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THE CHRISTIAN TREASURY

A FAMILY MISCELLANY

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WHERE DO YOU SPEND YOUR EVENINGS?

A PLAIN TALK WITH YOUNG MEN.

BY THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.



IF I were a merchant, and a young man applied to me for employment in any responsible position, one of the first questions that I should ask him would be, Where do you spend your evenings? The answer to that question would go very far toward determining whether he were

the man to be trusted or not. In the rural regions, evening commonly signifies a quiet fireside after the labours of shop or farm. With what swift and eager foot my memory runs back to the cheerful joys of my boyhood in the old hospitable farmhouse, and beside a roaring hickory fire! A book, and a game of 'fox and geese,' and a row of sputtering apples and chestnuts on the hot hearth, made up the usual round of indoor entertainment. Whittier tells the whole story in that most delightful of American idyls, 'Snow-Bound.'

It is of young men in the cities and the large towns that I am thinking now. Some of them are living under a parental roof; tens of thousands are in boarding-houses; legions of them are 'on the road' and lodging in hotels. For those who still reside at home, the parents are still responsible. The primal duty of every father and mother is to make home attractive to the boys and girls. Some godly-minded fathers, who are very regular at prayer-meetings, and some mothers who never miss their 'Dorcas society,' make shocking blunders in the management of their own children. Their 'own vineyards' are badly kept, and yield only sour grapes. When a boy begins to dislike his home, and seeks to escape from it, he has very often reached the first milestone on the road to 'the bad;' and for this dislike his parents may be more than half responsible. I entreat every father and mother to see to two things. The one is that their own dwelling be made just as attractive as possible (and a bright open fire will pay tenfold more than it costs as a 'means of grace' to your family). The other is, be

careful how you trust your boys with a night-key. If you *know* where he is, very well; if you hand him a night-key, and do not know or care whither he goes with it, you may find out one of these days to your sorrow. A sagacious father said to me yesterday, 'The anchorage of my children has always been a bright, happy home.' That man has never seen one of his sons wrecked on the rocks of ruin. Thousands of young men really have no home, except the parlour of a boarding-house, and no domestic property, except a trunk up in a third-storey bedroom.

But however a young man may be situated, the evening hours bring to him certain temptations and perils. The day's work is over, and nature craves recreation. No one understands this natural necessity better than the devil; and he makes the most of it. The evening is his harvest-time; then he opens his numberless doorways of temptation. Then he lights up his places of enchantment—brings out his dice-boxes, and cards, and champagne-bottles, and billiard-tables, and roulette-boards; then he tunes his horns and violins, and flings wide open his crimsoned and chandeliered gateways to sensual indulgence. It is in 'the black and dark night' that the shameless wanton prowls the streets in quest of 'the young man void of understanding'—yes, and of some grey-headed fools, likewise. How many a one (while father and mother are in their unconscious sleep) 'goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and knoweth not that it is for his life.' So successful are these various baits of the tempter, that if all the young men who have spent any one evening in dangerous places could be mustered the next morning in a mass-meeting, its size would be appalling, and the composition of it would strike many a parental eye with horror. After thirty-one years of close observation of city life, I am not surprised that so many a mother's son is led astray; I only wonder that so many escape destruction.

About the specific evil ways of seeking amusement I have already spoken, in my previous articles on the 'Perils of the Playhouse'—see *Christian Treasury* for 1883, p. 601—(which has had a wide currency in tracts and reprints), and on wine-drinking, card-playing, and gambling. But the best antidote to all dangerous places and pleasures is to find safe ones. Where and what are they? A wholesome home, of course, stands first. As long as you are tethered there, you may live in happy ignorance of manifold things which a pure heart should not wish to know; for blessed is the youth who does not know *too much*. No matter how plain or cheap your boarding-quarters may be, my young friend, if you have plenty of good books you may spend many an evening in company fit for a king. Secure a ticket in a public library, and then bring to your room such authors as you can afford to be intimate with. You need never be lonesome while Shakespeare will take his seat beside you, or while Prescott, or Macaulay, or Green tell their enchanting stories. In these days of ubiquitous travel, you can go all over the world with Bayard Taylor and De Chaillu and Stanley. Shun every book that stirs lewd passion, or that shakes your faith in your mother's God, as you would shun a rattlesnake. Some of the best educated men—Horace Greeley, for example—never went to college; but they had eyes in their head, and books well studied brought a university up into their scantily furnished rooms. Don't ask to be everlastingly *amused*; it is the mark of a baby-mind, when a young man cares for nothing but fun and frolic.

Music is one of the most thoroughly wholesome of evening recreations, if it is only the enjoyment of a violin, a banjo, or a flute in your own room. Put aside half-a-crown often out of your wages or your salary for the best public concerts, and for tickets to the art galleries. The cities are growing richer every year in such treasure-houses of beauty and inspiration. As for the whole matter of recreations, I will give you one wholesome rule. Every amusement or recreation which makes the body healthier, the mind stronger, the heart purer, is *right*. Let the others alone. Whatever you think of with a twinge of conscience or an ugly taste in your memory next morning, never do; it is the next morning's whip of scorpions that spoils the sensualist's revelries. It is a good rule never to spend an evening in such a manner that you cannot pray with a clean conscience when you go to bed.

I pity the young man who is without acquaintances among the other sex. Spare no pains to put one or more female friendships between you and the temptations of the 'devil and his angels.' I am inclined to favour early attachments and engagements; for the society of a pure girl, evening after evening, has saved many a young man from perdition. Put yourself also into the circle of some Christian church as soon as you come into a town. Its weekly meetings and social gatherings will anchor you from drifting away from your mother's Bible, and from the faith of your childhood. One of my church-officers said to me lately: 'When I went to Boston, a poor, homeless clerk, the Bible-class and young people of Dr Kirk's church saved me from drifting to destruction.' Heaven's blessing rest on 'Young Men's Christian Associations!' They have given a bright, soul-cheering evening home to thousands who were under the stress of loneliness or evil temptations. Be careful how you join 'clubs.' Too many of them are training-schools that will initiate you into forbidden things. Better remain 'green' than to get early ripe in sin. Finally, remember, my young friend, that what you earn during the day goes into your pocket; but what you do during the evening hours and on the Sabbath *goes into your character*.

Thy Praise.

When, Lord, to others I would show
The beauty found in Thee,
All language fails, I can but say
With Philip, 'Come and see.'

Full sadly, oft, on willow bough
My tuneless harp I've hung,
And mourned so ill my feeble voice
Thy worthiness had sung.

So sweetly forth Thy praise I'd tell,
Thy wondrous love declare—
O Thou, who chief 'mong thousands art,
And altogether fair—

That, listening to my heaven-taught strain,
Some weary-laden one
Might cry, 'Oh, tell me whither now
Is thy Beloved gone?

'Close following where thy steps shall guide,
With thee I'll seek His face,
Thy Saviour from this hour shall be
My Shield and Hiding-place.'

Come, Spirit blest, my harp attune,
Then sinners shall draw near,
The music of Emmanuel's name
With raptured souls to hear.

M. A. C. M.