

WHY NOT BET?

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Betting may be defined as a stake upon chance for gain without labor. Gambling is "a contract to give or receive money or goods without a just equivalent in exchange, and on conditions that are for the most part beyond the foresight or control of the parties engaged in the transaction."

GAIN WITHOUT EFFORT.

I. To gain money by betting means gain without merit and profit without effort. It means taking our neighbor's money without giving him anything worthy in return. It substitutes feeble chance for vigorous effort. Save in the way of charity, money ought not to be given or taken without something worthy behind it which it represents, something which has the show of an equivalent. It marks a decay of manliness and self-respect to take money which has become ours by no exertion of our manly powers and faculties, and which has ceased to belong to another by no willing acceptance on his part of its fair equivalent.

If it is urged that it is not for the money that a man bets, is it not a sufficient reason to ask, "Why, then, do we always bet for money?" Why not bet dollars against buttons? If it is urged that the money is only incidental to the interest and excitement of the process, the further question is suggested: Wherein does the excitement consist? Is it not in standing to win or lose money? Do men bet if they think they are going to lose? Why do they demand odds, if the chances are unfavorable? Why are they more ready to bet if they think they are sure of winning? As a matter of hard fact, the money element is very much in it all. If all winnings had to be handed over to a hospital, for example, how long would betting continue? If it is urged that the real reason for betting is not to win money at all, but to back up a horse, or team, or friend, we ask further, "Backing against whom?" It is not against an opponent. It is really against the gamblers. A self-respecting friend, however, can scarcely glory in a support which ranks him with game-cocks, race-horses and prize-fighters. This is sad and squalid support.

The winning of money on the mere turn of chance must tend to lower a man's self-respect and self-reliance. Herbert Spencer says, "It sears the sympathies, cultivates a hard egoism, and so produces a general deterioration of character and conduct."

If betting is analyzed into its elements, it will be found to rest on the assumption that the man who bets knows more than his partner to the wager. Then his action is mean, for he is taking advantage of a more ignorant man with a view to making money out of his ignorance. If the other man is his friend, the meanness is accentuated. Is this a noble and generous attitude to take toward your friend and neighbor in his hours of recreation? If there is equity of knowledge between the parties, each nevertheless bets on the chance that he may win, and this betting on an uncertainty has its inevitable consequence of demoralization and debility.

DEGRADES TRUE SPORT.

II. It tends to lower, degrade, and kill what should be manly sport. It is the foe of sound and clean athletics. There can't be a whole-hearted love of sport, sport in itself, when there is money on the game. It is an abuse of language to call the man who bets on the game, and not the player, a "sport." To a man who habitually bets there is no attraction in a game or race on which no money depends. The sport in itself ceases to be of interest to any one who has staked largely on the issue; it is not sport, but sordid money-getting. Between the man who plays for the game and the man who watches the game for the sake of the money, there can be no question who is the truer sportsman. The element of gambling degrades many a manly and exhilarating amusement into a carnival of greed and trickery. In the great days of ancient Greece men contended for the glory of victory and for a chaplet of leaves. No money-stake was allowed to corrupt the contests. These clean games had no small share in training the Greeks to win in their mighty struggle against the hosts of Persia. Every advocate of athletics, every true sportsman, every one who would "play the game," should be the sworn foe of betting. Between games with bets or no games, it is better to choose "no games," but if we will, we largely can have games without bets.

FOLLY OF GAMBLING.

III. Gambling is foolish. In the long run the gambler is almost certain to lose. An occasional individual may grow rich, and die rich, the many lose, and die poor. As soon as a gambler or betting man loses, the world's real estimate of him becomes apparent. When he has staked his last dollar and lost, he is pronounced by all and by himself a fool. He gets no practical compassion. No business house wants to employ a betting man. No bank wishes to advance money to a gambler for his trade. The solid business community as such sets itself against the vice. If individual business men take an occasional fling at it, they know that they have already passed judgement on themselves, and that "this their way is their folly." Even if scrupulous honesty obtained in all betting circles, the law of probability should tell a man that his chances are few; and when dishonesty obtains, as is not infrequently the case, his chances are nil. The bookmakers at the race courses pay high fees for their privileges; they live in lavish style—who supplies the money?

The foolish persons who hope to win. Chance may be fickle, but chance is almost constant in disappointing her votaries. If we think that we shall be the exceptions and win where others have lost; that we shall be the solitary lucky ones among the unlucky thousands, we are guilty of exceeding folly.

CHARACTER DEGRADED.

IV. Betting and gambling exercise a deteriorating influence on character. This may not be apparent where the stakes are small, but the tendency is in the wrong direction. Betting bewitches a man with the idea of getting something for nothing—an idea which will surely unmake a man. It fosters deception and bluff in order to influence the issue. It is a fruitful mother of crime. Embezzlement, fraud, suicide, are among its untoward offspring. It kills the freshness and spontaneity of life. It begets distrust. It tends to make men hard, reckless, mean, cruel, wolfish.

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It distracts a man's attention from his legitimate business. It wastes his time. It creates that unhealthy restlessness which kills all sober work for a fair reward. It is a powerful intoxicant of mental life. It is a fierce stimulant of the imagination. Its excitement impairs reliability of judgment.

WHEREIN LIES THE WRONG OF IT ?

V. First—Betting ignores our responsibility for the use of the money with which God has intrusted us.

The man who loses is spending his money in a wrong way. It is sheer waste, it serves no useful or productive purpose, it accomplishes no good end. In the sight of God no man has the right to use money in this way. Money has well been called "stored personality." All money is the price of life. There is human blood in it. To waste it is like treading life blood under foot.

When the money lost is not a man's own, there is double dishonor ; there is treason to man as well as to God. When the money lost is what a man calls his own, he is really mis-using God's gift to him, and he is guilty of awful waste in a world of such need as ours. A man cannot do what he will with his own. In a free and enlightened country he must not use his own so as to injure another. Is it too strong to say that money thus wasted is provocative of anarchy ? A wise moralist says : "The man who puts his solemn responsibility for the use of money upon the back of a race horse, or into a pack of shuffled cards, is doing more to weaken the public sense of the sacredness of property and to discredit its possessors, than all the revolutionary literature of our time put together."

VI. In principle this practice of betting is wrong. Guard against its beginnings ; don't indulge in its smaller applications. Whether you bet with men or women, for caudy or gloves or drinks, over games or cards or races—"just a friendly little bet"—you are educating yourselves into an inability to see that principles are principles.

This practice is unchivalrous. How can one of two friends stoop virtually to profit by the other's loss, and that in the hour of recreation ? Let friendship be generous, giving and hoping for nothing again, unpoluted by the mercenary selfishness of a bet. If you wish to make a present to your friends or acquaintances, do so openly and sincerely, without the ill-mannered subterfuge of a wager by which you may reverse your wish and exact some small payment from them. There is a real pleasure in receiving a gift from another as a token of remembrance and affection ; there is none in winning from him money which he is compelled to pay, and which he may ill afford to lose.

In the Gospel narrative there is a hideous contrast between the soldiers of hard and greedy faces—half-seen in the dark—tossing the dice at the foot of the cross, and the Redeemer of the world, incarnate self-sacrifice and unselfishness, who died that He might deliver men from sin and purify them to be his own possession, zealous of good works.