

F.B. Meyer:

THIS difficulty about amusements, where to go and where not to go, is not a new one. It agitated the Christians at Corinth centuries ago as it agitates us; and led up to one of those questions which the Apostle answered in his first epistle.

Dean Farrar, in his graphic style, explains the difficulty and perplexity of their position. They were daily living in the great wicked streets, in sight and hearing of everything that could quench spiritual aspirations and kindle carnal desires. The gay, common life pressed on them so closely, the splendid vision of Christ's advent seemed so far away, might they not mingle with the heathen festivals, join in the gay processions, watch the dancing-girls, or take part in the fun and frolic of the voluptuous city? Were they to live always on the heavenly manna, and never taste the onion, leek, and garlic of Egypt? Were they never again to drink of the foaming cup of earthly pleasure, and mingle in the dance, the feast, the pantomimic show?

In answer to these difficulties, the Apostle laid down two principles, which contain between them the very light we need to enable us to pick our pathway through the world, to teach us how to act with regard to the thorny question of amusements.

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any " (1Corinthians 6:12).

"All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful, but all things edify not Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbor's good" (1Corinthians 10:23-24).

We must have recreation, times when jaded nerves recuperate themselves, and tired brains turn from their absorbing thoughts to lighter themes. We shall perform the serious work of life more successfully if we have seasons of respite. We shall breast the Hill Difficulty more energetically after seasons of rest in the Arbor of Ease. Our many-stringed nature craves for seasons when laughter, song, and enjoyment may take the harp of life and sweep its lighter chords. And surely Nature's gayer moods, when Spring scatters her flowers, or Summer is ripening the year's produce, suggests, as Milton tells us in his immortal L' Allegro, the relaxation of the severer strain of business toil. Little children, with their ringing laughter, their keen appreciation of mirth and frolic, their demand for good times, arouse us from our pensive melancholy and laborious toils, quickening our pulses, awakening our laughter, and giving us an excuse, which we are not loth to snatch, for casting aside the serious business of life, and taking a brief spell of pleasure. Then the perpetual question arises, How far is all this lawful and expedient? what should be our attitude as Christians to amusement? There are several principles to guide us, but the ultimate decision must ever remain with the individual; and it is by our action on the debatable ground of twilight, between the clearly defined territories of absolute light or darkness, that the most of us are made or marred.

First: We must not be enslaved by any farm of pleasure. The Apostle vowed that he would not be brought under the power of anything, however lawful or innocent it might be in itself. It is marvellous how easy it is to become enslaved to forms of pleasure-taking which in themselves are perfectly harmless and natural. A man may be so intoxicated with golf or cricket, a woman so fascinated with lawn-tennis or bicycling, that they are spoiled for all the practical business of life; and at the call of their favorite pastime, will at any moment renounce the most urgent and pressing engagements. It seems as if they can think, dream, and plan for nothing else.

When this is the case, whether the form of amusement be one of those healthy out-of-door pursuits already named, or the more hurtful absorption in the theatre, the ball, or the music-hall; when what should be only the means to an end becomes an end in itself; when we feel our best energies withdrawn from the serious demands of life, and dissipated in its flotsam and jetsam; when our soul is engrossed by the handling of a bat, the striking of a ball, the swiftness of a machine,- it is time to pull up and consider which way we are drifting. Surely life was given for higher purposes than these, and if it be said that all such pastimes react on the health and agility of the body, still we must reply, that at the best the body is only the organ and instrument of the soul, and that it must be kept under and made subservient to those lofty purposes which the soul conceives in its secret place and executes in life's arena.

Next: We must have an eye to others. There are forms of amusement which we cannot indulge in without helping to destroy the souls of others. They not only do not build up, but they destroy the work of God. We have no right to jeopardize the eternal interests of those who copy our example or who minister to our enjoyment.

Paul says that, so far as he was concerned, he felt at liberty to accept an invitation to a meal in the precincts of an idol-temple; but that he would not go lest the weak conscience of some fellow Christian should be defiled. Our attitude towards certain places of amusement and pastimes should be determined by our considering whether we would wish those who take their cue from our example to follow us thither. What effect will my conduct have on my children, my young brothers and sisters, the scholars in my Sunday-school class, and others who are not as strong as I am to resist the pernicious influences that are associated with this special form of amusement? Let me remember that young life is behind me, and though, as an experienced mountaineer, I might take the more precipitous route, for their sake I must follow the safe path.

Besides, we must consider whether the effect of some system that gives us pleasure may not be in the highest degree deleterious in its effect on those who minister to our laughter or love of spectacular display. Have we any right, for our pleasure, to hold out baits of money to young girls or children or others, to jeopardize body and soul, and spend their days on the edge of the precipice? "All things edify not," said the Apostle, and we must seek not only our own but another's weal.

On the whole, simple and natural pleasures are the best. The skate over the frozen pond, rather than the dance in the over-heated ball-room; the family party, with its olden games, rather than the scenic representation of music-hall or theatre; the real rather than the artificial, the day rather than midnight, the dear ones of the home rather than the society of strangers. Let every one have a hobby; let every one become proficient in some branch of natural science or history; let every one do something well, be it to handle the oar or alpenstock, to use the camera, glide over the , ringing ice, or climb the beetling crag. Let this man collect geological specimens, and that flowers or ferns, and that curiosities from various countries and people. But let there be some controlling interest, which shall give occupation in the summer ramble, or the snatch of foreign travel, and shall afford amusement in recollection, arrangement, and comparison, when the long winter evenings would hang heavily on hand.

Whatever does not leave a wry taste in our mouth, nor causes a feeling of compunction and regret as we review it, nor exerts a baleful effect on those who minister to our enjoyment, nor unfits us for prayer and communion with God, nor so dazzles and blinds us that we can find no pleasure in the simple delights of home and natural beauty; whatever is wholesome and health-giving; whatever is capable of being presented to God in prayer as the object of his blessing; whatever is in harmony with the tender, holy, unselfish, and blessed nature of Jesus,--is an amusement which we may gladly avail ourselves of; and it shall be to us as the whetting of the scythe amid the mower's toils, and as the mending of the nets torn by the midnight fishing-cruise.