

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Christian View of Pleasure

There are few things harder to define than pleasure. The same thing can be a delight to one person and a penance to another. There is in pleasure a completely subjective element. To one person one kind of food is appetising and desirable, to another person the very same thing is nauseating. One kind of music will thrill one person and will appear to another person only an unpleasant noise. One person will enjoy games and sport; another person will think them a childish waste of time. One person will read avidly a certain kind of book; another person will find the same kind of book almost unreadable. One person will love travel; another person will find it an exhausting weariness. Pleasure varies from person to person—but there must be some kind of principle behind all the variation.

The simplest thing to say is that pleasure is the opposite of work, but that will hardly do. In the first place, there are people who are never happier than when they are at their work. Their work is a joy to them. Take it away and you would take from them that which in life they enjoy most of all. And secondly, there are many pleasures which involve a great deal of hard work. Many a man works harder at some game at which he wants to excel than at his day's work. Many a man puts a great deal of thought and time and effort into his hobby. There are people whose pleasures look very like hard labour.

We may go a step further. We may say that the effort which pleasure involves is effort which is voluntarily made, and which is made for the sake of no material reward. For instance,

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

a man might spend a great deal of time and thought and effort and money building up a stamp collection in which he found delight; that would be pleasure. But, if he stopped stamp-collecting and started stamp-dealing, he would be doing much the same kind of things, but it would be work. A man may spend a great deal of time and money on a game, and so long as it is a game it will be pleasure. But he may decide to become a professional; he may decide to make his living by that game. In that case he will be doing much the same kind of things, but it will be work. It is then true that the absolutely voluntary nature of the activity is an essential part of pleasure.

But still another step must be taken. A man may spend a great deal of time and thought and money on some activity; it may be quite voluntary; it may have no material reward. But it may not be in the normal sense of the word pleasure. For instance, a man may give a great deal of time to church work, to youth work, to social service. He does it voluntarily; he does it for no material reward; but that is not what we normally mean by pleasure.

So we have to come back to the essential meaning of the word. Pleasure is that which is *pleasant*; and that which is pleasant is that which is *pleasing*. Pleasure is that which a man does simply and solely to please himself. Pleasure is what a man does when he does what he likes. He is not doing it because he has to; he is not doing it to earn money and to support his family; he is not doing it to be of help and service to others; he is doing it for no other reason than that he likes doing it.

We no sooner begin to think of pleasure than we remember that there have often been Christians to whom pleasure is a bad word. There were those who thought the same long before Christianity came into the world. Antisthenes the Cynic philosopher once said that he would rather be mad than pleased, that he would prefer madness to pleasure. There have been those who would have said that there was no such

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

thing as a good pleasure, if pleasure is taken as referring to anything in this world.

The monks and the hermits of the fourth and fifth centuries were like that. H. B. Workman describes them in his book, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*. They made a cult of discomfort. They trained themselves to do without food. A Cilician monk called Conon existed for thirty years on one meal a week. They trained themselves to do without sleep. Adolus never slept except the three hours before dawn. Sisoos spent the night on a jutting crag so that if he fell asleep, he would pitch to his death. Pachomius never lay down, but slept, when he did sleep, standing in his cell. Some lived on grass; some lived in cells so small that they could neither stand up nor lie down. Some were famous for their 'fleshlessness'. It was said of Macarius that 'for seven years he ate nothing cooked by fire', so that 'the bones of his face stood out naked beyond the wont of men'.

They made a cult of filth. The dirtier they were, the holier they were. It was said of Simeon Stylites, as a mark of great holiness, that his body 'dropped vermin as he walked'. Jerome wrote to Paula: 'Why should Paula add fuel to a sleeping fire by taking a bath?' And Paula replied: 'A clean body and a clean dress mean an unclean soul.' Anthony never changed his vest or washed his feet. The great Roman lady Melania boasted that after her conversion she never allowed water to touch her, except the tips of her fingers, in spite of her doctor's advice.

They made a cult of killing all human emotion and all human relationships. There is nothing uglier than their view of the relationship between men and women. Augustine would never see any woman except in the presence of a third party. An Egyptian monk Pior was ordered by his superior to see his sister. He obeyed, but he kept his eyes shut tight all the time he was in his sister's presence. A dying nun refused to see her brother. Melania, to whom we have already referred, lost her husband and two of her three sons in one week. Her reaction

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

was to thank God: 'More easily can I serve thee, O Lord, in that thou hast relieved me of so great a burden.' When Paula was about to enter the convent, her children wept and besought her not to leave them. 'She raised her eyes to heaven, and overcame her love for her children by her love for God. She knew herself no longer a mother.' A certain Mucius entered a convent with his eight-year-old son. They were separated. To test Mucius the boy was systematically beaten. 'The love of Christ conquered, nor did he grieve over the lad's injuries.' One day when the lad was in tears, Mucius was ordered to throw him into the river. And 'this new Abraham' would have done so, had the monks not stopped him.

It is easy to see what people like that would have thought of the word pleasure. And that tradition has never wholly died.

It took England a very long time to escape from the Puritan tradition. The best account of Puritan England is still to be found in Chapter 8 of John Richard Green's *A Short History of the English People* and in the second chapter of Thomas Babington Macaulay's *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*.

The publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible did something to England. 'Theology', said Grotius, 'rules there.' 'There is great abundance of theologians in England,' Casaubon said to a friend. 'All point their studies in that direction.' As J. R. Green put it: 'The whole nation became, in fact, a church.' But at first there might be gravity and solemnity and seriousness, but there was no gloom. Colonel Hutchinson was one of the people who signed the death warrant of Charles the First; he was a Cromwellian and a Puritan. His wife left a most beautiful biography of him, which was published early in the nineteenth century. Hutchinson was serious enough, but he was expert in hawking, in fencing and in dancing. He loved 'gravings, sculptures and all the liberal arts'. 'He had a great love for music, and often diverted himself on a viol, on which he played masterly.' John Milton and John Milton's

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

father were Puritans. But John Milton's father composed madrigals to Oriana. He saw to it that his son knew French and Italian as well as Latin, Greek and Hebrew. John Milton played the lute and the organ, and he could admit to loving the theatre of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

Early Puritanism was not what Puritanism was to become. More and more the seriousness and the gravity turned to gloom. More and more the elect stressed and felt their difference from the world. As J. R. Green puts it: 'Humour, the faculty which above all corrects exaggeration and extravagance, died away before the new stress and strain of existence.' A grim legalism descended on life. 'The godly man learned to shrink from a surplice, or a mince-pie at Christmas, as he shrank from impurity or a lie.'

Macaulay tells how the Book of Common Prayer was banned from public and even from private use. 'It was a crime in a child to read by the bedside of a sick parent one of those beautiful collects which had soothed the griefs of forty generations of Christians.' Any picture which showed Jesus or Mary was burned. Works of art and beautiful churches were brutally defaced. All public amusements were prohibited and an ordinance was passed that every Maypole in England should be hewn down. All theatrical shows were banned. Playhouses were dismantled, spectators fined, and actors whipped at the cart's tail. Rope-dancing, puppet-shows, bowls, horse-racing, wrestling-matches, games on the village green were all banished from life. The Long Parliament of 1644 put an end to Christmas Day and enacted that 25th December should be observed as a national fast, on which men bemoaned the sins their fathers had previously committed on that day 'by romping under the mistletoe, eating boar's head, and drinking ale flavoured with roasted apples'. Fiddlers were put in the stocks; dancing and hockey on the village green were ended. It was when he was engaged on what he called 'the ungodly practice' of playing tipcat that the voice came to Bunyan: 'Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven,

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

or have thy sins and go to Hell?' Bell-ringing and tipcat had become crimes of the first magnitude.

Henry Graham's *Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* provides a picture at least as gloomy, especially in the chapter on religious and ecclesiastical life. In 1715 a Dumfriesshire Presbytery spent months investigating the charge against a minister that on a printing machine which he had in his manse he had printed copies of a 'profane' song called 'Maggie Lauder'. The Presbytery of Edinburgh denounced those who 'immediately before public worship, and then after it was over, take recreation in walking in the fields, links, meadows and other places, and by entering taverns, ale-houses and milk-houses, drink tittle, or otherwise spend any part thereof, or despise and profane the Sabbath by giving or receiving social visits, or by idly gazing out of windows beholding vanities abroad'. Simply to talk in the street, to go for a walk, to pay a visit, even to look out of the window had become a sin.

In Scotland in the eighteenth century one of the popular institutions was the 'penny wedding'. The people were very poor, and on the occasion of a wedding all contributed a very small sum that there might be an entertainment, especially an entertainment with dancing. In 1715 the Kirk Session of Morton in Dumfriesshire condemned the penny weddings. It talks about 'the great abuse that is committing at wedding dinners, and in particular by promiscuous dancing betwixt young men and women, which is most abominable, not to be practised in a land of light, and condemned of former time of Presbytery as not only unnecessary but sensual, being only an inlet of lust and provocation to uncleanness through the corruptions of men and women in this loose and degenerate age, wherein the devil seems to be raging by a spirit of uncleanness and profanity, making such practices an occasion to the flesh, and thereby drawing men and women to dishonour God, ruin their own souls, and cast reproach upon the holy ways of religion'. Anyone taking part in a penny

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

wedding was to be fined by the church and publicly rebuked at the church service. To people with minds like that any entertainment in which men and women shared was an evil thing.

A certain Mr John Willison was a popular preacher and writer in those days. He gave advice to his people about how they must live so as not to forget God. When they put on their clothes, they must think of the nakedness of their souls and for the need of the robes of imputed righteousness. When they comb their head they must think of their sins, which are more than the hairs thereof. When they sit at supper, they must think of the joy of some day supping with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As they see themselves stripped of clothing, as they prepare for bed, they must think that they came naked into the world and that they will leave it naked. And, as they cover themselves with the blankets, they must think of lying in the cold grave and being covered with the earth.

There was little room for pleasure in a day spent in thoughts like that.

It must have been desperately hard to be a child in those days. John Wesley drew up the rules for his famous school at Kingswood near Bristol. No games whatever were to be allowed in the school. 'He who plays when he is a child will play when he is a man'—and that is not to be thought of. There were no holidays at all. From the day he entered the school until the day he left it, the child had no holiday. All in the school, adults and children alike, rose at four in the morning. The first hour was spent in reading and meditation, in singing and in prayer. On Fridays they fasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. After thirty-five years of it Wesley wrote in his diary: 'The children ought never to play, but they do every day, and even in the school. They run about in the wood, and mix and even fight with the colliers' children . . . They are not religious: they have not the power and hardly the form of it.' W. M. Macgregor, telling of this in his book, *The Making of a Preacher*, wonders at any man trying to

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

lead his fellow men to God and understanding them so little!

George Whitefield recounts in his *Journals* an incident which happened on board the ship on which he was sailing to America:

Had a good instance of the benefit of breaking children's wills betimes. Last night, going between decks (as I do every night) to visit the sick and to examine my people, I asked one of the women to bid her little boy say his prayers. She answered his elder sister would, but she could not make him. Upon this I bid the child kneel down before me, but he would not, till I took hold of his two feet and forced him down. I then bid him say the Lord's Prayer (being informed by his mother he could say it if he would), but he obstinately refused, till at last, after I had given him several blows, he said his prayer as well as could be expected and I gave him some figs for a reward.

Susannah Wesley said about bringing up children: 'The first thing to be done is to conquer their will . . . I insist on conquering the will of children betimes.'

When we remember this kind of attitude, we can very easily see how the church at least in some of its parts inherited a suspicion of pleasure, and how pleasure came to be looked on as something which is wrong as such. And to this day there are still lingering remnants of this attitude.

It would be true to say that a man is known by his pleasures, and so is a society. The things which a man enjoys will provide a clear indication of his character, and the things which it calls sport will reveal the character of a nation. It will then be important to look at the pleasures of that Roman society to which the Christian ethic was first preached.

The basic fact in the whole situation was that by the time Christianity entered the world Rome was mistress of the world, and the Roman citizen was convinced that work was beneath him. The work of the world, as far as he was concerned, was done by slaves. This meant that in Rome there were about

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

150,000 people who had literally nothing to do; and there were another 100,000 whose work was finished by noon. Some safety-valve had to be found for this mass of people; somehow they had to be kept fed and amused. Hence there came the famous phrase that all that the populace now wanted was 'bread and circuses' (Juvenal, *Satires* 10.77-81). Fronto said that the Roman populace was absorbed in two things—food and the shows.

It has been pointed out that Rome had more public holidays than any society in history has ever had. On these public holidays everything stopped, and the populace thronged to state-provided amusements. In the time of Augustus, 66 days were public holidays each year; in the time of Tiberius, 87; in the time of Marcus Aurelius, 135; in the fourth century, 175. When the Colosseum was dedicated under Titus, there were 100 consecutive days of shows and holidays. When Trajan celebrated his Dacian triumph there were 123 consecutive days of public holiday and entertainment. The hardest work that the Roman did was his pursuit of pleasure. Let us then see what these pleasures were.

There have been few times in history with such a passion for gambling. Juvenal said that it was not a purse that men brought to the gambling tables; it was a treasure chest. Nero, Suetonius tells us, gambled at the rate of the equivalent of £4,000 on each pip of the dice, for dicing was the favourite game. At a dinner-party Augustus usually presented each guest with £10 so that, if he so wished, the guest could gamble to pass the time.

Equally, there can have been few ages in history so dedicated to gluttony. By this time the Romans had formed the habit of taking emetics before a meal, and even between courses, to enjoy the food better. Vitellius held power for only a few months during the chaos which followed the death of Nero. He served a dish in a platter called The Shield of Minerva. Suetonius says: 'In this he mingled the livers of pike, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingoes,

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

the milt of lampreys.' When Vitellius entered Rome and assumed for his brief space the imperial power, his brother gave a banquet, at which there were served two thousand fish and seven thousand birds. Seneca (*Moral Letters* 95.15-29) compares the modern luxury with the old Spartan fare. Nowadays, he says, it is not a question of finding dishes to satisfy the appetite but rather to arouse it. Countless sauces are devised to whet men's gluttony. Food was once nourishment for a man; now it is a further burden to an already overburdened stomach. Hence the characteristic paleness, the trembling of wine-sodden muscles, the repulsive thinness due to indigestion rather than to hunger; hence the dropsy; hence the belly grown to a paunch by repeatedly taking more than it can hold; hence the yellow jaundice; the body rotting inwardly; the thickened and stiffened joints . . . The halls of the professor and scholar are empty, but the restaurants are besieged with crowds. There is a medley of bakers and a scurry of waiters. 'How many are kept busy to humour a single belly!' And note it is not a Christian preacher but a Stoic philosopher who is responsible for this indictment. There is a curious resemblance between that world and the world of the latter half of the twentieth century, a world of betting-shops and plush restaurants, a world in which abject poverty and the lushest kind of wealth existed side by side.

It was the age of the degeneration of the theatre. The theatre had become sexual, bawdy and depraved. But it had become something worse. It had become cruel. Many of the plays were about some criminal character and his exploits. In many cases the criminal in the play was played by an actual criminal. And the play ended with the criminal on the stage being crucified or torn limb from limb in the full sight of the audience.

It was the great age of chariot-racing. The greatest of the arenas was the Circus Maximus which was about two hundred yards long and about sixty yards wide; it had room for

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

385,000 spectators. The race was usually seven laps. The chariots might have up to eight or ten horses. This meant that the chariots went fourteen times round the turning-posts, and it was there that what one writer called 'the bloody shipwreck' could happen, for the drivers drove standing in the chariot with their reins wrapped round their bodies, and the flying wheels and the trampling hooves at the turning-points caused many a disaster. The public and even the Emperors were fanatical supporters of the whites or the blues or the greens or the reds. A charioteer could finish up a millionaire. Diocles rode 4,257 races and won 1,462 victories and retired with £375,000. It was not only the prospect of disaster that lured in the crowds; it was the betting in which the millionaire betted in his thousands and the man on the dole staked his last penny. There was even a transfer system whereby the most famous riders were lured away from one faction to another. Chariot-racing in Rome and big-time sport today bear a close resemblance, not least in the way that the financial rewards of sport make nonsense of all real values.

It was, as all the world knows, the age of the gladiatorial games. It was at these that the people received their greatest thrill. The rag man in Petronius' story looks forward to the games which Titus is going to give. 'He'll give us cold steel and no shrinking, and a good bit of butchery in full view of the arena.' That 'carnival of blood' had a strange fascination. Alypius, the friend of Augustine, gave up the games when he became a Christian, but on one occasion his friends dragged him to the arena with them. At first he held his hands over his eyes and refused to look; but the atmosphere got him, and soon he was shouting and swaying and roaring with the rest. There were the Samnites who fought with a great shield and a short sword; there were the Thracians who fought with a little shield and a long curved scimitar; there were the heavy-armed myrmilliones, so called from the fish-badge on their helmets; there were the *retiarii*, the net men, who fought with net and trident; there were the horsemen with their long lances,

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

and the charioteers with the wheels of the chariots with projecting scythe-like blades.

The numbers of the gladiators constantly grew. Julius Caesar had 320 pairs of gladiators; Augustus claimed to have put 10,000 men into the arena. At Trajan's Dacian games 4,941 pairs of gladiators fought in under 120 days. Sometimes they fought each other. Sometimes they fought with beasts. When Titus dedicated his great amphitheatre in AD 80, 5,000 animals were exhibited as shows and more than 9,000 were killed. And in Trajan's Dacian triumph in AD 107, 11,000 animals were killed.

Sometimes the gladiators were slaves; sometimes they were criminals; sometimes they were prisoners captured in war; sometimes they were men who fought because they wanted to. Sometimes a great gladiator fought for years and retired wealthy and honoured. The great ambition of a gladiator was some day to be presented with the wooden sword which signified honourable retirement. Then he would hang up his armour in the temple of Hercules and maybe retire to a little country estate and live to see his son become a citizen—and sometimes he came back to the arena, for there were gladiators who had fighting in their blood.

There were even artificial sea-battles. Artificial lakes, sometimes 1,800 feet long and 2,000 feet wide, were dug out and flooded; and there were sea-fights in which as many as 19,000 marines took part.

The Christian ethic first came to a society which was thrilled by murder in the name of sport. And it is the mark of the power of the Christian ethic that, while the gambling and the gluttony and the pornography continue, the bloodthirsty cruelty is gone.

It is now time to see if we can lay down certain principles by which pleasures may be judged. We can approach this from two different angles. We can approach it from the *negative* angle, and we can lay down certain principles on which

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

certain things have to be rejected; and we can approach it from the *positive* angle, and we can lay down certain tests which a true pleasure must satisfy.

*i. No pleasure can be right if its effects on the person who indulges in it are harmful.* There are pleasures which can injure a man's body and which in the end can have a permanent ill-effect on his health. There are pleasures which can coarsen a man's moral fibre. There are pleasures which can weaken a man's character and lower his resistance power against that which is wrong. Any pleasure which leaves a man less physically fit, less mentally alert, less morally sensitive is wrong.

There are obvious instances of this. The excessive use of alcohol lowers a man's power of self-control and renders him liable to do things which he would not have done if he had been soberly master of himself. The taking of drugs and stimulants can end in leaving a man a physical and mental wreck. Over-indulgence in eating and drinking can leave a man a burden to himself, with his physical fitness seriously impaired. Promiscuous sexual relationships can leave a man with the most tragic of diseases, diseases which will not only ruin his own life, but will descend to any children he may beget.

One of the simplest tests of pleasure is: What does it do to the man who indulges in it? If it is actively harmful, or even if it has a built-in risk in it, it cannot be right.

*ii. No pleasure can be right if its effect on others is harmful.* There are pleasures which can result in the corruption of other people, either physically or morally. To teach others to do wrong, to invite them to do so, or to make it easier for them to do so, cannot be right. It is no small sin to teach another to sin. When Burns went to Irvine to learn flax-dressing he met a man whose influence was altogether bad. Afterwards he said of him: 'His friendship did me a mischief.' It is precisely this that Jesus unsparingly condemned. 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!' (Matthew 18.6,7). If Jesus is right it is easier for a man to be forgiven for his own sins than it is for him to be forgiven for the sins which he taught to others. A man may have a certain right to ruin his own life; he has no right at all to ruin the life of someone else.

A person always needs the first impulse to sin. True, that impulse will often come from within his own heart. But almost always it needs someone's push to turn the inner desire into outer action. And tragically often the wrong thing can be given a spurious attraction. To take drugs can be painted as adventurous and free. An illicit relationship can be presented as a beautiful friendship. Experiment with things which experience has proved to be disastrous can be looked on as the assertion of freedom. To lead or persuade or seduce someone else into any kind of conduct which is hurtful and harmful is a grave and terrible responsibility.

*iii. A pleasure which becomes an addiction can never be right.* The formation of a habit is one of the most terrifying things in life. The first time a person does a wrong thing he does it with hesitation and with difficulty. There are many forms of self-indulgence which are actually unpleasant when they are first tried, but which in the end can become a tyranny. The second time the thing is done it will be easier, and so on. The initial unpleasantness will give place to pleasure, and the day will come when a man discovers that he cannot do without the thing. It has become an addiction. One of the old Greeks said that there were only two questions about any pleasure: 'Do I possess it?' or, 'Am I possessed by it?' 'Do I control it?' or, 'Does it control me?' The minute a man feels that some pleasure is gripping him in such a way that he cannot do without it, he will be well advised to break it before it breaks him. Addiction can happen with quite ordinary things like

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

tobacco; it can happen with more serious things like alcohol; it can happen with drugs, so that a man becomes 'hooked' on some drug, the slave of the evil thing. It is better to have nothing to do with a pleasure which is liable to become an addiction. It is essential, the moment we become aware of the growing addiction, to stop.

*iv. A pleasure is wrong, if to enjoy it the essentials of life have to take less than their proper place.* A pleasure can cost too much, even if it is a good thing in itself. A man may spend on a game time and money which should have gone to his home and family. A man may practise a public generosity which leaves too little for his own home. A man may be so active in the service of the community, of youth, even of the church, that he has too little time left for his own wife and his own children. Anything in life that gets out of proportion is wrong. Whenever any pleasure annexes time and money which should have gone to things and to people in life of even greater importance, then, however fine it is in itself, it is wrong.

*v. Any pleasure which can be a source of danger to others must be very carefully thought about.* Here we are back at Paul's insistence that he will eat and drink nothing which might cause his brother man to fall into error (Romans 14. 21; 1 Corinthians 8.13). He will put an obstacle in no man's way (2 Corinthians 6.3). This is not something on which we can lay down definite rules and regulations. It is something for a man's own conscience to decide within the context of the life that he has to live. But a man is a selfish man if he insists for his own pleasure on that which may ruin his brother.

*vi. We may end this series of principles with what is the most far-reaching test of all. The ultimate test of any pleasure is, does it, or does it not, bring regret to follow, and that pleasure which brings regret is wrong.* Epicurus was one of the very few philosophers who declared that pleasure is the supreme good in life. And we use the word *epicurean* to describe a person

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

who is a devotee of pleasure. But when we do so, we do grave injustice to Epicurus. For Epicurus always insisted that it is essential to take the long view of pleasure, that it is essential to ask, not, what does this feel like just now? but, what will this feel like in the time to come? Epicurus was therefore himself the least epicurean of persons. He believed in a diet of bread and water, for such a diet has no ill consequences to follow. He believed in justice, in honour, in honesty, in chastity and in fidelity, for only when life is lived in these things are there no regrets. Epicurus believed that, if you do make pleasure the supreme good in life, you must take the long view of pleasure.

This is the final guide. We must always ask, not simply, will I enjoy this at this moment? but also, how will I feel about this in time to come? This even the prudent man of the world will ask, but the Christian will ask not only what the thing will feel like in time to come, but also what it will feel like in eternity to come. And if that be so, the supreme test of pleasure is, can it bear the scrutiny of God?

We now turn to the positive side of the matter, and we try to lay down certain principles regarding the Christian view of pleasure.

*i. Pleasure is a necessary element in life, because, if there is no pleasure, one essential part of the total personality of a man is not being satisfied.* Certainly, in life there is the basic need to work; but equally certainly, there is the basic need to play. The desire to play is instinctive. No one needs to teach animals to play. No one needs to teach children to play. Long before they come to the games which have their special rules and which a child has to be taught, children have invented their own games and their own play. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' the proverb says. It does not only make him a dull boy; it makes him an unnatural boy as well.

Life must have its work, and equally life must have its leisure. Leisure can on occasion mean doing nothing, but

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

more often leisure means doing things. Man has two instincts. He has the gregarious instinct; he wants to do things with other people; he wants activity in friendship; and thus the conception of the game, and especially the team game, is born. But man has also the instinct of competition, and in the game the instinct of competition is harmlessly and healthily satisfied. Thus pleasure fills an essential gap in the life of man. Without it a man's personality cannot be fully developed.

ii. Within this general background pleasure has at least two definite aims and uses. *Pleasure relaxes the mind.* The mind can become tired just as the body can become tired. It comes to a stage when it works slowly and laboriously like a machine running down. It comes to a time when it works inefficiently, and when it makes mistakes. Anyone who uses a typewriter knows that the tired he gets the more typing errors he makes and that there comes a time when the only sensible thing is to stop. In industry there tends to be, when work is really hard, a decreasing efficiency from Monday to Friday. The relaxation of the mind is essential.

John Cassian tells a famous story about the apostle John. John was one day stroking a tame partridge. Just then a famous philosopher came to visit him, and the philosopher was dressed as a hunter, for he was going on to hunt after he had visited John. He was astonished to find so famous a man as John playing with a tame bird, and he said so. He said he would never have expected to find John doing a thing like that. 'What is that you are carrying in your hand?' John said. 'A bow,' said the philosopher. 'Do you,' asked John, 'carry it always and everywhere bent, taut and at full stretch?' 'No, indeed,' said the philosopher. 'If I kept it at full stretch all the time, it would soon lose its elasticity; and the arrows would fly neither true nor straight nor fast.' John answered that it is exactly the same with the human mind. Unless there are times when it is relaxed, the mind cannot follow its search for truth as it ought. 'The bow that is always bent will soon

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

cease to shoot straight.' And the mind which is always at full stretch will soon cease to be efficient.

Everyone needs some relaxation. He may find it doing nothing; he may find it in a hobby; he may find it in a game; he may find it in music; he may find it in reading a detective novel; he may find it by going fishing or by spending an hour with his stamp collection or with his model railway. When a man is engaged on these things at the right time, he is far from wasting his time. He is recharging the energies of his mind.

*iii. Pleasure refreshes the body.* Two of the great masters of the spiritual life have pointed out that sometimes, when a man feels that there is something spiritually wrong with him, the trouble is physical and not spiritual at all. Philip Doddridge has a sermon on 'Spiritual Dryness' in which he writes:

Give me leave to offer you some plain advice in regard to it . . . And here I would first advise you most carefully to enquire whether your present distress does really arise from causes which are truly spiritual? Or whether it does not rather have its foundations in some disorder of body or in the circumstances of life in which you are providentially placed, which may break your spirits and deject your mind? . . . The state of the blood is often such as necessarily to suggest gloomy ideas even in dreams, and to indispose the soul for taking pleasure in anything; and, when it is so, why should it be imagined to proceed from any peculiar divine displeasure, if it does not find its usual delight in religion? . . . When this is the case, the help of the physician is to be sought rather than that of the divine, or, at least, by all means together with it; and medicine, diet, exercise and air may in a few weeks effect that which the strongest reasonings, the most pathetic exhortation or consolations, might for many months have attempted in vain.

The advice of Doddridge is plain—if you think that there is something wrong with your mind and your soul, check on

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

your body first. Richard Baxter has a sermon 'Praise and Meditation' in which he writes:

I advise thee, as a further help to this heavenly life, not to neglect the care of thy bodily health. Thy body is an useful servant, if thou give it its due, and no more than its due; but it is a most devouring tyrant, if thou suffer it to have what it unreasonably desires; and it is as a blunted knife, if thou unjustly deny it what is necessary to its support . . .

There are a few who much hinder their heavenly joy by denying the body its necessaries, and so making it unable to serve them; if such wronged their flesh only, it would be no great matter; but they wrong their souls also; as he that spoils the house injures the inhabitants. When the body is sick and the spirits languish, how heavily do we move in the thoughts and joys of heaven!

So two of the great masters of the spiritual life lay it down that the surest way to injure the spiritual life is to neglect the body. The truth is that many a man might work better if he played more. Pleasure is that which relaxes the mind and refreshes the body, and it is no credit to a man, only a sign of grave unwisdom, if he says that he has no time for it.

In his 1520 manifesto, *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Luther writes:

It is the part of a Christian to take care of his own body for the very purpose that, by its soundness and well-being, he may be enabled to labour, and to acquire and preserve property, for the aid of those who are in want, that thus the stronger member may serve the weaker member, and we may be the children of God, thoughtful and busy one for another, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

It is as if Luther said that, if not for his own sake, then for the sake of others and of the service that he must render them as a Christian man, a Christian ought to care for his body.

But general principles have always to be tested by particular applications. There are then certain pleasures which we must

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

look at in the light of the Christian ethic. We choose three, because they are built into modern society.

1. There is, first, gambling. There has never been an age which did not gamble, for gambling seems little short of a human instinct. But the figures for the present time are staggering. Something like £1,000,000,000 a year changes hands in betting transactions. In 1965 the various figures were as follows: On greyhound racing bets amounted to £110,000,000; on football pools, £73,000,000; on horse-racing, £615,000,000; on fixed odds football betting, £65,000,000; on bingo, £35,000,000. There were then 15,500 betting shops. 12,000,000 people engage in the football pools every week. (It is interesting to note that, when the government has taken its tax, and when expenses have been met, about 8s. in the £1 remains for distribution in winning dividends.) There were 12,363 bingo halls, and the membership of the bingo clubs totalled more than 14,250,000. The charge for taking part in bingo, apart altogether from stake money and club membership money, amounted to £11,700,000. These are staggering figures (cf. R. H. Fuller and B. K. Rice, *Christianity and the Affluent Society*, pp. 80, 81). When we consider this whole matter, there are two facts in the general background at which we must look.

(a) The most universal form of gambling is football pools. These pools began thirty or forty years ago. That is to say, they began at the time when unemployment was always a threat and when life for the working man was permanently insecure. In those days in the early and middle thirties such gambling did not arise from anything like a gambling fever. It arose from a very simple and a very pathetic dream of some kind of security on the part of the working man. If only he had enough to meet that threat of the loss of his work without sheer terror. He was living always on the edge of the precipice of unemployment, and it was here he saw his way of escape. That is not so now. In the age of the affluent society, the

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

desire is not for subsistence; it is for luxury—which is a very different thing. The element of pathos is no longer there.

(b) In the present social structure there is another factor. It is the simple fact that there is hardly any way of becoming really rich other than by one of these immense wins which are publicised. Under the present tax structure, if a man had an income of £24,000 a year, he would pay £18,000 in income tax; if he had an income of £100,000 a year, £83,000 of it would be consumed in tax. The only way to get wealth and to get it quickly, and to get it and keep it, is by a big pools or betting win.

These factors help to build gambling into the social background of the time. There is in the Bible no definite instruction about gambling; we cannot quote this or that text; we have to approach the matter from first principles.

*i.* The gambler had better begin by facing the fact that all the chances are against him. His chances of losing are far greater than his chances of winning, and his chances of a really big win are very slim indeed.

*ii.* There are few activities which gain such a grip of a man. It is a common saying of wives that they would rather that their husbands drank than that they gambled. Gambling can become a fever which can leave a man penniless. To go into a casino and to watch professional gamblers at work is a grim experience. There is a bleak and deadly silence and a look on faces which have nothing remotely to do with what we would ordinarily call pleasure.

*iii.* It is not irrelevant to remember the effect of gambling on sport. Horses and dogs can be doped; more rarely, players can be bribed. Gambling is often allied to crime.

*iv.* From the point of view of the Christian ethic, the case against gambling can be based on two things.

(a) Basically, gambling is an effort to gain money without working. It is an attempt to become wealthy with no contribution whatever to the common good. The gambler produces nothing and hopes to gain much. Gambling is a deliberate

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

attempt to bypass the essential social principle that reward should go to productive labour. Gambling literally attempts to get money for nothing.

(b) In gambling all winning is based on someone else's losing. In order that one should win another must lose. One person's good fortune is based on another person's ill fortune. One man's winnings are paid out of another man's losses, losses that all too often the loser can ill afford.

It may be argued that the harmless 'flutter' which a man can well afford, that the raffle, the sweepstake and so on can do no harm. They are the very things which can start a man on a way of excitement which can end in very serious harm. It would be well that the Christian and the church should have nothing whatever to do with gambling, which has reached the proportion of a social menace.

2. There is drug-taking. Drug-taking may well be the supreme problem of the present generation.

*i.* We live in a drug-conscious society. We live a pill-dominated life. People expect to be supplied with a tranquilliser which will pacify them, or a stimulant which will rouse them; and we can even have the bizarre situation of one man at the same time being supplied with a tranquilliser to soothe him, and a stimulant to remove the depression which the tranquilliser caused. No one doubts there is a legitimate and beneficial use of these things. But the root trouble about them is that they are fundamentally a deliberate evasion. They seldom cure; all they do is to hide or mask the symptoms under a cloak of synthetic calm. They are basically and fundamentally an attempt to escape from reality—and the trouble is that reality has a way of catching up with us. No drug on earth can permanently tranquillise a man into peace or stimulate him into action. Their action is temporary; they leave the man unchanged—and there lies the problem. They are an attempt to solve a problem by running away from it.

*ii.* Serious as that problem is, it is much less serious than

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

the problem of the dangerous drugs. The trouble about these drugs is that they do provide an experience which can be in itself a thrill in the initial stages. Young people think it clever to experiment. There are dope peddlers who cash in on the situation, and surely no hell can be too grim for people who grow wealthy by ruining others body and soul. Let us make no mistake about it. The way to the hard and deadly drugs is through the drugs which are allegedly less harmful. As I write this, there is an article in today's *Scotsman* in which a man's story is told. He began with cannabis offered to him in the bar of a public house; he went on to the amphetamines and to methadrine; he proceeded to heroin and to intravenously injected barbiturates; he ended up a morphine addict. His best friend is a victim, assured of death, of drugs because of 'the slow suicide of the hard drugs', and he would never have got to that stage of the ruin of body and soul if he had not started by experimenting with cannabis. No man in his senses can experiment for a thrill with that which can end by being lethal in the most terrible way.

The Christian ethic must be set against this. Certainly freedom is important, but freedom does not include giving people freedom to destroy themselves and giving people freedom to peddle death.

3. We come now to the third of the pleasures characteristic of our present society, the pleasure of drink, of alcohol. This is by far the commonest pleasure, and by far the most controversial. To take only one form of drinking, in one year the production of beer was 29,500,000 barrels, and the amount drunk was 1,032,000,000 gallons. In the ten years between 1955 and 1965 the convictions in the police courts for drunkenness increased by 60 per cent. There are at least 400,000 alcoholics in Britain, of whom one in every five is a woman. In the case of gambling and drug-taking, the actual evidence from scripture is scanty and meagre; in the case of drink it is plentiful and abundant, but by no means consistent. Let us

begin by setting out the scriptural evidence, and let us begin with the Old Testament.

*i.* For the Old Testament people the staple articles of diet were corn and wine and oil. To talk of corn and wine and oil was for them what talking of bread and butter is to us. The question of abstinence from wine did not arise. In the time of famine even the children call to their mothers: "Where is the bread and wine?" (Lamentations 2.12). Whenever the people of Palestine wished to talk of their basic food, it was bread and wine of which they spoke (Genesis 27.37; 1 Samuel 16.20; 25.18; 2 Samuel 16.1; 1 Chronicles 12.40; 2 Chronicles 2.10,15; Nehemiah 5.11,18; 10.37,39; 13.5,12; Job 1.13; Jeremiah 40.10,12). It is well to remember that they drank wine in the proportion of two parts of wine to three of water.

*ii.* It was a sign of the punishment of God when the bread and wine failed. This is what happens when the nation disobeys God and goes its own way (Deuteronomy 28.39; Isaiah 16.10; 24.9). In the day of punishment, when joy is in its twilight and gladness is banished, "there is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine" (Isaiah 24.7,11). In the blessed days the invitation is to come and buy milk and wine (Isaiah 55.1). It is God who gives the corn, the wine and the oil, and it is God who can withhold them (Deuteronomy 28.51; Hosea 2.9; Haggai 1.11).

*iii.* The tragedy is when a man labours and then is never allowed to enjoy his wine and oil (Hosea 9.2; Joel 1.10). The definition of peace and prosperity is when a man works in his own vineyard and enjoys the fruits of it (Amos 5.11; Micah 6.15; Zephaniah 1.13).

*iv.* The corn, the wine and the oil are the gift of God. "May God give you plenty of corn and wine and oil," is Isaac's blessing (Genesis 27.28). The promised land is a land of grain and wine (Deuteronomy 33.28; Isaiah 36.17). "Honour the Lord and your vats will be bursting with wine" (Proverbs 5.10; Deuteronomy 7.13). It is the fault of Israel that she does not see that it is God who gives the corn, the wine and the oil (Isaiah 65.8).

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

There is no doubt that in the Old Testament the corn, the wine and the oil are the gifts of God. Certainly, they may be sinfully misused; certainly, they have their dangers; but they are freely to be enjoyed.

There is another side of the picture. Drunkenness was to blame for the shame of Noah (Genesis 9.21-24); the incest of Lot (Genesis 19.20-38); it played its part in the murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11.13) and of Ammon (2 Samuel 13.23-29). It was a law for the priests: 'Do not drink wine or strong drink when you go into the tent of the meeting' (Leviticus 10.9; Ezekiel 44.21). The rebellious son who is a glutton and a drunkard is guilty of a sin punishable by death (Deuteronomy 21.20). Part of the Nazirite vow was temporary abstinence from wine (Numbers 6.3; Amos 2.12) Jeremiah tells of the Rechabites who were under a permanent vow of abstinence (Jeremiah 35). It is exactly this double view which presents us with our problem.

*i.* There are many passages in the Old Testament where the excellence of wine is praised and its use commended. It was a regular part of the equipment of the temple, although not for the priests on duty (1 Chronicles 9.29). It was part of the first-fruits to which the Levites were entitled (Deuteronomy 18.4). It was part of the tithes which were to be 'eaten before the Lord' (Deuteronomy 14.22-27). 'Wine or strong drink or whatever your appetite craves . . . you shall eat before the Lord and rejoice.' Wine was a regular part of the daily sacrifice (Exodus 29.40). Wine was a standard part of the sacrificial system (Numbers 15.5-10; 28.7-14).

Wine is the symbol of that which is best and most joyous. Only love is better than wine (Song of Solomon 1.2,4; 4.10; 7.9). Wine is part of Wisdom's feast (Proverbs 9.2,5). Wine cheers gods and men (Judges 9.13). God gave it to gladden the heart of man (Psalm 104.15). It is to be given to those who faint in the wilderness (2 Samuel 16.2). Wine in plenty was to be a picture of the golden age to come. 'They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine' (Amos 9.14; Joel 2.24; 3.18;

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

Isaiah 25.6; 62.8). 'They shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine and the oil' (Jeremiah 31.12). 'Go your way,' says the Preacher. 'Eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.' 'Bread is made for laughter and wine gladdens life, and [an odd sentiment to find in Scripture!] money answers everything' (Ecclesiastes 9.7; 10.19).

The Old Testament has much to say about the joy and the delight of the God-given wine.

ii. But there is another side in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was acutely aware of the danger of wine. Very naturally the prudent Wisdom literature emphasises this. 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise' (Proverbs 20.1). 'He who loves wine and oil will not be rich' (Proverbs 21.17). 'The drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty' (Proverbs 21.17; 23.20). There are two long passages in Proverbs which must be quoted in full:

*Who has woe? Who has sorrow?  
Who has strife? Who has complaining?  
Who has wounds without cause?  
Who has redness of eyes?  
Those who tarry long over wine,  
those who go to try mixed wine,  
Do not look at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup,  
and goes down smoothly.  
At last it bites like a serpent,  
and stings like an adder.  
Your eyes will see strange things,  
and your mind utter perverse things.  
You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,  
like one who lies on the top of a mast.*

*The Christian View of Pleasure*

*'They struck me,' you will say, 'but I was not hurt;  
they beat me but I did not feel it.  
When shall I awake?  
I will seek another drink'* (Proverbs 23.29-35).

*It is not for kings, O Lemuel,  
it is not for kings to drink wine,  
or for rulers to desire strong drink;  
lest they drink and forget what has been decreed,  
and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.  
Give strong drink to him who is perishing,  
and wine to those in bitter distress;  
let them drink and forget their poverty,  
and remember their misery no more* (Proverbs 31.4-7).

It is only to be expected that the prophets with their strong ethical bent would be very much aware of the dangers of wine. 'Wine and new wine,' says Hosea, 'will take away the understanding' (Hosea 4.11). 'Princes become sick with the heat of wine' (Hosea 7.5). 'Wine is treacherous' (Habakkuk 2.5).

To the sin of drunkenness the prophets are merciless. 'Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,' says Isaiah (Isaiah 28.1). 'They also reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink; they are confused with wine; they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision; they stumble in giving judgment. For all tables are full of vomit; no place is without filthiness' (Isaiah 28.7,8). 'Woe to them who rise early in the morning that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late in the evening till wine inflames them' (Isaiah 5.11). 'Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right' (Isaiah 5.22). Isaiah rebukes those who say: 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.' 'Come, let us get wine. Let us fill ourselves with strong drink, for tomorrow will be like today, great beyond measure' (Isaiah 22.13; 56.12).

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

There then is the Old Testament evidence. To put it briefly—the Old Testament looks on wine as one of the good gifts of God; it nowhere demands total abstinence from it; but there is no book which is more intensely aware of its dangers, and which more unsparingly condemns its misuse.

Finally, we turn to the evidence of the New Testament. In the New Testament the material is not so extensive, but we meet with the same general attitude. Jesus himself was not a total abstainer; they could slanderously call him a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11.19; Luke 7.34). The miracle of Cana of Galilee shows Jesus willing to share in the simple joys of a wedding-feast (John 2.1-11). Paul can send advice to Timothy: 'No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments' (1 Timothy 5.23).

But the voice of warning is there. The bad servant in the parable eats and drinks with the drunken (Matthew 24.49). 'Do not get drunk with wine,' says Paul, 'for that is debauchery' (Ephesians 5.18). When the New Testament lists sins, sins in which the Christian must have no part, revelry, drunkenness, carousing regularly appear among the forbidden things (Romans 13.13; 1 Corinthians 6.10; Galatians 5.21). There are even times when drunken conduct invades the church and its Love Feasts (1 Corinthians 11.21; 2 Peter 2.13), and there are those who have to be warned against drunkenness at night (1 Thessalonians 5.7). In particular those who hold office in the church are warned against any excess. There must be no association with a drunkard (1 Corinthians 5.11). The older women are not to be addicted to drink (Titus 2.3). The deacons are not to be slaves to wine, and the bishop is not to be a drunkard (1 Timothy 3.8; 3.3; Titus 1.7).

One passage must have special treatment. The saying in Colossians 2.21 is often used as evidence for total abstinence—'Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch.' It is precisely the reverse. In the passage Paul is dealing with those who are preaching a false asceticism, and who are trying to introduce

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

new food laws which will prohibit people from eating this, that, and the next thing. And this saying is the saying of the *heretics*, who are trying to mislead the people. It is the heretics and the misguided and misleading teachers who say, 'Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch,' and this the Revised Standard Version makes quite clear by putting the sentence into quotation marks, in order to show that it is a quotation from the false teaching of the heretical teachers. This sentence tells us, not what to do, but what not to do.

This, then, is the New Testament evidence. Once again there is nowhere any demand for total abstinence, neither in the words nor in the example of Jesus or of his followers, but there is a strong warning against the misuse and the danger of drink. In this case we have no rule and regulation on which to fall back. We must work out our own conclusion.

Before we begin to work out a view of this question of total abstinence or of the Christian attitude to the use of alcohol, we may note that this is a comparatively new question. We have already seen that neither in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament did the demand arise. Nor were the reformers against the use of alcohol. Luther enjoyed his wine and his beer. When he was hidden away in the castle of the Wartburg, he wrote to Spalatin: 'As for me, I sit here all day long, at ease with my wine. I am reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew.' John Kessler tells how he and another Swiss student met Luther in an inn, not at first aware that it was Luther. Luther paid for their dinner. Kessler tells the charming story: 'Then he (Luther) took a tall glass of beer and said in the manner of the country, "Now you two Swiss, let us drink together a friendly drink, for our evening Grace." But as I went to take the glass from him, he changed his mind and said, "You aren't used to our outlandish beer; come, drink wine instead".' Luther says in a 1522 Wittenberg sermon that the work that was in progress was none of his doing; it was the work of the Word of God. 'I simply taught, preached and wrote God's word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

slept (cf. Mark 4.26-29), or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip (Melanchthon) and (Nicholas von) Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the Papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.' It did not occur to Luther to abstain from alcohol. Nor did it strike the early Methodists. Charles Wesley writes to his wife Sally that 'a glass of wine helps him in his indispositions. And he always carries his own Madeira with him on his journeys' (Frederick C. Gill, *Charles Wesley, the first Methodist*, p. 174). When George Whitefield set off for America, amidst a host of other stores he took with him 'a firkin of butter, a Cheshire cheese, a Gloucestershire cheese, one hundred lemons, two hogsheads of fine white wine, three barrels of raisins' (Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, p. 144). The practice of Thomas Chalmers of Disruption fame is interesting. His resolution was 'not to take more than three glasses of wine at a sitting'. Dr McDonald of Ferintosh was so famous a preacher that he was known as the Apostle of the North. Cunningham the historian tells us of him: 'Twelve or fifteen glasses of whisky daily rejoiced his heart and simply produced a pleasant glow upon his countenance' (Ian Henderson, *Scotland: Kirk and People*, pp. 100, 101). From another source we learn that in September 1824 in Glasgow, Thomas Chalmers' cellar was composed of: 71 bottles of Madeira; 41 of port; 14 of sherry; 22 of Teneriffe; 10 of claret; and 44 of whisky.

On the other hand, William Booth was inflexibly opposed to the use of alcohol. In the conditions of his day he could not use it. Richard Collier describes the London scene: 'London's 100,000 pubs, laid end to end, would have stretched a full thirty miles. In East London alone, the heart of Booth's territory, every fifth shop was a gin-shop; most kept special steps to help even tiny mites reach the counter. The pubs featured penny glasses of gin for children; too often child alcoholics needed the stomach-pump. Children less than five years old knew the raging agonies of delirium tremens or died

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

from cirrhosis of the liver. Others trudged through the Sunday streets bringing yet more gin to parents who lay drunk and fully clothed in bed, vomiting on the floor. These were the by-products of a £100 million a year trade, whose worst victims slept on heaps of soot beneath the arches of Blackfriars Bridge, living only for the next glass' (Richard Collier, *The General next to God*, p. 53). On practical grounds, Booth was unalterably opposed to the use of alcohol, and his Salvationists were and are pledged to total abstinence.

*i.* The prevalence of the use of alcohol in all grades of society is ample proof of its attraction. It makes entertaining easy; it relaxes tensions and eases the atmosphere of a social occasion. There is the occasional medical use of it, of which even Paul's advice to Timothy is an example. We need not argue about the attraction; it is there.

*ii.* But in addition to the attraction there are obvious dangers.

(a) There is the fact that the effect of alcohol on a man is quite unpredictable. One man may be able to take it in even large quantities with no visible ill effect; another man may be liable to become drunk on the smallest quantity; another man may have that built into his composition which makes him an alcoholic, and he may be such that any use of alcohol will have the most disastrous effects. None of these effects can be predicted in advance. Only experiment shows how a man will react, and it can be argued that the experiment carries with it such a risk that it is unwise to make it.

(b) There is the danger of excess. It is quite true that the danger of excess arises with any pleasure, and that scripture warns against gluttony just as strongly as it warns against drunkenness. But drunkenness is a specially ugly thing in a drunken person, and a specially unhappy thing for those with whom he lives and who share his life and home.

(c) With alcohol there arises the question of addiction. One of the characteristics of alcohol is that, as time goes on, it requires an ever-increasing amount of it to produce the same

### *Ethics in a Permissive Society*

effect. What in the beginning was a pleasure becomes in the end an overmastering desire. The habit is formed, and the habit is desperately hard to break. A man will do well to think whether it is wise to begin something to which he may well end by becoming a slave.

(d) There is the matter of expense. Drinking is nowadays one of the most expensive pleasures; and a man may well find himself spending money on a luxury which should have been kept for the necessities.

(e) There are the general effects of alcohol. It can impair a man's efficiency and dull his brain. It can slow down his reflexes and his reactions, which is why the law is so stern to those who drive a motor car under its influence. It can slur a man's speech. But it has one effect which is more serious in its own way than any of the others. Alcohol does not only relax tensions; it also relaxes a man's self-control and renders him liable to do and to say things which in his sober senses he would not do or say. In particular, it loosens a person's moral control, and sexual immorality and alcohol very often have a very close connection. Alcohol, especially if it is used to excess, can make a man behave in ways in which he would not ordinarily behave. There is therefore in alcohol an inbuilt danger.

All this is true, but all this does not settle the matter. All that has been said could be said of almost any pleasure that has got out of control. There are many drugs which are at one and the same time dangerous drugs and useful drugs. There are many habits which are useful in moderation but harmful in excess. If the man who takes alcohol risks danger to his stomach and to his liver, the man who smokes risks danger to his lungs, and the man who consistently eats too much and moves too little risks the stomach ulcer and the thrombosis. The physical danger argument is not a good argument, for a man might answer quite simply that he is aware of the danger and that he chooses to face it.

In the last analysis the only argument against the misuse of

### *The Christian View of Pleasure*

alcohol is the argument from responsibility for our brotherman. We have here the old tension between freedom and responsibility. Paul is quite clear that no man has any right to lay down what any other man may eat or drink (Colossians 2.21). The classic passage is in Romans 14.1-8. There Paul refuses to arbitrate between those who hold different ideas of what it is right to do. If a man holds that what he does is as far as he is concerned right in the sight of God, then no one can criticise. On the other hand, there is the responsibility never to cause a brother to stumble or fall by what we eat or drink (1 Corinthians 8.13; Romans 14.20,21). The liberty of the strong must never become a stumbling block to the weak (1 Corinthians 8.9). Certainly, all things are lawful, but all things are not helpful, and nothing must be allowed to master us (1 Corinthians 6.12).

But even this does not free us from making our own personal choice. The biblical writers, Paul, Jesus himself knew the dangers of drink as well as we do, for every age has known what drunkenness means, and yet, while they unhesitatingly condemned excess, they never demanded total abstinence. The decision is left to us, and on soul and conscience we must make it, and some will decide one way and some another—and they have liberty to do so.

The one thing to avoid is a censorious self-righteousness. W. M. Macgregor, in *The Making of a Preacher*, says: 'Nearly sixty years ago I knew a crusty, ill-tempered woman, who lived alone in one very dismal room, with no apparent means of support but her parish allowance and occasional charity. Her neighbours resented her caustic tongue, so her solitude was seldom invaded, but at vague intervals she started on a pilgrimage among old acquaintances, from each of whom she exacted a contribution of at least one penny, and on the proceeds of the tour she got satisfactorily drunk. The deliberation of what she did gave it an ugly look, and she was appealed to and denounced as peculiarly a sinner, but only once, as I was told, did she retort: "Wad ye grudge me my one chance

*Ethics in a Permissive Society*

o' getting clean out o' the Pans wi' a sup of whisky?"' Her one chance of escape from the Pans, the grim slum in which she lived, was occasionally to drink.

Whatever else we say, and whatever stand we adopt, those of us who have comfortable and happy homes should not be too hard on the person whose only club is the pub; those of us who have many friends should not be too hard on the lonely one who turns to the public house for company; those of us who have no fears and tensions should not be too hard on the person who seeks to relax with drink.

We can do no more than leave the verdict in suspense for each man to make his own decision. We are not the keeper of any man's conscience. But let the man who emerges with one verdict not condemn the man who emerges with another.

In life there must be pleasure, and the ideal pleasure is that which is harmless to the person who indulges in it and to all other people, which brings help to him who practises it and happiness to others.