

The Gospel Witness

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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD AMUSEMENTS.

A Sermon by the Pastor.

(Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday Morning, Feb. 13, 1921).

See note at the end of the sermon.

"And through thy knowledge shall thy weak brother perish, for whom Christ died."—I Corinthians 8:11.

The Christian attitude toward amusements is a subject of great importance. While belonging, in some respects, to the category of minor questions, to the "childish things" which we may be expected to "put away" as we attain to some degree of maturity in the Christian life: yet because, as Christians, we can never be unrelated to anything which affects in the slightest degree the spiritual welfare of the least of God's children, we cannot be either indifferent or superior to this matter.

It is a fact, moreover, which even the most liberally and charitably minded find themselves compelled to acknowledge, that vast numbers of professed Christians are now being carried away by an ever-growing love of pleasure, which, like a mighty tide, is sweeping over the world. It cannot be denied that many church members go oftener to the theatre than to church, and pay more for their amusements than for their religion; that there is reason to fear that many such are better versed in rules "according to Hoyle," than in the principles of the Gospel according to Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John; and are bolder and more expert in dealing cards than in disseminating the Word of God. Some, too, there are, who are most punctilious in their observance of religious decorum; who would be offended by a colloquialism from the pulpit, or an inartistic performance by the choir; but who see no impropriety in the presence of professing Christians at the dance.

Nor is this condition of things peculiar to any one denomination, nor to any one country. It is a matter of general observation that vast multitudes of the professed disciples of Christ, by their addiction to these and other forms of amusement, openly advertise themselves to be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

Candid minds, I think, will acquit me of the charge of exaggeration, when I say that this has had, and now has a deadening and almost paralyzing effect upon the life of the churches. The public worship of the sanctuary, the

preaching of the gospel, the study of Scripture, the exercise of prayer, the spiritual service of the Christian life, and all the pure spiritual joys flowing therefrom, are esteemed dull and uninteresting.

And I venture the assertion that this inordinate love of sensuous pleasure vitiates not only the public taste, but the taste of that part of the public which professes to be Christian. This has resulted in many deplorable reactions upon the life and activity of the churches. Standards have been lowered to suit the popular taste. People who feed on Charlie Chaplin several days a week have but little appetite for anything but Charlie Chaplin on Sunday. Standards may not always, however, be vulgarized. They may only be reduced to fit the diminishing capacities of the people. The man who becomes addicted to the use of stimulants soon loses his appetite for wholesome food, and what food is forced upon him must be administered in tabloid form. And it seems to be the policy of "the god of this world" to vitiate the appetites of God's children for all healthy spiritual enjoyments, by treating them with stimulants.

Respecting the particular form of amusement provided in the moving picture theatres, it ought frankly to be said that, independently of the character of the pictures, the habitue of the "movies" is certain to find the habit mentally demoralizing. Even now there are many who refrain from reading certain books, preferring to await their production on the screen. Quite apart from the moral quality of the pictures, this aspect of the influence of the craze for the "movies" should give educators, and all concerned in the cultivation of the mind, the most serious concern.

The great question, however, which faces us is this: What is the Christian Church to do? What is the truly Christian attitude toward these things? If people will have nothing but pleasure, is the Christian Church to provide it? If the multitudes insist upon being entertained, must those who serve in the church, in the pulpit, and elsewhere, learn the entertainer's art? If young people refuse to engage in religious exercises designed to develop both the mind and the spirit, unless such exercises are diluted with some sort of entertaining or pleasurable element, is it the duty of the church to accommodate her ministry to the popular demand? Or is there higher and safer ground which we may take?

I. *Let us examine the principle of the text*, for our answer.

It appears to have been common in pagan Corinth, as in other places, to offer for sale in the market places, meat which was the residue of sacrifices which had been offered to idols in heathen temples. Some of the Corinthian believers seem to have made a practice of using such meat for food. They argued that as an idol was nothing in the world, meat which had been presented to the idol in worship was neither the better nor the worse for having been so used. Therefore they saw no reason why they, as Christians, should not eat it.

But there were others who viewed the matter differently. Lacking the clear intelligence of their more enlightened brethren, they appear to have felt that since the meat had been used in idol-worship, the eating of it would involve some recognition of the idol. Therefore when they saw their fellow-Christians eating such meat, notwithstanding their unenlightened consciences felt the practice involved a recognition of the idol, they claimed the liberty their fellow-Christians exercised, and in the doing of it were caused to stumble.

It is probable that this matter had been submitted to the Apostle Paul for judgment, as the first verse of this chapter seems to imply—"Now as touching things offered unto idols"—and this chapter is his answer. Many a pastor in our day is asked similar questions by members of his flock, who are sincerely desirous of knowing and doing the will of God in all things.

The apostle begins by telling them that they are right in the assumption that "an idol is nothing in the world," and that, therefore, meat is unaffected by the fact that it had been used in sacrifice. He tells them that in the eating of such meat in itself there is no wrong. He lays down the principle that *there is a spiritual knowledge which affords liberty*: "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many, and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father,

of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." That is to say, when a man knows God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, he knows there is no other god; and that God is a Spirit Who requires of His creatures a spiritual service; and that, therefore, we are not to judge ourselves nor others by outward forms, by the mere externals of life, such as eating and drinking. On the contrary, we know that it is spirit, and motive, and intention with which God is concerned. Or, as the same apostle says elsewhere (Rom. 14:17): "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

The argument, therefore, is that knowing an idol to be nothing in the world; so far as the act itself was concerned, and by itself considered, a Christian, knowing this, might eat meat which had been used in idol-worship without offence either to God or to his own conscience.

On the other hand, the Corinthians are reminded, there are some who lack the spiritual discernment to perceive that the nothingness of the idol leaves the sacrifice unpolluted: "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled."

And herein another principle is enunciated to this effect: that while the believer's relationship to God is unaffected by his eating or refraining, and his own conscience, therefore, is also undefiled thereby, *there is still another relationship to be considered, and that is, the believer's relationship to his neighbour.*

And here let me pause to interject a more general observation: in respect to its own desires, the human mind is marvellously resourceful in discriminative judgments. When it suits us, sin and righteousness are defined in terms of our human relationships, and men go so far as to measure a man's fitness for the presence of God by the service he appears to have rendered to his fellows. But how swiftly we can swing to the other extreme: "As long as I have a clear conscience toward God, whose business is it what I eat or drink, or where I find my pleasures or my recreations?" Thus we choose to magnify the one or the other of the tables of the law as comprehending our whole moral obligation, as the inclination of the moment suits us. One day we are sure that if our consciences be at peace with God, nothing else matters. The next day we are equally certain that so long as we busy ourselves with some particular bit of human service—usually something we rather like to do—it really does not matter whether we pray or otherwise recognize God or not.

The underlying principle of Paul's teaching, however, is this, that the gospel provides a way whereby "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"; and that the principles of the gospel applied to life and conduct will relate the believer in self-denying service to both God and his neighbor too.

But now, to return to the specific matter more immediately before us. I have said the Corinthians are here reminded of their further obligation to their neighbour: "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge." "But," someone will object, "am I to be brought into bondage to another man's ignorance? Because he is so ignorantly superstitious stupidly to suppose that the idol pollutes the meat, or that the idol and the sacrifice are inseparable, am I therefore to be deprived of the liberty which my clearer knowledge gives me?" So secure did they feel themselves to be in their spiritual knowledge, they felt they could actually "sit at meat in the idols' temple" without violating their own consciences, knowing the idol to be nothing, and God to be all in all.

But our apostle lays down a further principle: *that while there is a liberty in knowledge, there is a still larger liberty in love.* "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither if we eat not, are we the worse"—which means that, knowing our relationship to God is not affected by such matters, we may do as we like. Thus the truth of God makes us free. "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak."

"But why should I allow the absurd prejudices of my ignorant brother to deprive me of legitimate enjoyment?" Because, my friend, you may cause your weaker brother to stumble if you insist on the exercise of your liberty. "But why should I be held responsible for his stumbling? If I may legitimately do without injury to myself, that which, to him, becomes an occasion

of stumbling only and wholly because of his ignorance, why should not his stumbling be charged to his ignorance, and I be left in the enjoyment of my Christian liberty? Is there any sound reason why my freedom should be restricted, why I should be required continually to deny myself for fear of offending the ignorant, old-fashioned and superstitious?"

In effect, you really ask, Why should you care if the ignorant, and weak, stumble?

There is a reason why you should care, and why you should deny yourself for the sake of the most benighted human being. Hear the tremendous answer! *He is a soul "for whom Christ died!"* This man Paul has but one answer for every question: it is always the Cross! Everything is referred to the Cross. He sees everything and everybody through the medium of the Cross. He measures and values everybody, by the Cross: Nor is this a solitary note in his teaching. He wrote the same to the Romans: "Destroy not him with thy meat *for whom Christ died.*" Thus he measures and values all that is in this world and cries: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And that is no more than our Lord Himself said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."

Thus our text, and the gospel generally, puts love before knowledge as the guiding principle of life, and as the foundation of the largest liberty. Knowledge afforded liberty conscientiously to eat meat: love gave liberty to refrain from eating for the sake of the interests of a soul for whom Christ died.

I. *Let us consider some modern illustrations of this principle.*

There are certain forms of amusement which are only evil. There are plays which cannot be defended before the bar of an enlightened conscience; there are uses of playing cards which lead inevitably to ruin; there are kinds of dances which are flagrantly immoral, and which no reputable person will attempt to justify. To these propositions, no one in this audience will object. But with these things we have nothing to do in our present discussion. Every true Christian will instantly, and instinctively, recognize that the thing which is evil in itself should have no place in the Christian life. Participation in such amusements as I have just named, I feel sure every one here this morning will readily acknowledge, would be as unworthy of a professed Christian as lying or stealing.

The case before us is that of a matter which is not evil in itself, but which some uninstructed people, here called "weak", think to be evil. It is with the Christian attitude toward these we are now concerned.

For the sake of argument let us assume that the theatre is an institution of great educational possibilities. Lest I be misunderstood, I give it as my personal conviction that the theatre, as an institution, is immoral; that its influence, on the whole, is not good but evil. But I speak of the theatre in this way as an institution. I shall not argue the point here, for that is beside my purpose this morning. There may be exceptions, and I am willing to assume the exception, to assume that there may be individual theatres whose management keep their stage clean and pure and wholesome. And this involves the further assumption that there may be good plays. Doubtless many are not good; but we will assume that some are, and that their teaching is morally sound, and their influence morally uplifting—or at least not degrading.

We may assume further that the conscientious Christian—and who can be a Christian without being conscientious?—will exercise the utmost discrimination, and will go only to the best theatres, and the best plays, in which there can be nothing that is in any degree harmful.

And we may make the same assumption respecting the playing of cards. Surely no one will insist that there is any evil in the cards themselves; they are neither moral nor immoral: but unmoral. That, to the discerning, is self-evident. But I am aware of the strong prejudice conceived by many against the cards themselves, as though the pieces of pasteboard so marked were essentially evil. Personally I know nothing of cards; but I suppose there is something peculiarly fascinating about the various games they are used to play. It is not difficult for me to imagine a game of cards to be a very pleasant diver-

sion, nor indeed to believe that such a game may be mentally refreshing. I am not now speaking of the use of cards for gambling purposes. No one questions that cards are frequently put to evil uses; that even in private drawing-rooms men and women have been inspired by a simple, friendly game with a passion for gambling which has led to their ruin, and even to suicide. No one whose knowledge is at all extensive, will deny that cards have been the latchkey to the penitentiary for many—to let them in, however, not to let them out. I say it is not to be wondered at that so many should look upon a pack of cards as having been printed in hell, in view of the terrible havoc they have wrought.

But it must surely be assumed that no true disciple of Christ would permit himself to have part in a game in which any of these things could find a place. He would play cards only in such a way as there could be "no harm" in it.

But what shall we say of the dance? I confess to having had no personal experience. There are those who insist that the modern dance in any and all its forms is always and only evil. I have no doubt it is often so. Indeed I feel sure that certain dances can work only evil to those who engage in them. But I have no time to-day to discuss that aspect of the question. I would take ground, for the sake of argument at least, that many censors of the dance who are better informed and more experienced than I, would not take, I would assume that there may be perfectly innocent and harmless dances. For I am compelled to assume that no Christian would deliberately and persistently participate in any sort of dance associated with the probability of evil. I assume, therefore, (I say again, for the sake of argument, for the testimony of the more experienced makes me cautious), that under right auspices some pure-minded people may dance without injury to themselves.

Thus I have assumed that it is only with the good play, the innocent card game, the harmless dance—if such there may be, the Christian will have anything to do.

Can you, however, be sure that others will be equally discriminating? It is admitted that these things are not always good, but sometimes decidedly evil. What if others fail to exercise your carefully discriminating judgment? Perhaps someone will say that their failure to do so is their own responsibility. Beyond question, to great multitudes, the theatre is the theatre, the dance is the dance, and cards are cards. They do not discriminate, and they will not. Some fail for want of capacity to discern between the good and the bad, and some from want of inclination. "But that," I have heard even professed Christians say, "is their concern and not mine."

But remember, *the text lays down a principle for the government of the relationship of a person of a very high degree of religious intelligence to one who is densely ignorant and superstitious.* You must draw the picture for yourself. At one end of the scale you have a religiously enlightened mind, plus education, culture, refinement, wealth; all these co-operating to discern between the precious and the vile. At the other end you have one steeped in prejudice, restricted in capacity, weak in character, and sheep-like in his imitative propensities. Between these two extremes there may be many varying degrees, of intelligence on the one hand or ignorance on the other. But I take the extremes. What principle can possibly bridge that gulf or span that difference of spiritual enlightenment and moral vigor? *Only the principle of the Cross!* And that is the principle by which all truly Christian conduct is determined, and on which all Christian character is founded: "For whom Christ died"! Let me take the highest possible ground. I anticipate your argument as to your taste for literature and the drama, and your love of music and the aesthetic, and your passion for cultivated society and mental recreation, and your superiority to the degrading influences to which the less favored are subject. I will take your argument at par—"Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge"! Do you hear it? "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge." Let me thunder it in your ears: "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge"! What then? "Through thy knowledge shall thy weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" Oh, my brother, do you care? Do you care for the soul for whom Christ died? What? Does this question of amusements affect the business of soul-saving? Yes, it does. Most emphatically it does! The passion for pleasure, for society, for worldly amuse-

ment, has made barren churches as it has made childless homes! *And we shall never accomplish our God-given task, nor glorify Him in the salvation of men, until by the power of the Holy Spirit we learn to relate ourselves to men everywhere as to souls for whom Christ died.*

III. *May I venture now to offer a Word of Exhortation and Application?*

For the sake of clearness, I repeat, I have nothing now to say about indulgence in that which is known to be sinful. Nor have I any word of denunciation to utter respecting that which is not evil in itself. It would be as wrong to belie your moral intelligence by assuming there is evil where there is none, as it would be to ignore the ignorant conscientiousness of another, who, where there is no evil, thinks there is.

The supreme question is, Can any one of us afford to be indifferent to the fate of one "for whom Christ died"? That is the highest and strongest appeal which even God can make. From eternity He has estimated everything by the Cross! Have we learned to estimate men by the Cross? The man is poor, and ignorant, and obscure, and unattractive, I know; but he is a soul "for whom Christ died." For his own sake he is worth much; and he is one for whom an inestimable price has been paid.

For Christ's sake we cannot afford to be indifferent toward such an one. Can you not remember the thrill of satisfaction you experienced when you first realized that Christ died for you? And in that hour you realized His own satisfaction in some measure. Dare any of us consent to permit anything which might defeat the purpose of the Cross in another's life? Shall we have done once for all with all worldly standards, and henceforth measure all men by the Cross?

Do you realize that *some may be perishing through your act of selfish indulgence?* "It is only an innocent pleasure," you say. But the moment your pleasure becomes an occasion of stumbling it ceases to be innocent: "When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ."

Do you see *what estimate they put upon the weak brother who selfishly insist upon doing their own pleasure irrespective of its influence upon others?* They put their own passing pleasure before the salvation of the soul. That is the text's teaching. That is the consideration it forces upon us: "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" Is there a professed Christian here who will refuse to forego an evening at the theatre that another soul may have an eternity in glory? On one particular evening the weaker brother saw you there, and he found sanction for his course in yours. I know he is "weak," and "ignorant," and "prejudiced," and "narrow-minded," and all that is contemptible in the eyes of some: But for him Christ died! Can it be that anyone of us will deliberately sacrifice the interests of a soul for whom Christ died for a few hours' pleasure? Even to save a soul from death can we refuse to deny ourselves? I must be faithful. The spiritual requirements of the hour are insistent. The testimony of Scripture is most urgent: "Destroy not him with thy theatre-going, or with thy card-playing, or with thy dancing, or with the pursuit of any other kind of pleasure—destroy not him for whom Christ died!"

Does someone contend that such teaching is extravagant and impracticable? That it involves the erection of impossible standards? That such self-denial requires an unreasonable service? I remind you that the difference between the very greatest and the very humblest of earth, is infinitesimal in comparison with the gracious and infinite stoop of the Lord of glory when He died for your sinful soul. And for one for whom He died will you do nothing? For one for whom He sacrificed everything, will you sacrifice nothing?

No, my standard is not impossible. It is the simple standard of the New Testament. To be a "living sacrifice," to "be not conformed to this world," is our "reasonable service." It is for this we are here. For this we have been sent. I should be unworthy of my office were I to preach anything less. I must apply the principle to myself; and I say frankly, that if there be any pleasure upon which my heart is so set that it is more to me than the interests of a soul for whom Christ died, I am unworthy of my office, and I ought immediately either to resign that pleasure, or resign my office. And I say the same to the office-bearers in this church; I say it to the deacons: If there be a deacon of

this church who thinks more of an evening at the theatre, of the diversion of a game of cards, or of the pleasure of the dance, than of the interests of a soul for whom Christ died, he is unworthy of his office; and he ought immediately to resign either his pleasure or his office. And the same may be said of Sunday school teachers and officers, and also of every member of the church. The teaching of Scripture requires that every interest in life should be subordinated to the purpose of the Cross—which is, that they should be saved for whom Christ died. For any of us who call ourselves disciples of Christ, there is but one course compatible with love and loyalty to Christ, and that is to resolve that by His grace, and by the might of His Spirit in the inner man, we will put Him always and everywhere first; that we will live to realize the purpose of the Cross in our own lives, and in the lives of others; that we will lose our lives for Christ's sake, that thus we may find them.

As I thus closed my meditation, a thought occurred to me, it may have been a day-dream—I said to myself: "What if some young man should rise in his pew before all the congregation and say, 'I have here and now resolved that henceforth at all costs, I will in all things put Christ first'—if such a thing should occur, who knows how many would follow his example, and perhaps the revival we have longed and prayed for would come to-day." Shall we not all resolve to rededicate ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, and from this forward, put Him always first?

(As the conclusion of the sermon was reached a young man under the gallery rose and said, "I would like to say, Pastor, that I have resolved to put Christ first," and in a few moments a large number of men and women rose signifying the same decision.)

NOTE: This sermon was published in August, 1922, since which date we have had constant application for copies. We republish it now that we may be able to grant the scores of requests that have reached us.

EDITORIAL

"THE CHARIOT OF ISRAEL AND THE HORSEMEN THEREOF."

The Prophetic Office Is Paternal in Its Character and Relations. The true prophet, like the true pastor, is the father of his people. When Joash addressed the prophet as his father, he did not employ a mere formal term of respect. The king was deeply moved, and "wept over his face" as he said; "O my father, my father"; and we think he meant what his language implied, that Elisha had been the father of his people.

There is a common mental attitude which is inhospitable to the parental word, or to any word weighted with time and experience. There is a quality of mind which, though it may enlarge with the years, does not mature; it is a house with an eastern prospect and no back window,—which sees the sun rise, but never observes its setting. It lives in the present and the future, and is without even a nodding acquaintance with the past. Such a mind develops a temper like Rehoboam's, which welcomes only the counsel of youth and inexperience. It assumes that life is one long, unclouded summer afternoon. It is a mental garden in which there are no perennials, and in which that which grows, grows quickly because there is no depth of earth. The spirit of such a life is characterized by an enthusiastic readiness to manufacture things quickly; but is impatient of everything which requires time to grow. The only heavenly characteristic of such a life, is, that it will have nothing to do with any kind of tree which does not yield its fruit at least every month.

To all such,—and who of us does not recognize some aspects of his own disposition in the picture?—the prophet must come with the enlightening, steady, experimental word of a father. He must set the segmentary and incidental events of the individual life in the light of universal experience. He must bring the present into the light of the past, and throw the light of the eternal upon the temporal; and thus give to life a true perspective. He must be a father to the orphan mind, which, child-like, is so engrossed with its temporal toys, it has never enquired whence it came; and therefore is ignorant of life's true relations.

"Where there is no vision the people perish." So perished Pharaoh and all

his hosts. "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph." Had there been an Egyptian prophet to bridge that gap, and to inform the king of his indebtedness to the past, he had been worth more to Pharaoh than the chariot of Egypt and the horsemen thereof. And the true prophet must be a father to the new kings which know not Joseph, to teach them not to contend against, but to ally themselves with principles which climb from pits, through dungeons, to a throne.

But how is a pastor to be a father to Israel? As years are multiplied, and experience is deepened and extended, a man may summon courage to offer counsel to his juniors. But it is not of naturally acquired wisdom we speak; for the richer his own experience, the less inclined a wise man is to obtrude his advice upon others. Nor was it superior natural capacity, or widely varied knowledge which made Elisha a father to his nation. A man who had known Spurgeon well, told us as he reread his early sermons, he was led to marvel chiefly at the maturity of their thought, and the wealth of experience they implied. He said he could not understand how so young a man as he then was, had attained the mental stature of a sage. We ventured to reply that we believed there was but one explanation, and quoted the psalmist's saying: "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." For it was on this ground that Elihu presumed to speak. He said, "I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion."

The prophet is a messenger. In the New Testament meaning of the term, he must be an expositor of the great principles of the Bible. And the expository preacher may come to his congregation with the authority of years, and the weight of unlimited experience. He is wisdom's mouthpiece, saying, "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? . . . Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. . . . The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways."

The prophet is a father to his people only as he voices the ageless message of God's Book, and speaks the word of the eternal Father. Then, without apology or presumption he may cry in the hearing of the world: "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not."

The Prophetic Office Is Dynamic in Its Potentialities. The true prophet is not a dispenser of soothing syrup, but a dealer in dynamite. Whatever comfort he administers is not effected by narcotizing but by the disclosure of a Source of power adequate to the need of human experience. The peace he offers is not grounded in compromise but upon conquest; and is purchased only at a price of blood. Joash gratefully confessed that Elisha's ministry had in it a dynamic which was superior to the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.

Need we speak of the New Testament authority for this teaching? Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God

unto salvation"; "We preach Christ crucified, unto them which are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God"; "The kingdom of God is not in word but in power"—not in word but in dynamite!

But how does the prophet supplant or support the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof? There is a preventive power in his ministry, which is as invaluable as it is inconspicuous. An immune serum has in it an element of power, which, though visually microscopic, is mighty enough victoriously to contend with the last enemy himself. And a prophetic ministry consists in the dissemination of principles of incalculable potentialities. How many a life is fortified, by sermonic inoculation with Biblical principles, against the diffused infections of a morally impure atmosphere! How many a citadel of human character has been able successfully to withstand, or strategically to evade, the assaults of the enemy because of advance intelligence of his devices! Thus Elishu forewarned the king of Israel. For when the king of Syria repeatedly laid plans for Israel's undoing, although the king of Israel had no aviator to discover the enemy's movements, the man of God sent to him saying, "Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down." And thus the king of Israel "saved himself there, not once, nor twice". When the king of Syria enquired of his servants, "Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?" they answered, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber."

It was with such deliverances in mind the ancient preacher said: "This wisdom have I seen under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: there was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."

Elisha's ministry exercised an expulsive power. How often the enemy made excursions into Israel's territory, as did the king of Moab! And it was the prophet who bade Jehoram and his allies, "Make this valley full of ditches"; and by the wisdom of his strategy enabled them to expel the enemy, and follow the Moabites even into their own country. But what intangible moral evil Elisha's gracious ministry expelled from the nation's life; what foul fountains he healed; what poisonous pottage he neutralized, cannot fully be estimated. It is thus the ministry of the gospel enables men to put on the whole armour of God; and to wrestle against principalities and powers, and to stand in the evil day. Thus, too, light is thrown into dark corners, and creatures of the night, and evils which hide in the shadow, are cast out; and all the springs of life are sweetened; and many a pleasantly situated, but one-time cursed Jericho, is made pure, and healthy, and habitable.

Let us consider also the expansive power which characterized Elisha's ministry. He was a great man with a long and wide range of vision, who could not be shut up in a small room. The effect of his presence upon the school of the prophets was typical of his ministry to the nation's life: "The place where we dwell with thee", said the sons of the prophets, "is too strait for us"; and forthwith they built a larger home. And the whole nation lived a large life. His ministry pushed back the boundaries of their interest and influence into Moab, and Syria; and the nation lived more richly and deeply with him. It is even so that a faithful ministry of the Word brings relief and enlargement and enrichment of life to the soul that is stagnant, and impoverished, and circumscribed. The dingy office, the narrow workroom, the monotonous and unelastic schoolroom, the hot kitchen, the ill-ventilated car, the surging, thronging duties, the motley crowd,—how full the world seems with no breathing space or elbow room for anyone! But when the word of the Infinite is spoken with a breath from the immeasurable spaces in the heavens, how the straitened life expands, and the walls of our limitations are dissolved, and our feet are set in a large place; and we find, like Isaac in his well-digging, we progress from Esek to Sitnah, and arrive at length at Rehoboth where there is room!

And a true prophet is a maker of war. He will never leave well enough

and of discernment to which they were formerly strangers. And they are also endowed with a gift of farsight; an ability to see things in perspective; and thus to give to the mind a new conception of the proportional values of life. In short, the Source of the springs of life, for the Christian, is in the heights, and therefore life in all its aspects must rise higher, must show "more" strength and beauty than appear in other lives.

It would therefore be singularly anomalous, if the mind made by divine grace to be alert to the marks of divine skill in other realms, should be blind to the hidden possibilities of humankind. We do not fail to "salute" with respect to the treasures of material wealth. The true Christian is distinguished by his superior discernment, in saluting the human treasures of moral and spiritual potentialities. And we shall be like our Master, and do "more than others" only as we "honour all men". The man who allows himself to become or to remain exclusive in his interests and friendships; who is indifferent to his neighbour's welfare, and makes no effort to acquaint himself with those whom he regards as his inferiors, is far from having the mind of Christ. The man or woman who is the confidante and companion of Christ will esteem it a privilege and joy to speak to publicans and sinners.

All this involves an *Obligation to Cultivate the Grace of Sociability*. Like all other Christian graces it is not born mature. It attains to its full strength and usefulness only by careful cultivation. All God's gifts are potentialities. He deals with us as Joseph dealt with the people who came to him: he fed them during the famine, and suffered no one to hunger during the time of dearth; but when the seven years were ended he said to those who came, "Lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land." And the grace of sociability is in us all in germ. It may not always be easy to salute others than our brethren. It may require more than a little effort to find interest in the conversation of some people. Our interest may rise a little higher than the changes of the weather, the commonplaces of travel, and the every-day sights of the street. And we shall meet with others characterized by qualities of heart and mind less easily overcome than a mere neutral, negative unattractiveness. The whole bent of their lives may be in a direction opposite to ours. They may, like the Samaritans, be manifestly hostile to every one whose face is as though he would go to Jerusalem. Then we shall be tempted to ask permission to call down fire from heaven, or at least to avoid further intercourse with them.

Then, too, the soil of our own dispositions may not be very favourable to the growth of this spiritual exotic planted in our natures by the Spirit of God. There may be a hard clay clod of natural reserve through which the tender green blade of an unselfish interest in others finds it hard to break. There may be a big stone of native selfishness around which the delicate heavenly plant finds it difficult to come out into the light of day. In the very constitution of the soil of our natures there may be ingredients which afford no nourishment for such life as is expressed in this particular grace of sociability,—elements, indeed there may be, which can only be neutralized by a continual breaking up of the soil which will expose it to the spiritual chemistry of heavenly rain, and dew, and sunshine.

At all events, it may safely be assumed that such sociability as is something "more" than natural to us, and yet such as is indigenous to the new life in Christ, will be produced in us only at the cost of much labour. We commend it to our readers as a grace to be cultivated by royal warrant. We are under the same obligation to display this grace as to exhibit the graces of joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. They are all the fruits of a cultivated spiritual life.

This grace imposes upon the believer the task of studying human nature as a solemn obligation. We ought to study our own natures that we may know what is easy to us and what is difficult. Thus we may learn under what circumstances and in relation to what opposites in human character, we are especially liable to display an unchristian spirit. We all have our opposites as well as our affinities; and we can know and recognize their approach only as we know ourselves.

And we should study other people. There is no more interesting and pro-

fitable study in life. The successful men, in all walks of life, owe their success in large measure to their ability to understand their fellows. And in view of the diligence of many to understand men in order to be able to take advantage of them, there is a pressing need for a Christian understanding of human nature in order to its redemption. We do not propose to give away our piano because no one can play it without learning. We do not take a book from our shelves and cast it into the fire because it is written in a language we do not understand. Nor are we proud of our inability to make the spirit of Handel speak in our piano; we do not boast of our ignorance of foreign tongues. The rather we take pride in setting ourselves to the mastery of these things, and find pleasure in the achievement. And ought we not rather to be humbled when we meet a man with whom we find it difficult to be kind? May it not be that we should find in him an instrument of music, if we understood how to play it? that we might discover in him a treasury of wisdom, if we understood the language?

But have we not found already some little reward in the direction of this proposed line of endeavour? The prospector finds satisfaction in coming upon gold; the explorer in making his way over trackless seas and tangled forests, that he may open up a new land; the archaeologist gets his reward in the unearthing of some long-buried tablet bearing a message from a remote generation; the man of business finds compensation for his toil in his growing wealth; the artist in the perfection of his art. But these achievements are not greater than his who discovers an enduring friend where he had thought a foe was living, or only a boor.

We remember our first meeting with a man, who, we were told, had proved to many "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". At that first meeting we wondered what others could possibly see in him. To us he seemed rather dull and uninteresting. He talked but little; and what he did say seemed to have in it little suggestion of force or versatility. We had a feeling that he would prove to be monotonously the same through the years. We met him the second time, and he had not altered in the least. There was the same almost gentle voice, the same quiet and reserved manner. He was the sort of man who never slammed a door, nor left it open to be violently slammed by the wind. He could go out of a house without anyone's knowing that he had gone, and he could come in again just as noiselessly. We were thrown into his company again and again, but the only variety we could observe in him was different varieties of sameness. No one would have called him clever. He was absolutely devoid of genius, unless it were a genius for being always the same. He was always calm. There was nothing of the barometer about him. He was not like a train with snow-covered cars: one could never tell what the weather was like where he had come from. We found ourselves feeling that this man would stand undisturbed in the midst of a burning building, and warn others not to stumble in their haste; or, like Paul, stand on the deck of a sinking ship and bid others be of good cheer. So little by little we turned to him. Instinctively we sought his company when we were wearied of change; and he was always waiting, just the same. It was a pleasure to be with him when we had nothing to say. In his company we could always find pleasure in silence. When the sun shone he did not reflect its brilliance; and when the day was dull he did not partake of its dullness. He was equally serene at a wedding or at a funeral: laughter and tears were equally unusual expressions of his quiet soul. He is far away now, and we have not seen him for years. We do not correspond regularly; but no offence is taken on either side on account of a year's silence. If we should be where he lives in twenty years' time, if we found him still living, we know we should find him just the same. "A man shall be as . . . the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." But we had almost missed the wealth of comfort in his monotony: we saluted one whom we did not understand,—but—but we almost passed him by!

Have we not had many experiences similar to that related? "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?" Like Samson, we have got honey from many a lion of whom we were once afraid.

We must, however, venture upon a word of caution. The most diligent

study will not discover all the virtues in one character. It would be contrary to God's universal practice of dividing things, if it were possible to find all desirable qualities in one character. We cannot have all climates in one country: we must travel the world for that. Nor can we see nature, in all her moods at any one season. We shall not quarrel with Canada when she changes her coat of green for one of white by and by. She has as much right to a new coat and a change of mood as we have. We cannot produce all varieties of fruit in one garden; we cannot get every kind of mineral from one mine. There is no more beautiful land in the world than that which lies about Vesuvius: but if people will live there they must put up with Vesuvius.

God always speaks in parables. Can we not learn the lesson? We must not expect to find Moses and Aaron in one person. That human landscape called David is likely to have one ugly scar, and its volcanic fires are likely to work havoc on its sunny slopes. We cannot have that mighty, rocky, range of sky-piercing mountain peaks, known as Elijah, without the corresponding depths, the vast solitudes inseparable from such altitudes, the truly awful canyons whose depths seem sometimes to be black with despair. And yet some frivolous town-dweller thinks he ought to be able to understand Elijah without study!

Men live in Arctic regions for the sake of its one attractive feature, that it is the land of gold. Others choose to journey in lands remote from civilization, for the game that they can find. So each part of God's creation has its own peculiar attraction, for the sake of which its natural disadvantages are endured. And thus in the world of human nature, if we would have variety we must have a wide acquaintance with the world. And in every stranger we salute, in every natural antipathy we overcome, in every sphinx-like human face we lighten with a smile of gratitude, we register a triumph for the grace which enables men to be and do "more than others".

We need hardly say Who is the great Exemplar of the rule of life we are discussing,—there is but One, the Man Christ Jesus! It has ever been the wonder of the world that He did not reserve His salutations for His brethren: He spoke graciously to and ate with publicans and sinners. It was because "He knew what was in man". What a variety of men He drew around Him! No two of them alike; and no one of them in whose character there was no flaw. And yet He endured them,—no, not endured them! He loved them, and delighted to have them near Him. That He might miss nothing of the infinitely varied human reflections of His glory, He has chosen "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues to stand before the throne, and before the Lamb."

"By misery unrepelled, unawed
By pomp or power, thou seest a Man
In prince or peasant,—slave or lord—
Pale priest, or swarthy artisan.

"Through all disguise, form, place, or name,
Beneath the flaunting robes of sin,
Through poverty and squalid shame,
Thou lookest on the man within,

"On man, as man, retaining yet,
Howe'er debased, and soiled, and dim,
The crown upon his forehead set,—
The immortal gift of God to him.

"Let there be reverence in thy look;
For that frail form which mortals wear
The Spirit of the Holiest took,
And veiled His perfect brightness there."

MISSION FIELDS UNDER NORTHERN CONVENTION.

For the particular benefit of Canadian readers we print below an extract from the June number of The Baptist Spokesman, Portland, Oregon, which is a concise report of the conditions on the foreign mission fields under the direction of the Northern Baptist Convention, as learned by Dr. Curtis Lee Laws and Dr. Earle V. Pierce, on their recent visit to the fields.

A Frank and Accurate Report by Dr. Pierce.

Dr. Curtis Lee Laws and Dr. Earle V. Pierce spent five months in traveling through the mission fields in China, Burma, and India. The full report of their impressions and the facts of the situation are frankly set forth in the Watchman-Examiner of May 21.

The following brief summary of Dr. Pierce's report is reprinted from the May "Spokesman."

What are the bare facts of what Dr. Laws and Dr. Pierce observed on the foreign field?

1. That most of our missionaries have the faith and are preaching it on the field.

2. That the great mass of the heathens are still unsaved.

3. That the policy of our board toward the work in China is not in accordance with the Great Commission, which is in the order: PREACH—BAPTIZE—TEACH. They report that the failure of our work in China, where it has failed, seems to be because we are going at it backwards: TEACH—PREACH—BAPTIZE.

4. The Southern Convention is having marked success for they have followed the order laid down in the Commission.

5. They did not habitually use their right of questioning missionaries, but found evidence that the board had sent out both liberal and conservative missionaries in following out the "inclusive policy".

6. They found some liberal missionaries on the field who had found their message and become evangelists and others had not.

7. In Swatow, educating the native preachers had given place to secular education.

8. When a cut is necessary due to lack of funds, the preaching stations are sacrificed but the secular schools continue.

9. The schools are not making a success of turning out native preachers, according to the report.

10. The majority of the heathens educated at the expense of our missionary fund do not become Christians.

11. Only thirty per cent. of those who do become Christians are found at work later in the native churches.

12. They found places where the so-called social gospel took precedence of the gospel of personal redemption and salvation.

The Jarvis Street Whole Bible Sunday School Lesson Course

Lesson XVIII.

August 2nd, 1925.

THE RELATION OF CONDUCT TO DESTINY.—Ecclesiastes, chapters 9-11.

I. Chapter Nine Marks the Absence of Temporal Judgment Under the Sun.

Those who have been following this lesson course will remember the argument of Job's would-be comforters when they insisted that all sin was judged here and now, and that Job's sorrows could be explained only on the assumption that he had sinned. The Preacher was a keener observer; and in this chapter he notes that the opposite of the contention of Eliphaz and his associates is true.

1. Moral distinctions in life are clear and unmistakable enough—some are good and some are bad; some wicked and some righteous; some clean and

some unclean. And this is a true picture of life. One cannot but observe these things. 2. Yet this wise man seemed startled to note that one event comes to all; and that evil in this life often meets no judgment, and good receives no reward (vs. 1-3). 3. Hence there is in this an implied necessity for future adjustments. To lose sight of the principle of divine retribution is to invite the removal of all moral distinction.

II. He Looks Upon Life as a Determinative Probation.

"For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion." By which he means to say that that which, in the eyes of men, is but mean and contemptible, if it be alive, is better than majesty dead. 1. He conceives of life as the only certain sphere of activity, and of preparation for reward. What is to be done must be done here and now. We are to make the most of our opportunities (vs. 5 and 6). 2. The highest prize to him is the divine favour. This is consistent with what he elsewhere declares, that wisdom is the principle thing.

III. He Observes that Wisdom's Intrinsic Value is Unaffected by Human Contempt.

1. Wisdom is often associated with poverty (v. 15). It is still true that great artists and musicians and masters of literature have nearly all been poor. 2. Cities and nations have often been indebted for their salvation to some poor man's wisdom (vs. 14 and 15). 3. The world's greatest benefactors have often been neglected (v. 16). The most notable example of this neglect is found in Him Who is incarnate Wisdom; and Who was despised and rejected of men. 5. Notwithstanding all human estimate, however, the wise man still contends that wisdom is better than strength (v. 16).

IV. The Certainty of an Ultimate Correct Appraisal.—Chapter 11.

1. We are admonished to do good for the sake of doing good (v. 1); and its fruit will some day appear. 2. We are to serve in faith regardless of wind and clouds (v. 4). 3. We are to sow bountifully, on the principle that many are called and few chosen (v. 6). Applying this principle to the Bible School, it suggests that though few come it is worth while to make many calls. 4. So also the life that is lived by the senses and on the carnal plane shall ultimately find divine judgment.

THE PULPIT LAST SUNDAY AND NEXT.

On Sunday last the hand of the Lord was again upon us for good. At the morning School there was an attendance of eight hundred and thirty-four. Dr. Gillon preached a great sermon on John 3: 5. In the evening the church was filled to capacity; and a large number responded to the invitation. Five were baptized at the evening service. There was a large gathering at the open air meeting at the rear of the church at eight-thirty.

Next Sunday will be Dr. Gillon's last Sunday in Jarvis Street. He will teach the Pastor's class at ten o'clock, preach morning and evening at the regular hours, and deliver the last sermon in the Prodigal Series in the open air at eight-thirty,—"The Father's Attitude Toward the Prodigal". Dr. Gillon will teach the lesson Monday evening, July 27th, and we hope will remain with us until Thursday.

DR. SHIELDS AT HOME.

On August 2nd, the Pastor will occupy his own pulpit, for the first time following vacation. It is expected he will reach Toronto Friday, July 31st, and will attend the Saturday evening prayer meeting.