of preserving proper decorum, true biblical modesty, when once launched on the tide of fashion, was an invincible argument for shunning its power.

How manifest this is when the common bathing-habits of that day are considered! Immense and numerous baths were built and regarded not merely as necessities, but as places of delightful entertainment. In Rome there were nine thousand public baths, of which that of Diocletian would accommodate three thousand two hundred bathers. While bathing, Archimedes discovered the law of specific gravity, and rushed from the bath exclaiming, "Eureka! I have found it!" Irenæus gives as a saying of Polycarp's that the apostle John, having gone into a bath in Ephesus and found the

heretic Cerinthus within, ran out without bathing because he feared lest the bath should fall in while that enemy of truth was there. Tertullian, the religious ascetic, and the noble Augustine also used these baths. In Constantine's time baths were built near the churches, for ecclesiastical uses. Lycurgus, in his celebrated code of laws, established common baths for the sexes, and the grave philosopher Plutarch, in his *Life of Lycurgus*, justifies the legislation, while Plato, in his *Model of a Perfect Commonwealth*, introduces this and other immoral features of the Spartan lawgiver. Many of the better heathen objected to this custom, but it held its ground in popular estimation. Who could doubt that the result would be otherwise than most pernicious?

The Christian Father Cyprian (martyred A. D. 258) censures the practice, and the ecclesiastical council of Laodicea, as well as the old Apostolical Constitutions, absolutely prohibited the scandalous immodesty, as we should expect. Christians were required to have a good report with men and with God, to seek what was becoming and honorable, and "to give no offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God"

(1 Cor. x. 32). Their light must so shine before men that God might be glorified.

FORBIDDEN OCCUPATIONS.

In accord with these views, while the primitive believers were not austere ascetics, but continued in the common walks of life, many occupations were unlawful for them, though pecuniarily profitable. The Apostolic Constitutions, compiled early in the third century, various Church councils, the early Fathers and the Fathers of the Nicene Council forbade baptism and church membership to any engaged in or associated with reprehensible amusements, as gladiators, fencing-masters teaching how to kill, actors, persons frequenting theatres and games as spectators, those making or painting idols to be worshiped or selling incense to be used in honoring them, the chief city magistrates, or prætors, whose duty it was to exhibit the *spectacula* to the people, astrologers and practicers of curious and divining arts—in fact, any persons whose employment ministered to unseemly levity and luxury or the profane heathen cultus. All such popular entertainments and pursuits, the Circensian and Olympic games, the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries,

were in honor of the false and debasing idolatry or bound up with it, or involved bloodshed, cruelty, excess, meretricious adornments and tastes, and were inconsistent with the purity required by an exemplary Christian walk. Such employments must be renounced before those engaged therein could be received by the Church. As Cyprian (third century), when asked whether a stage-player who continued to teach children that pernicious art might communicate, replied, "It is neither agreeable to the majesty of God nor the discipline of the gospel that the modesty and honor of the Church should be defiled with so base and infamous a contagion."

Tertullian, living in the second century, the earliest of the Latin Fathers, wrote at length on these subjects. His position was that such employments, and frequenting these exhibitions or participating in these general amusements, were violations of covenant vows and incompatible with the Christian calling, and that no sophistry could justify their continuance. Participation was itself sinful; the example was hurtful to others, heathen and Christians, and encouragement was given to what was evil.

OBJECTIONS.

But it was sometimes urged that the profession forbidden was the only means of subsistence, and that the apostle Paul directs every man to abide in the same calling wherein he was called (1 Cor. vii. 20). Tertullian answered that this course of reasoning would permit the thief, the robber, the assassin, to continue in their crimes, and would require the Church to be open to them all alike.

Again, artisans pleaded that they did not worship these images: they only handled them in trade. In holy indignation is hurled the reply: "Assuredly, you, who prepare them to be worshiped, do yourselves worship them—not by the ministry of another, but by your own: you sacrifice to them, not the life of a victim, but your own life, your ingenuity and talent; you offer the sweat of your brow as their drink-offering, and kindle for them the light of your skill; you are more than priests unto them by your own ministrations. Deny as you may your participation in the worship, they will not disown the worship while you offer in it the greatest, the richest, of all sacrifices—your own soul's salvation."

Cyprian of Carthage, the eloquent heathen rhetorician, converted when about forty-five years old, had experience to teach him what was right and safe conduct for the Christian. When one who had trained himself and his children for the stage wished to continue his occupation, for lack of any other means of maintenance, Cyprian entirely rejected his petition and referred him to the Church for a reasonable supply of his wants. If that was not sufficient, he pledged his own church to the fulfillment of the duty. Before the Church rose the scriptural example of the Ephesian converts who brought out their cherished books of curious magical arts, to the value of eight thousand dollars, and made a bonfire of them before all men (Acts xix. 19). As Justin Martyr said to the emperor, "'Tis not mere professors, but those who live according to their profession, that shall be saved." So the power of the new gospel was invoked to rule the heart and defend against the enticing baits of all worldly amusements. As Augustine with noble heart says, "*Non vincit nisi veritas; victoria veritatis est caritas*" ("Nothing conquers but truth; the victory of truth is love").

A BEAUTIFUL EPISODE.

This self-denying and noble stand on the principles of God's word and this refusal to touch the unclean thing are beautifully illustrated by a thrilling episode that occurred in the history of gladiatorial sports while Honorius was emperor. From ancient descriptions of these bloody tragedies, the narration of the scholarly ecclesiastical historian Theodoret (born in the fourth century), and other sources, we gather this scene.

Telemachus was an obscure monk dwelling in the Libyan desert. Descriptions of the desperate and sanguinary contests in the Coliseum at Rome deepened in horror as sailors and Eastern voyagers rehearsed them in Alexandria, and as thence they reached the corded monk's solitary cell. On the trembling desert air or the black robe of night he seemed to gaze upon the stern, unfortunate gladiators as, arrayed for death, they marched across the arena and stood before the emperor. Pausing, their swords flash aloft, and he hears their exclamation, "Imperator, morituri te salutant" ("Emperor, they about to die salute thee"). Vestal virgins in sacred robes bend forward to

bless the combatants. Approving smiles and murmurs are showered from tier rising above tier filled with Rome's proudest nobility and ladies in gorgeous array of gold and gems. From higher seats thousands upon thousands of soldiers, country-people and all classes of society echo the royal and aristocratic welcome. Gay pennons flutter in the breeze. "Many-colored tapestries cover balustrades and parapets; festoons of roses link pillar to pillar, and in the spaces between stand glittering statues of the gods, before whom rise from tripods fragrant odors." Everything combines to enchant the senses and to drown serious thought. Joy crowns the rosy hour, and laughter, love-affairs and wagers give busy occupation to expectant thousands.

Hear the harsh trumpet! It summons to the combat with deadly weapons. Blood is drawn. That frenzied shout of twenty thousand spectators is like the merciless roar of stormy ocean on a rock-bound shore, and it rouses Telemachus from troubled sleep on those far-off African sands as the yet palpitating carcase of the fallen gladiator is dragged from the gory arena and the victor receives his palms and purse.

The monk's soul is fired with resolution to extirpate the savage customs which had long defied the assaults of humanity and religion. He crosses the sea. Elbowing his way with the jostling, profane crowd, he wins a place in the Coliseum near the front barrier. He has no eyes for royalty, for pomp or for beauty. Hark! the signal that he had heard in the desert crashes through the hushed air. Combatants eager for victory and life rush with thirsting weapons on shield and net, and fast and loud ring death-bearing blows. Lo! yonder a phantom form suddenly leaps over the restraining bound, throws itself between the combatants and arrests their deadly game.

"In the name of Christ Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, I command these wicked games to cease! Depart from the arena!" Amazement sits on every face. A hush before a storm holds audience and gladiators spellbound. In a moment imperial contempt and popular fury burst forth, and on the bloodstained sands lies the pale stranger, the corded monk from Libyan wastes, with cloven skull and with crimson streaks across his brow.

Thy life is not lost, O Telemachus! Soon the madness of that crowd subsides. Wonder seizes

fighting, in suicidal Monacos ; on theatre-boards in the Black Crooks, Lady Isabells, Camilles and Frou-Frous wellnigh as naked and infamous as any ballet-dancings of pagan Rome ; in the gilded and dissipated balls—dishonest extravagances of the “upper ten” faithfully copied by an imitative populace ; and in the so-called “respectable” drinking-saloons, measured by the miles, and numbered by the thousand, in city, country, and hamlet, insidiously appealing for Christian patronage, as in the first three ages ? Need we not pause before we try to lift ourselves beyond the power of the historic analogy ? Pause even to defend this cycle from the charge of being, in view of its light, more culpable for its filth than the heathen themselves ?

Natural religion still opens the door to large indulgence. Skepticism, agnosticism and materialism decoy unwary souls into moral sloughs. Lord Bolingbroke teaches that “the shame of modesty is artificial and has been inspired by human law, by prejudice and like causes.” Political expediency decides moralities, so the nineteenth century allies itself with the first in many of the principles underlying its favored amusements and occupations.

The contest is the same on a new field. God and Mammon, the Church and the World—these contend. Truth, the same holy book, the symbolic cross—these ancient powers still are our only hope. In this nineteenth century—in every century—the Christian must be buttressed by the same holy defences that in the first three centuries secured his brother and his sister.

PRINCIPLES NEVER DIE.

Consider, then, the claim which these early principles now have on Christians because of their renovating power. No philosophy appeared to lift heathenism into life or to cleanse the Augean Stable of society. How fruitless proved the experimental wanderings of Justin Martyr searching for peace of soul! The Stoic taught him that the sure knowledge of God was a minor philosophical speculation. Then, appealing to a Peripatetic for light, he was repelled by the peremptory demand for a fee. A Pythagorean dismissed him because he lacked acquaintance with music, geometry and astronomy—essential prerequisites for purifying the soul! No better did he fare with the Platonist under his dreamy doctrine of ideas to bring him

nigh to Deity. Wandering forlorn along the resounding seashore, he met an aged Christian who led him to the Lamb of God, who gave him the peace so long vainly sought. In his first *Apology* he says, "We who formerly delighted in fornication now strive for purity. We who used magical arts have dedicated ourselves to the good and eternal God. We pray for our enemies."

Athenagoras said, "You can find uneducated persons—artisans and old women—who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of Christian doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their choice."

Tertullian addresses the heathen, and appeals to the records of their courts as showing that "it is always with your folk the prison is steaming, the mines are sighing, the wild beasts are fed; it is from you the exhibitors of gladiatorial shows always get their herds of criminals to feed up for the occasion. You find no Christian there, except for being such." Minutius Felix uses similar language. Galen, the great physician, witnesses that Christians despise death and keep themselves from carnal pleasures. Arnobius and Eusebius note as grand evidences of the divinity of the faith that it

subdued men of the greatest parts and learning and made them leave loved opinions and suffer everything for Jesus. Origen reminds Celsus how much higher was their courage of their opinions than that of Aristotle, who was ready to leave Athens lest he should suffer as did Socrates.

Porphyry, the great philosopher and acute enemy of Christianity, sought from Apollo's oracle how he could win back his wife from Christianity. How remarkable the answer!—that he “might as well, and to better purpose, attempt to write upon the surface of water, or to fly like a bird in the air, than to seduce his wife from those wicked sentiments she had taken in.” When the heathen saw the persuasive power of Christian women for righteousness, and their elevated character, and especially when the golden-mouthed orator, Chrysostom, was won to the faith through the piety of his Christian mother, Arethusa, the noble encomium was wrested from them, “What women these Christians have!”

It was noted, too, that under Diocletian an actor in Rome, Genecius, appeared in a play ridiculing Christians. Readily and with applause he performed his part until he was to ask for baptism.

"Seized by an irresistible power, he suddenly stood still and silent, and then explained to the astonished audience that *he himself desired to become a Christian*. Upon this he left the stage, received baptism, and soon sealed his faith with a martyr's death."

Steadily the truth gained ground. In Bithynia the temples of the gods were wellnigh deserted, the Goths in Mœsia and Thrace and distant India saw the light, while "the places of Britain inaccessible to the Romans were subject to Christ." In A. D. 260, Gallienus issued his edict of toleration, and at the beginning of the fourth century Christianity sat, in the person of Constantine, on the throne of universal empire. Wonderful change!

Such power still has consistent advocacy of the truth. The islands of the sea own it as cannibals turn from wicked lusts and sit, clothed and in their right mind, at the feet of Jesus. All feel it in their hearts as they deny themselves and keep their garments pure from the world. Principles born of God's truth are immortal.

DANGER.

Corruption crept into the Church at an early day. Its inroads were long and successfully resisted, but after the third century many evils grew, and the Church's early purity was sadly marred. Danger lies coiled in the kiss of the world; love of its ways fills life with subtle poison. That kiss is fatal as the embrace of the iron virgin of the Inquisition. Her victim is received with welcoming arms, but to an inhospitable bosom, which, opening, pierces him with her keen, glittering knives, and, folding him closer and closer, with merciless clasp holds him in agonizing death.

The world's welcome must still be feared. Its smiling enchantments, its appealing amusements, will be sharp knives to the soul of Christian simplicity, purity, growth in grace and likeness to Christ. Resistance, separation, nonconformity, must still be the supreme law. Christian doctrine, as illustrated by the primitive disciples, will preserve the soul. Whereas Democritus, as Tertullian observes, was forced to put out his eyes because not able to defend himself from the charms of beauty, Christians could look with chaste, unsubdued eyes,

being at the same time *inwardly blind* as to any temptation from lust.

With such mighty force did the gospel captivate men's hearts unto the obedience of the truth. Renan well says (*Apostles*, p. 262) "that one of the most profound sentiments of the primitive Christians, and one, too, which produced the most extended results, was detestation of the theatre, the stadium, the gymnasium—that is to say, of all the public resorts which gave its distinctive character to a Grecian or a Roman city."

HAPPY CHRISTIANS.

Were not these Christians veiled in sombre melancholy? Did they, as Renan thinks, push their virtues to excess? Rejecting public shows, festivities, baths and luxurious convivialities, discarding the adornments of the Alexandrian fops and flaunting Aspasia's, with the "hour-long pursuits of idle and vain objects," whence their sunshine and song? Were they not, like some modern professors of religion, ever complaining?—"Oh, it is terribly dull this season. Nothing is going on for us to enjoy. There is to be a dance at the ele-

gant mansion of Pomponius Mæcenas on the ides of March, and Sempronius and the beautiful Aphrodite will play on the kalends of June; but you know the narrow views that prohibit these pleasures for us. Well, I don't believe these things would hurt me. I wish there was something we could enjoy." No; the Christian was truly happy outside the whirl and the flash of fashion. Quiet and rational joys were his, and spiritual delights.

Reference has already been made to that early epistle to Diognetus. It beautifully declares that "it is not by authority over others, not by wealth or power, that you find happiness or become assimilated to God, but by bearing the burdens of your neighbor, by condescension and kindness to inferiors, and by imparting to the needy according as God in his good providence has given to you." It goes on to picture the delightful results of such living. Julian's commendation of Christian continence as conducive to elevation and comfort has been quoted. It is memorable, too, that the emperor Alexander Severus, in the third century, was so impressed with the excellency of this pure Christian faith and conduct that he had a bust of

Christ placed in his private chapel to be honored among superior beings.

Tatian, author of the *Diatessaron*, in the second century wrote: "I desire not to reign; I wish not to be rich; I avoid military office; I abhor licentiousness; I care not to go out on long voyages at sea; I contend not at games to win a crown; I am far removed from the mad love of glory." Was he not miserable? He says, "*I am fearless of death; I am superior to every kind of disease; my soul is not consumed with grief.*"

Origen makes this triumphant argument against Celsus. Referring to the former filthiness and impurities of those who had embraced the Christian doctrine, he challenges comparison with their present lives: "Now how gentle, how moderate, how grave, how consistent, they have become! so that some, influenced with the love of purity, even forbear from lawful gratifications."

NEW ASSOCIATIONS.

Nothing like the Christian congregational life existed in pagan antiquity. There were clubs, fraternities or corporations of mingled festivities and business (*ἐρανοὶ* and *θίασοι*) in Athens, but

they were not more dignified than similar associations of men alone to-day. Ancient political life and polytheism admitted of no genial, active, elevating mixed associations. But in Christian communities were formed circles controlled and united by sincere fellowship, common faith and common fate, with room and opportunity for every activity and most varied talents. "There freedom found a sanctuary, and there, in the midst of action and suffering, noble characters could unfold and grow strong."

In a bas-relief in the church of St. Ambrose, at Milan, and in the Roman Catacombs, we see pictured the social customs of these early Christians as men and women, contrary to Grecian ideas, purely gathered around their *triclinium*, or semi-circular table, in sweet and modest intercourse. Their *agapæ*, or love-feasts, were remarkable entertainments, referred to honorably by Pliny in his letter to Trajan, and described by many. There was no lavish cost for vainglory. The love-feast permitted no vileness or excess, says one of the early Fathers. The order of the feast was as sober and regular as the cause—a love-feast—was honorable. They gathered as before God; they sang.

When they separated, they took the same care of modesty and chastity as if they had been to a place of instruction rather than at a banquet.

In the midst of vulgar pleasures and low morality, uncertain when a spy was watching them or a mob might burst upon them with stones, whatever they did, wherever they went, these faithful ones traced the sign of the cross on their foreheads, in living remembrance of the crucified One whose baptismal vows and redemption bound them to renounce the pleasures of this evil world. The kingdom of God within was the foe of folly and fanaticism, the inspiration of moral excellence, the light of singing love and the life of unpolluted and eternal entertainment. This spirit of humanity and glow of heaven illuminated their hearts. Thus it was that the servant-maid Blandina of Lyons (A. D. 177) by her martyrdom for truth, no less than the noble Flavia Domitilla and the wife and daughter of Domitian, transmitted the potency of their Christian example to their own age and to succeeding generations. Heavenly character was moulded into symmetry and strength by heavenly endeavor. With the light of the future glory on their brows, and with hallowed

consecration of body and life to holiness, these primitive followers of the Lamb wore the festive garlands of the new life, drew about them the resplendent robes of the soul's wedding-feast, dipped up satisfying draughts from the fountain of immortal pleasure, and with comforting social song, *agapæ* and Godlike works of love, eagerly, under escort of ministering angels, ran up the shining way to their eternal reward.

“All their history shows them to have been cheerful and happy. Free from cankering, corroding cares and guilty passions, they enjoyed peace of conscience and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God. They were eminently social. The sacred song, the harp, the lyre and the exalted themes of Christian intercourse enlivened their pastimes; so that in their quiet seclusion they enjoyed a steady and tranquil flow of happiness and peace which the world could neither give nor take away, and with which no stranger could intermeddle. With a propriety which none else could claim they could say,

“With us no melancholy void,
No moment lingers unemployed
Or unenjoyed below;

Our weariness of life is gone,
Who live to serve our God alone,
And only Jesus know.'"

Most beautifully and emphatically, it may be added, are all the foregoing positions and principles illustrated and confirmed by that remarkable Bryennios manuscript *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, written early in the second century, but only recently discovered in the Greek quarter of Constantinople, and just published. Many pregnant passages, as in Chapters I., III., V. and XIV., throw large light on the careful habits of living, avoidance of all evil pursuits and constant cheerfulness of the Christians of that early age.

IN OUR DAY.

Let Christians of this day follow the brethren of these first three centuries in their attitude and principles toward popular amusements, even as they followed Jesus. Restraint, now as then, will give zest to life, while satiety wearies and disgusts. Before them and before us behold in undimmed and matchless splendor the one grand, perfect Exem-

plar, the Lord Jesus Christ. All perfect lives must be woven after that divine Pattern.

OUR PATTERN.

"A weaver sat one day at his loom
Among the colors bright,
With the pattern for his copying
Hung fair and plain in sight.

"But the weaver's thoughts were wandering
Away on a distant track,
And he threw the shuttle in his hand
Wearily forward and back.

"And he turned his dim eyes to the ground,
And tears fell on the woof;
For his thoughts, alas! were not on his home,
Nor the wife beneath his roof,

"When her voice recalled him suddenly
To himself, when she sadly said,
'Ah! woe is me! for your work is spoiled,
And what shall we do for bread?"

"And then the weaver looked and saw
That his work must be undone;
For the threads were wrong, and the colors dimmed
Where his bitter tears had run.

“ ‘Alack! alack!’ said the weaver,
 ‘And this had all been right
 If I hadn’t looked at my work, but kept
 The pattern in my sight.’

“ Ah! sad it was for the weaver,
 And sad for his luckless wife;
 And sad it will be for us if we say,
 At the close of a weary life,

“ ‘The colors that we had to weave
 Were bright in our early years,
 But we wove the tissues wrong, and stained
 The woof with bitter tears.

“ ‘We wove a web of doubt and fear,
 Not faith and hope and love,
 Because we looked at our work, and not
 At our Pattern from above.’ ”

Failure to keep our heavenly Pattern in sight is sin and death. Keeping Christ ever in our soul’s view until he be found in us the hope of glory and our continual light is life and peace. Then may latter-day saints and early-day saints reach across separating centuries and gladly shake hands as they bear according and united testimony against

all forms of worldly conformity, and to the sufficiency of the gospel of Jesus and pleasures sanctioned thereby for our happiness here and our comfort hereafter.

PART II.

Lawful Christian Amusements.



LAWFUL CHRISTIAN AMUSEMENTS.

QUESTIONINGS.

“WHAT are lawful Christian amusements?” is an eminently practical question of the hour. How to decide it clearly is a perplexity. All sweets are not wholesome; many surfeit, sicken and kill. Victorious enchantments of pleasure often fascinate until sudden darkness shroud body and soul in wretchedness. Who has not heard merry songs sink into mournful sighs? The Saviour himself affirms that among other enumerated destroyers of the precious seed are “the pleasures of this life,” the choking thorns of all good, that prevent any fruit reaching perfection. What, then, are “the pleasures of this life”? They are alluring and popular pursuits, of vast variety, in the realm of literature or science, or search after wealth, or mere physical or sensual delights—pleasures that are neither sanctified by divine approbation nor con-

ductive to spiritual prosperity. On the contrary, their legitimate and actual tendency and effect are to stifle all holy growth, all blessed influences that seemed about to spring up in the soul; so that no fruit is matured. Since promising forms of life are thus fatally arrested, the apostolic Epistles abound with warnings to professing Christians against being lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, against conformity to this world, and against all appearance or every form of evil.*

Is the Christian life, then, confined to strictly religious exercises? Are there no legitimate pleasures, in the popular sense, for the church-member? Can he never participate in any of the customary amusements of his day and generation without a flash of divine anger flaming athwart his pathway? For God's children there are joys abundant and fadeless, inexhaustible in variety and richness—green pastures and gardens of delights where their lines have indeed fallen in pleasant places, and where all their borders are made of pleasant stones. Fountains of living pleasures are bursting up for them all along their earthly journey, and they know and have the choicest amusements that can

* 2 Tim. iii. 4; Rom. xii. 2; 1 Thess. v. 22.

ensure the zest of noblest and enduring recreation.*

A DIFFERENCE.

Still, a distinction and a contrast exist between proper and healthful pleasures and those that choke all spiritual life; or, in a narrower and clearer demarkation, a positive division runs between amusements lawful and amusements unlawful to the Christian. How can a wise decision between the opposing claimants for the Christian's homage be satisfactorily reached?

CHRISTIAN LIFE.

First, then, this question claims answer. What is Christian life? A few salient characteristics will draw the picture.

1. Consecration.

It is a true and hearty consecration of self to God, with new views and new motives.

Some happy cases of Christian experience occur wherein God's children are not conscious of any time when they did not love God. So early did

* Ps. xvi. 6, 16; xxxvi. 8; xxiii. 2, 6; Isa. liv. 12.

the work of sovereign saving grace begin that they cannot trace the blessed history of the death of the carnal mind and enmity to God and the dawn of the new life. For this reason doubts sometimes assail them as to the reality of their new birth. Let such rather bless God for his sweet leading, be thankful for the fruits of piety that prove true life in the soul, and ever abide in faith in the Saviour.*

Many other Christians, though conscious of having led sinful lives, cannot mark the exact hour of their birth, under the power of the Holy Ghost, into the kingdom of Christ, by any sharp contrast of views. The new birth is a radical work and change in man's inner nature, but the vital question is not one as to *TIME*, but one as to *FACT*. The blind man restored to sight was conscious that once he could not see, but that he did now see. Paul felt that he had been dead and was made alive. And in the large and general history of Christian life there is commonly a deep consciousness of fresh views of the evil of sin, the corruption of the human heart, the poverty of our own righteousness, the value and glory of the redemp-

* 2 Tim. ii. 1.

tion by Jesus Christ and the preciousness of a personal Saviour. New love fills the renewed heart, and peace that passeth understanding comforts the oftentimes surprised and adoring believer.*

From these new views of grace, life and duty new motives arise. Man's chief end is felt and confessed to be to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever. All aims in life are higher and nobler.† Sin is crushed and good done, because God has so loved us and we, bought with a great price, are God's chosen sheep. The Christian life is eminently a receptive life. Through the cross the opened heart receives from God all its treasures—pardon, peace, sanctification, strength, defence, faith, hope and glory. Nothing less can be done, than to make a glad and entire consecration of self to the adorable Redeemer.‡

2. *Productiveness.*

Next, Christian life is productive.

Wherever there is healthy life there must be growth and fruit-bearing. These will be seen in

* 1 John iv. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 7; Rom. v. 1; Phil. iv. 7.

† 1 Cor. x. 31.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 20; Rom. xii. 1.

personal character and in usefulness, and their distinctive trait must be holiness. Christians must grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—grow like Christ, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of his fullness. So must their light shine and their good works abound that they may glorify their Father which is in heaven; “for herein,” said Jesus, “is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” *

3. *Self-Denial.*

Such Christian life involves self-denial.

Cultivation is necessary to its prosperity, and costs both care and toil. Respect to our fellows and the effort to love our neighbors as ourselves, control of wayward desires, resistance of temptations, the very performance of plain daily holy duties and the whole range of Christian obligations require, for their right performance, patience, pity, love, sacrifice of personal ease and natural selfishness, and often involve mighty constraint and sharp inner conflict. Yet Christians must take up the cross, follow Jesus and forsake all for

* 2 Pet. iii. 18; Eph. iv. 13; Matt. v. 16; John xv. 8.

him. Denying all ungodliness, they must bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* They must imitate Him who said of himself, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom²

4. Obedience.

So Christian life must be one of supreme obedience to God's law, and therefore one of obedience and fidelity to his Church.

There is but one code of law which is supreme, the Holy Bible. It is God's inspired and authoritative word. It must be loved and carefully studied. How can any true child of God neglect the Father's tender messages, or any loyal subject turn from the plans and commands of his wise, infallible, just and lawful King? Then, the Church is God's kingdom, founded and loved by him, and is commissioned to gather and train his elect; and by her are these sacred oracles of God to be taught and enforced on her loyal subjects. This is organized life, and needs perfect regulation under perfect law, in family and church, and wherever it is exhibited.

* Tit. ii. 12; Gal. vi. 2.

5. *Oneness.*

It will suffice to add that hereafter this Christian life is ONE.

We cannot be one thing on earth and another of different type and order in heaven. After death is the judgment, and the character formed here is the exponent ^{and} index of the estimate there, made from the records in open court under the eye of the infallible and just Judge. For when the sea and land and death and the grave shall give up their dead, according to their words and their works shall they be judged, and justified or condemned finally and for ever.* Holy life here begun shall be carried on unto perfection by Him who gave it birth in one continued career of growing brightness.

But this present world is irreconcilably hostile to this Christian purity and uniformity of life and marshals many and tempting pleasures to choke it in its infancy. So this divine life must be filled and girded with heavenly power. It must draw its trusted weapons from the armory of the cross. Wrestling with the rulers of darkness and with

* Matt. xii. 37 ; xxv. 46 ; Rev. xx. 13.

spiritual wickedness, humble and sincere Christian warriors must grasp and wield all the varied forces of faith, wisdom, prayer and love, that they may thus advance in grace and strength and steadfastly and with unflinching perseverance withstand every form of evil, and, having done all, stand safe and happy under the victorious banner of Jesus.

Summary.

What, then, are the leading traits of Christian life?

True and hearty consecration of self to God in Christ, with new views and new motives; fruit-bearing; self-denial; supreme obedience to God's law and loyalty to his Church; and oneness of spiritual organic life here and hereafter.

AMUSEMENTS AND LIFE.

In view of these facts and confessions, how shall Christians enjoy the new life? how secure lawful pleasures and amusements and avoid those that will choke spiritual life and leave the professors of religion stunted, withered, worthless, dead—lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? What principles shall plainly mark out the right road?

A Christless world with Christless customs confronts God's Church with her Christ-given laws. Fashion opposes grace. A conflict, a decision, is precipitated on us, and very largely with regard to our precious little children and the young, immature and unmarried men and maidens. Unquestionably, if any custom or amusement is deemed either improper or sinful, a sound reason should be rendered that will prove so clear as to gain ready approbation from the doubting. The mere assertion that a certain amusement is wrong will not be sufficient. It is true—

1. That God has given to parents and guardians *authority*, which should be exercised over all under their roof. Abraham *commanded* all his children and servants, and was blessed for his conduct. Failure to exercise this divine rule will bring evil on a household, as the history of Eli's house shows.*

2. But authority arbitrarily wielded, without good reasons or love, is hurtful; as when a Christian father said to his son, "I do not say *pro* or *con* about card-playing, but it must not be practiced in my house." That boy ran away to

* Gen. xviii. 19; 1 Sam. iii. 13.

sea.* His father ought to have given clear reasons built on truth against the practice; on them he should have stood in tender love firm as Gibraltar. Despotism makes rebels against even good.

3. It must also be remembered that no flexible set of principles will suffice. Nobody respects a character that like a gutta-percha face will change under every pressure. It cannot be that what is immoral or immodest and inconsistent with Christian purity at home is right in Paris, in Baltimore or in New York. It has well been said that it is an offence to sound morals for one to indulge in amusements behind lock and key which he may not enjoy with open windows. It cannot be right for parents to seek enjoyment where they forbid their children to go lest defilement be incurred, or to send their children where they, as Christians, decline to be seen. "Blunt men of the world will denounce such ethics as the ethics of a sneak."

Christian conduct requires no cloak, but comes to the light that its deeds may be made manifest

* See essays on *The Christian and Puritan Theories of Amusements*, by Rev. Austin Phelps, D. D., from which several thoughts have been adopted.

that they are wrought in God.* Matthew tells us that our gracious Lord denounced double-faced folks as whited sepulchres; yea, in hot indignation exclaimed, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" †

4. Yet, undoubtedly, we all sometimes need relaxation from busy cares. Life is not one long funeral. Youth wants the bird-songs and the fragrance of morning—needs full draughts of dewy air, but needs all harmonious, fresh, pure and full of true life. And riper age should sometimes unbend from the rigidity and pressure of years and cheerily prove again the elasticity of early days. An old proverb says, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," but what will all play or wrong play make him? Better far no play than evil play. *Dullness* is preferable to *badness*, notwithstanding some—chiefly the thoughtless and the fashionable—seem to prefer the latter. If the alternative exist—did it ever exist?—it is wiser to choose few rather than improper or ruinous recreations. Stolen waters may be sweet, but the brand of unholy theft is fastened on the soul, and God sees and counts it, though we close our

* John iii. 21.

† Matt. xxiii. 27, 33.

eyes. Sharp-edged tools are not for children, and he is unwise who risks the dangerous experiment. Certain it is that either from natural bias to evil, from ignorance or from inexperience the average youth is likely to choose many current pleasures and amusements that will hurt, if they do not destroy, him.

TESTS FOR LAWFUL AMUSEMENTS.

By what crucial tests, then, shall amusements be shown to be lawful? *The fundamental position is that they must accord with BIBLE TESTS.*

Here some demur, and some begin to sneer and to talk about "sour Christianity," and "puritanical piety." Nothing the noble Puritans ever did is so narrow-minded as that criticism. Neal, in his *History of the Puritans* (vol. i., pp. 268, 312, etc), gives an instructive lesson. In order to prevent the common people from regretting the fall of the papal Church and the carnal liberties allowed by the Jesuits, King James in 1618, and his son, Charles I., afterward, under the instigation of Archbishop Laud, issued the famous *Book of Sports*. This was done in bad faith by James. The instrument defined lawful sports and gave

liberty on the Sabbath, after public worship, to engage in morris dances, May games, Maypole sports, Whitsun ales and various revelings and tiplings, and the publication of this command to observe these recreations was ordered to be made from the parish pulpits. Because the godly Puritan clergy, conscientiously disapproving of such immorality, refused to read the order, they had to endure for seven years suspension from the ministry, sequestration, excommunication, persecution and banishment. Thank God they had strength given them to endure injustice while maintaining God's truth and the sanctity of his holy Sabbath!

Were Christians in these United States summoned on the Lord's day, after sitting around the Lord's table, to engage in or encourage a game of base-ball with beer-stands at hand, or to participate in a boat-race on penalty of fine or the whipping-post, would they quietly submit? Would they heed the voice of conscience or that of God's word? At once the common-school history falls open to the page about the tea, the tax and Boston Harbor. Human nature ^{being} ~~was~~ the same in the nineteenth century as it ~~is~~ in the seventeenth,

not only would men resist, but they would perhaps declaim with intense zeal against all such recreations at any time. Would not the very enormity of the imposition precipitate and extenuate such an extreme position? Freemen would to-day out-puritan the Puritans. At least, refusing all such moral uplifts, they would follow the English Christians in burning such enactments by the hand of the common hangman. Thus would be triumphantly and unanimously affirmed, and reaffirmed, the ineradicable belief that the stability of all good government and the security of life, liberty and estate rest on the maintenance of the great principles revealed in the Bible touching the obligations and duties of men to one another and their relation to God.

Deep down in the hearts of all men in Christian lands lives the feeling that this code of morals and religion is perfect and supreme. Every one is bound by it alike and equally. Those not directly connected with the Church seem to think it is not *their* law and chart. BUT IT IS. It matters not that they neglect and disown it. God is their Lawgiver; the Holy Scriptures are infallible, divine and universal law. But the church-mem-

ber freely acknowledges that God's word is authoritative to him. Whatever is not of faith is, for him, sin. For all that he does or hopes he craves a "Thus saith the Lord" or the endorsement of the general sentiment of the words of the heavenly King. Hence the Christian must test all recreations by the Bible.

1. PURITY.

Amusements must be pure. Modesty, honesty, purity, are sweet virtues admired of men and required by God. Chambering and wantonness must be far from the child of heaven. Any pleasure having in itself the elements, the seed and the power of impurity or of dishonesty is unlawful for any one. Therefore the horse-race, with its betting and many evil associations, is sinful; so, also, the gaming-table, in all its varieties and fascinations, whether the stakes be small or large, is corrupt, and is forbidden even by human law. As Tertullian long ago said, "nowhere is the Christian anything but a Christian." He surely should not touch or advocate any amusement that is not honest, pure and modest in itself, any sooner than he would choose spoiled and dis-

eased meat instead of sound or prefer counterfeit money to the genuine. He should not willingly even witness indecencies, for God is of purer eyes than to behold evil.* They must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord—made clean through the word of Christ.† Christians are temples of the Holy Ghost and members of Christ, and they must not be defiled. But whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report, these they may richly and innocently enjoy.‡

2. SPIRITUALLY HELPFUL.

Amusements should be spiritually helpful. If they make us better in God's sight, they are lawful. If they have not this tendency or effect, they should be shunned as deadly pestilences, as devices of Satan for the soul's undoing. "What!" says a doubter; "apply such a test to a boat-ride, to a tea-party, to a game of croquet?" Yes. Why not? Would not the introduction of the genial and gentle spirit of Christ into many of the small amusements of life—not to speak of the great ones—be an invaluable blessing and kill many a sharp

* Hab. i. 13.

† Isa. lii. 11; John xv. 3.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 15, 19; Phil. iv. 8.

speech, many an envious thought, many an unkind action? Would it not calm the mind, beautify the whole character and bring exhilarating sunshine into laughter, play and song?

It is distinctly affirmed that our amusements should help the soul. God enumerates the commonest physical acts and pleasures of this life as representatives of all acts and pleasures, and says through his inspired apostle, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." * Christians are bound to glorify him in their bodies and spirits, which are his. They are bought with a great price, even the precious blood of his dear Son, and have no right to do anything or find enjoyment in any act, however trivial, that will dim the lustre of the new life.

Have they not noble social natures to be cultivated, common and praiseworthy sympathies, friendships and tastes which should be genially exercised and developed by pleasant use? Should not all the lighter acts and recreations promote these ends and give healthful play to every charming capability of these wondrous natures? Can there be any such healthy history except through

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

the use of those delightful excitements which breathe the innocency and light of a heavenly clime and involve a rightful use of the varied gifts of God and the infinite opportunities of his gracious providences? So he will obtain that merry heart that doeth good like a medicine. Carrying such a heart, the Christian will be a blessing. What a gift and light is a playful wit! How its flashes brighten any social circle! But it should be loving, sanctified, truthful, not that bastard species of fun-making which gets its life and power from its scorpion-sting, from the damage it inflicts or by some wayward or wanton exaggeration that rises to untruthfulness. Such is not Christian wit. Its light is not from a holy, loving, Christlike nature, and its exercise ranks not among lawful delights. Paul says there is a filthiness and there is a species of foolish talking and scurrilous jesting that becometh not saints.* "Be not ye therefore partakers with the children of disobedience."

But whatever recreation elevates, broadens, brightens, our natural powers so as better to fit us to do our duty well and cheerfully before God

* Eph. v. 4.

and to help our fellows, may justly be classed among lawful Christian amusements. In giving health, vigor and activity to the body and to the mind, such amusements increase that capacity for spiritual growth and contribute a healthful spiritual life. But those diversions—often fascinating and fashionable—that unfit for serious duties, that undermine health and character, that lead into temptation to do wrong or to waste money or time in extravagance of dress or fashionable display, or to live beyond one's legitimate means, or to cultivate evil associations or tastes, and so distract the heart and weary the body that all true spiritual comfort in the private and public worship of God is utterly marred or destroyed,—these diversions are all wrong, are unlawful to the Christian. The candid confession has been made to me, and to many pastors, that after a night's dissipation in some of the common forms of popular amusement the heart could not get near to God before sleep in true prayer—*true prayer*; for much *saying prayers* is nothing but hollow muttering of formulas, with no acceptable worship of soul. How can any simple, sincere child of God be happy or satisfied unless his occupations be

holy, and all the cheerful entertainments in his daily journey be those for which he can praise God because they have brought pure refreshment to his tired spirit and vigor to a renewed nature? There is no discount to those amusements that make a soul laugh before God, that lift it up with all the ecstasy of the excitement from a sense of the rightful harmony of all the natural powers and give it the delightful *abandon* of assured security through conscious purity of motives, elevation of hopes and restfulness of faith.

3. WHOLESOME INFLUENCE.

It naturally follows that to be lawful *Christian amusements should have a wholesome influence on others*. How reluctant are men to acknowledge the obligation resting on them to promote their neighbors' welfare, and in no direction perhaps more so than when seeking their pleasure! Yet frequently there are pleasures which may be in themselves innocent to us personally, but which would be misunderstood by some, and would hurt them—would either give them pain, make them doubt the reality and value of religion or lead them into evil acts. Paul illustrates this prin-

ciple by declaring his liberty to eat meat that had been placed before an idol, which was to him a mere nothing; but, finding that some sincere believers were liable to be led astray or to get erroneous ideas or to fall into some idolatrous practice that might ruin their souls, he says, "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother offend." * So also in his refusal to receive that support which he might justly claim in his mission-work from mission-churches. He did this to avoid misconception and injury to the young church and the cause of the Redeemer.

In selecting amusements the same principle must be applied. God has certainly constituted us our brothers' keepers—has commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be pitiful and courteous and as heirs of the grace of life to help and cheer everybody in all possible ways.† In charity we must please all men for their good, remembering how Christ pleased not himself selfishly, but in joy ministered to others.‡ While breathing the

* 1 Cor. viii. 13.

† Gen. iv. 9, 10; Matt. vii. 12; xxii. 39.

‡ Rom. xv. 2, 3; 1 Cor. x. 33; Matt. xx. 28.

fragrance of rosy hours, Christ's child must, under royal law, be as glad to give joy as was Jonathan to bend the sportive bow with David, and as careful as Jerusalem saints to offend none by any liberties allowed. Every Christian must be a pattern, especially toward them that are without, in all their general daily habits, that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of him.*

How much trouble and evil would be avoided were these sound scriptural rules observed! Evil wrecks many fond hopes. What sadness in this recent wail of a Christian mother!—"I kept cards and round-dances out of my house as long as possible, but my daughters attended a party given at the house of an elder in our church who has always been regarded as a peculiarly saintly man, and there the round-dances were introduced; and since that I have been obliged to yield, for my children say to me, 'Are you any better than Mr. H——? He allows dancing in his house.' What could I reply to that?"

The Rev. James W. Alexander, D. D., wrote these significant words: "The door at which those

* Acts iv. 32; Col. iv. 5; Tit. ii. 7; 1 Tim. iv. 12.

influences enter, which contravails parental instruction and example, I am persuaded, is *yielding to the ways of 'good society.'* By dress, looks and amusements an atmosphere is formed which is not that of Christianity. More than ever do I feel that our families must stand in a kind but determined opposition to the fashion of the world, breasting its waves like the Eddystone lighthouse. And I have found nothing yet which requires more courage and independence than to rise a little, but decidedly, above the *par* of the religious world around us." Surely, then, those amusements which exercise evil influences on others are unlawful to Christians. To do good and not to do evil, to increase light and joy and not to create or foster darkness and pain, is their heaven-born mission.

4. PROPORTIONED TO LIFE-WORK.

Another important reflection is *that all recreations should be in due proportion to the life-work.*

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal."

This life is not all of life. Its hours are crowded with duties whose right performance has a vast

sweep of influence on us and others, now and for ever. Time must be redeemed. If life is not a funeral, neither is it a comedy. It is serious. Responsibility for moments and work is imminent and real. When thick nights—ever threatening—fall on life, the tallow-dips of frivolous pleasure will go out and darkness will be doubled. Idle moments steal heavenly sunshine, while weeds of worldliness choke the word. A time there is for laughter, but a time also for thought. Many forget all this, and their mirth and amusement are too often grievously misplaced. Hence the ingenuous children of God are sometimes greatly depressed when they see the house of God forsaken, where earnest worship and prayer are offered, while numbers—some of them members of these very churches—flock to an assemblage for vain and giddy amusement. Perhaps the sound of the gay revelry reaches the church where God is worshiped by a little band in faith and hope, while others neglect his claims for the twanging of the fiddle and the embraces of the immodest dance.

A decent respect is due from *all men* to the services of the sanctuary, but surely it is more than comely—it is high duty—on the part of pro-

fessing Christians to forsake all for the honor of their Lord. Therefore the time for all amusements must be judiciously selected, and those are unlawful which directly conflict with duty to God or require the time that should be devoted to his service.

And, further, the time given to recreation must bear an honest proportion to the claims of God's worship and of the grave daily duties devolving on men under divinely-imposed responsibilities. Will a man rob God? Laborers in his vineyard have appointed work and a final reckoning. Music and feasting will be freely given by the Master to the faithful, but so that they may be through suitable relaxation led into green pastures on earth and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Chastened fun and frolic will not degenerate into cheating folly, nor will the lightsome reliefs of busy life usurp the place and province of the realities of time and eternity. For, while the servants are indeed making themselves merry, the controlling aim of their lives is not the eating and the drinking, the enticing amusements of a day. Yet they do sit at a bountiful table spread from the rich resources of the Master who has girded

himself and made them his own guests and serves them.* They that live in pleasures are dead while they live;† but when amusements are sought decently and in order, and in due proportion to the work God has assigned, they are right.

Our life-work is to get ready for a long eternity. Unwise devotion of time, care and wealth to what hinders this needful equipment for eternal success can result only in bitter lamentations. The wailing confession of the worldling Lord Chesterfield will be fully realized. "I have run," says he, "the silly round of business and pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and consequently know their futility and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which is, in truth, very low; whereas those that have not experienced always overrate them. They only see their gay outside and are dazzled with the glare, but I have seen behind the scenes; I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes which exhibit and move the gaudy machine; I have seen and smelt the tallow candles which illuminate the whole decoration, to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant

* Luke xii. 37.

† 1 Tim. v. 6.

audience. When I reflect back upon what I have seen, what I have heard and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry and bustle and pleasure of this world had any reality; but I look upon all that has passed as one of the romantic dreams which ~~opinion~~ ^{opium} commonly occasions, and I by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose for the sake of the fugitive dream."

5. LOYALTY TO THE CHURCH.

Lawful Christian amusements must accord with the regulations of the Church.

Every church has a constitution as the kingdom of Christ. Every regulation is designed to conform to the great principles contained in the Bible. These must be applied through changing generations to changed social surroundings. Experience, prayer and the judgment of the best men and chosen representatives of the whole membership shape all this legislation. Its power is only moral and spiritual, for the Church wields no carnal sword.

Every member of any church is under voluntary and solemn promise and pledge to his church and to God to obey the rules of that church. Hon-

or, faith, love for the welfare, reputation and integrity of this spiritual organization, and duty to her divine Head,—all combine to keep each member secure in his Christian sphere and in harmony with settled judicious legislation. No church has any *secret* laws or mysteries revealed only to the initiated, but each has an established standard of doctrine and living.

Whenever, then, any Christian church at large has expressed its sentiments about any line of fashionable amusements, what is the duty of its loyal members? *Unquestionably*, OBEDIENCE, while the law stands, unless an instructed conscience says it would be *sinful* to obey that law. Where the conscience does not condemn certain practices handled in the law, still, if the decided judgment of church courts and of the pious constituency disapproves and reprehends, yet does not absolutely forbid under penalty, then those members who differ in view from the majority should quietly and honorably acquiesce, and not bring discord and disharmony into the fold of Christ. Repeal may be sought, but meanwhile obedience must be rendered. *This is the very lowest ground that can honorably be taken.*

But higher ground must be held. When the pronounced judgment of the church disapproves of any social practices or amusements under the prayerful application of scriptural principles, and further advises and urges that those engaging therein be subjected to discipline for their offence, any member ought to be in serious doubt whether his objections and disagreements are correct. He surely ought to endeavor with great care, anxiety, prayer and study of God's word to ascertain the mind of the Spirit. Almost always long and arduous consideration and the testimony of history and wide pastoral experience underlie and support such ecclesiastical deliverances. Yet many are led astray by popular worldly sentiments and customs, and lightly regard these enactments and advice, and sometimes speak of them in flippant and disparaging terms. Now, is it modest for any member of any church to object to her carefully-considered regulations, long established and approved by extended experience, when he has not devoted this prayerful study to the principles involved?

Can any professing Christian afford to throw himself or herself boldly and directly against the general sentiment of the wise and the good on

any subject not a matter of conscience? Will not individual Christian character inevitably suffer from such a course? and will not the Church herself be seriously hurt in her efficiency and spirituality? The body of Christ is one; and when solemn deliverances are issued against any forms of worldly amusements, however popular, that action should make them unlawful for the members of that mystic body.

CONCLUSION.

Is not this whole question thus fairly and sufficiently presented to lead to a decided conclusion? Cannot every anxious and candid mind, in the light of the reflections and arguments advanced, determine what amusements are lawful for the consistent Christian? Review the discussion.

First, what is Christian life? It is a life consecrated, enjoying new views and new motives, receptive, productive, self-denying, obedient to divine law and loyal to the Church, and one here and hereafter. This fully-organized life moves with authority in family, society and church, yet this authority is not despotic, but exercised with reason and love, and rests on no flexible and

changeable principles. And as the human career is neither a funeral nor a comedy, and all need, amid earnest, practical labors, the natural restoratives of healthful relaxation and cheering sunshine, the essential characteristics and vital principles of this high and heavenly life must determine what are the lawful amusements for the children of the heavenly King.

God's word affords the required and sufficient touchstone, because infallible, that can select and reveal the choicest pastimes for the charming of weary hours without chilling or cursing the immortal spirit. Tested thus, these entertainments must be pure physically, and spiritually helpful to the participant, wholesome in their influence on others, in rightful proportion to the duties of the whole life-work, and in accordance with the rules of the Church.

Recreations thus tried and adopted will be both lawful and Christian. Joyous wings will be given to all noble social gifts and possibilities. A happy process of development will be auspiciously inaugurated which will beautify each individual and bless all. A natural and healthful variety of chaste delights will possess heart and soul,

and will beautifully equalize, elevate and strengthen our powers—wonderfully capable of virtuous passions—and so keep the whole man active and useful, an illustration of the harmonious union of piety and pleasure.

“Lord, in my view let both united be :
I live in pleasure when I live with thee.”

A CHALLENGE.

The heart of every zealous and affectionate pastor is pained when he warns his people against the fascinations of worldly amusements and they lightly throw off the whole subject as though it did not concern them. He clearly sees that they are in danger of great spiritual loss, if not of shipwreck. The pleadings of the sacred desk, drawn from God's holy book, are here earnestly renewed. Is not the question as to what are lawful Christian amusements a most practical one and worthy of candid and careful consideration? You are challenged, reader, to take it to the Bible and test it there. That is the only sure fountain of solution.

Take the whole subject, with your Bible in your hand and in your head and heart, to the

throne of grace. Pray, and pray again, and test it there. On your knees seek light. Ought not this to be done. Will not *you* do this? Will you not do it *now*?

You are challenged to let the light of history, the testimony of judicious, pious men and women, of large and long opportunities for observation and your own experience and knowledge speak as to the effects upon Christian and upon general society of free indulgence in those amusements that cannot sustain the tests proposed.

Should you differ from the foregoing statements and conclusions, ought you not to inquire whether you may not be in error? Will it not be unfair, unworthy, prejudiced treatment to say carelessly, flippantly, "I do not think so," and then dismiss the question? You cannot dismiss God thus. No follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, under covenant engagements as a member of his Church, can without grievous risk and sin refuse these solemn considerations his personal investigation and application. Be wise, and incur not the rebuke, "My people doth not consider" (Isa. i. 3).

Let none of God's redeemed children sin by adding force to the current of worldliness. Let

all beware lest "the pleasures of this life" choke the word in the heart, and so the life be a failure at last. What a failure! Sad—sad indeed—the fate of those whose barren amusements in this life crush their hearts with baleful amazements hereafter, whose evanescent songs when living become their eternal sighs when lost!

THE END.