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POPULAR AMUSEMENTS:

AN APPEAL TO

METHODISTS,

IN REGARD TO THE EVILS OF

CARD-PLAYING, BILLIARDS, DANCING,
THEATRE-GOING, ETC.

By HIRAM MATTISON, D.D.



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POPULAR AMUSEMENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

BELoved BRETHREN:—It is commonly reported among us, and we partly believe it, that some of you Methodists who were once poor and unknown, but have grown rich and prominent in the world, have left the narrow way in which you walked twenty or thirty years ago, have ceased to attend class-meetings, seldom pray in your families or in prayer-meetings, as you once did, and are now indulging in many of the fashionable amusements of the day, such as playing chess, dominoes, billiards, and cards, dancing and attending theatres, or allowing your children to indulge in them. Others, it is said, who do not practice these things themselves, apologize for them; and some not only indulge in them, but even have bowling alleys and billiard tables in or near their dwellings, and have dancing in their parlors whenever their children or company desire it.

These things, it is said, are most common in cities and villages; and the rich and aristocratic families of the Church, as some call them, lead the way, and are the most prominent and open in the practice of these follies. To such, then, especially, and to all Methodists who indulge in or apologize for these things, or encourage others so to do, I make this solemn appeal, in behalf of the interests of our holy religion, the honor of Method-

ism, the good of your own families and the world that lieth in wickedness, and the everlasting well-being of your own souls. Will you hear me patiently and with candor?

CHAPTER I.

EVILS OF CARD-PLAYING, BILLIARDS, ETC.

I. *It is A WASTE OF TIME, which God gives us to use for higher and holier ends.*

“See that ye walk circumspectly,” says the apostle, “not as fools, but as wise, *redeeming the time*, because the days are evil,” Eph. v. 15. And again, Collos. iv. 5, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, *redeeming the time.*” Both these scriptures clearly teach that a Christian is to use his *time* well, and not to waste it. “With all possible care,” says John Wesley, “*redeeming the time*—saving all you can for the best purposes: buying every possible moment out of the hands of sin and Satan, out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly business, etc.” (*See Notes.*) Oh how precious a boon is *time* to an immortal being bound to the bar of God! And who of us have any time to waste in idle games and worldly follies?—

No room for mirth or trifling here,
For worldly hope, or worldly fear,
If life so soon is gone.

And who can doubt that God, to whom we must account at the last, even for every vain and idle word that we speak, will also call us to account for the manner in

which we have spent the precious time allotted us in this world?

Time destroyed
Is suicide, where worse than blood is spilt.

And what a response it will be, to be obliged to say at last, "I spent my evenings playing cards and billiards, and chess and dominoes!" And we shall not have even the poor excuse urged in regard to some other amusements, that it afforded healthful recreation and exercise, either for mind or body; for this is seldom or never claimed now for cards, or dominoes, or chess-playing. A Christian, therefore, should use his time aright, as he must account to God at last, and has no right to spend it over such profitless games. How much better to spend it in religious conversation, reading good books, or visiting the sick, by which God would be glorified and Christianity made influential for good in the earth!

II. *Playing cards, billiards, etc., even at home, and in the family circle, exposes those who do it to be drawn into corrupt associations.*

Your son, for instance, learns to play at home, and becomes skillful. It becomes a passion with him. He gets acquainted with other young men who have no billiard tables at their houses or boarding-places, and must go to the public rooms if anywhere. They play, and your son plays, and they invite him to go with them. Of course it is "only for amusement." They go to the public rooms. But here is a *bar*, and some of the party drink. Your son resists at first, but is at last overpersuaded, and joins them in drinking. Then comes playing "for the drinks," or "the cigars;" and before his father has been aware of it, many a son whose father has set him the example, and been his teacher in billiards, cards, etc., has become a companion of rowdies and gamblers, and perhaps a tippler and a gambler himself.

III. *Playing for amusement is the highway to gambling and to final ruin.*

For as all drunkards are first "moderate drinkers," so all gamblers begin by playing "merely for amusement." Not one gambler in a thousand ever thought of becoming one when he first began to play. His soul would have revolted at the thought. But he learned to play, became skillful and confident, played for small stakes and won; staked more and more and was encouraged; lost all and played on and recovered it again; and thus became a gambler. And how smooth the inclined plane from the family circle, perhaps his father's house, where he first played chess, or dominoes, or shuffled the cards, down to the society of thieves and drunkards and debauchees, and the infamous calling of a public gambler! A recent fact will illustrate this point:

A few months since the writer was on his way to a dedication, and passing over the Erie railroad. Near him in the cars sat two young men, evidently intimate friends, playing cards for amusement. Pretty soon two other young-looking men came along, sat down near them, and soon joined in the game. In a short time, the four having each his "hand," one of the last two carelessly dropped the remark that he could "euchre" the other party. Meanwhile a large and well-dressed man came up, and stood carelessly witnessing the game. Hearing the remark about euchreing, the youngest of the first two studied his cards attentively, a bet of \$100 was offered by the stranger, and accepted by him (as he was confident of winning), the money "put up;" the cards rapidly thrown down; and, in less time than it takes to read this account his money was gone! The cars being near a station, the "professional gentlemen" got off, and the poor young man was left to his own reflections. Seeing his downcast look, I said to him, "Where did you

learn to play cards?" "At home," said he, "with my brothers and sisters." "Did you ever expect to become a gambler?" "No," said he, "and this is the first time I ever gambled in my life. But he was so willing and free about it, and I was so certain, that I thought I might as well take the money." But instead of *his* taking the professed gambler's money, the gambler had taken his. To the young man \$100 was evidently a very large amount, as he seemed near shedding tears as he talked about losing it.

But suppose he had won the hundred dollars, would he not have gone on in the career of a gambler? And suppose the other parties had remained, and he had had a thousand dollars, would he not have played further till he had either won his money back or lost all? Such is the exposure and the downward road upon which every man enters who has anything to do with the implements of gambling. The dreadful spell is upon him, and God only can tell where the lessons taught, even at some Methodist firesides, may yet lead many of the young men of our Methodist households. From playing at home with brothers and sisters, the descent is gradual to playing abroad with others. There is but a step between playing for amusement, and playing for drinks, cigars, and money, and from playing for money, to drinking, cheating, stealing money of employers, if need be, with which to gamble; and onward to detection, imprisonment, suicide and eternal ruin. And say what we may, there is no safety to the young but in total abstinence from all such games. If our children never learn to play, they are safe; but not otherwise.

Here is the end of one who began to play for amusement, and thereby lost his life and his soul forever. On his person, after his death by suicide in a club room in New York, the following note was found:

"May 20, 1867.

"DEAR CORONER:—Please inform Normal Lodge, No. 523, of my ungodly death, and say that I request that my poor wicked body be returned to the bosom of Mother Earth by them, and may Almighty God have mercy on my poor soul, through Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

F. B. FISHER.

"Please inform my poor old Christian mother of my death: Mrs. Mary E. Fisher, Iowa City, Iowa.

"My room is at 153 Laurens street, where my trunk and clothing are."

Attached to a latch-key found in the pocket was a card, containing the following in pencil mark:

"Done by my own wicked hand; cause, demoralized by playing faro bank, and may the Almighty God have mercy on my soul.

"F. B. FISHER."

What an illustration of the evil of attempting to blend sin and righteousness, light and darkness—to drink and gamble and pray to God, and commit suicide! So is it with all who follow the world and its vain pleasures, and yet vainly dream that they are Christians, and presumptuously hope in Divine mercy.

But who does not know that many suicides occur every year from this cause alone—the loss of money by gambling? And there are but a few easy steps downward from innocency to this terrible end—learning to play—playing for amusement at home—playing abroad—playing for money—losing all—despair—suicide—eternal death! These are the steps leading downward to hell. So begin all gamblers; and so will end many who are now learning to play, who have no more ideas of ever gambling than the "moderate drinker" of to-day has that he will hereafter fill a drunkard's grave.

Such are a few of the evils of card-playing, billiards, etc. And it is of no use to discriminate, and tolerate one and condemn the other. If we play dominoes and chess, why not cards and billiards? All have the same fatal fascination—all waste sacred time—all lead away

from God and expose to evil associations. Men bet upon billiards and chess and nine-pins, as well as upon cards and dice, faro-banks and horse-races. They all belong to one family, and are evil, only evil, and that continually. And how can you, reader, if a professed Christian, and especially a Methodist, indulge in, or even allow in your family or countenance, anything that may lead on to such consequences, and is legitimately capable of bearing such bitter fruits?

CHAPTER II.

EVILS OF DANCING.

I. *Like playing cards and billiards, it is* A USELESS WASTE OF TIME.

For children to learn to dance requires a great deal of time, which they need for other and better purposes; and both private and public dancing, in after life, are a waste of precious time, of which no Christian especially should ever be guilty.

II. *It is a* USELESS WASTE OF MONEY.

To learn to dance requires a dancing-master or school, and no little outlay of money for tuition, extra dresses, slippers, etc.; and, to keep up the practice requires costly dresses, suppers, and wines.

“The dance and the ultras of dress and fashion are sworn companions. In most cases a marked influence will be exerted in this respect. Many will be tempted to dress above their means, and thus add dishonesty to dissipation. The young gentlemen must have finer coats, and more rakish, jaunty hats than before; and the ladies will covet all the splendors of ruffles, trinkets, and

feathers. And now and then the parental purse must yawn to pay for a new dress, to be worn at the ball, but which is too short at each end to be called modest or decent anywhere else. The teacher of dancing must be paid more liberally for instructing the feet than he who informs and cultivates the nobler powers of the mind; and the dancing-master's array of satellites, white and black, must be abundantly rewarded for useless services. And all this, while within sight of the place where the dancers congregate, children, ragged and hungry, are desiring in vain to be fed with the crumbs that fall from the tables of the rich; and the poor are sick and dying in want of the necessaries of life."*

It is useless to say that this does not apply to private or "parlor dancing," for such is the fascination of this amusement that few who dance in private, especially if they are good dancers, will refrain in public. What the glitter of decanters and the fumes of gin and brandy are to the tippler, the sound of the viol and the movements of the dancers are to one addicted to this folly. If we learn to dance, and dance in private, we shall be almost sure to dance in public, and to incur all the expenses and other liabilities of attending dancing parties, "hops," or public balls. Indeed, private dancing sustains the same relation to public balls that private card and billiard-playing sustains to gambling. The one leads almost inevitably to the other, especially with the young, as almost all experience shows. How, then, can a Christian who expects to give an account to God at the last for the use he makes of his money, expend it in paying a dancing-master, or in costly wines and viands, and dresses for the ball-room, either for himself or children?

III. *Dancing often brings the otherwise virtuous and pure-minded into association with the low and vile.*

* Essay on Dancing, by Dr. Crane.

Public balls are not apt to be very select in this respect. In fact, there are all grades of "hops," from the private parlor to the dance-house and the brothel. And how is the votary of dancing to discriminate, and always keep in pure society?

"The exponents of almost every grade of society may be found in a dance of general character. In such a general dance may often be seen those who rank high as the world reckons men socially, and those who are dissolute and prostitute in character; those who would scorn to tell a lie, and those whose oath would not be believed. At such a time it is not the question in a lady's heart whether she shall dance the 'next figure' with a man because he has a fine character; but the question is, Is he a fine dancer?"

"A young lady was once dancing in a ball-room with all who chanced to invite her, until she was asked by an offended young man, who brought her to the place, if she 'would not dance with the devil if he was a good dancer?' and she replied that she would. But that there is at least in these general dances an unavoidable recognizing of those who are worthless or worse, must inevitably be true. I doubt not there are ladies who will read these words who have danced many a figure with a man whom they would scorn to entertain for an evening in their own parlors at home."*

IV. *Public dancing and moral impurity are almost inseparably associated.*

Among the Greeks the public dancers were almost invariably wretched females, who made merchandise of their own persons. The French are the greatest dancers in the world. From Paris, troops of dancing-masters go forth every year to corrupt and debauch other lands; and from her theatres and operas come the professional dancing-

* Rev. M. S. Hard, in the *Northern Independent*.

girls of our city theatres and operas. And yet, according to the testimony of Rev. Dr. Baird, a virtuous woman is not the rule in France, but the exception, and one-third of the children are of uncertain parentage. Even the Roman Catholics in this country, instructed by the revelations of the confessional, have recently prohibited dancing, as tending to licentiousness.

V. *Dancing is usually associated with tippling, and often leads to intemperance, and consequent ruin.*

Who ever heard of a ball where wine was not used? And are not other liquors usually supplied and drank?

"Young men who habitually attend balls," says the *Central Advocate*, "are, as habitually dram-drinkers, on the high road to a drunkard's destiny. Such young men are unfit companions for virtuous girls. They would be better dead than married to a common dram-drinker. Nothing out of perdition is as bad as being a drunkard's wife, unless it be to be a drunkard. This all-consuming curse has its strongest defences in fashionable society, and in that society its securest retreat is the ball-room. The fact is, both ladies and gentlemen drink at balls, and both get heated with wine and inflamed by passion. The atmosphere of a ball-room is deadly to modesty. It smothers it, murders it, and leaves the robbed victim polluted by the image of sin and the breath of the destroyer, Intemperance. Cases have not been unfrequent in which young persons have chosen their companions among the beautiful waltzers of the ball-room, and afterwards found that they were either incurable tipplers or debauched prostitutes."

VI. *Dancing is usually as injurious to the HEALTH of its votaries as it is to their purity of mind and morals and their habits of temperance and sobriety.*

And yet some plead for dancing as a health-promoting exercise! But what are the facts?

“Exercise, to promote health, must be taken at proper hours of the day, in a pure atmosphere, and in a dress that will admit of deep and full respiration. But all these conditions are violated by the votaries of the modern Terpsichore. They dance away the hours of midnight and early morn, when they should be seeking balmy sleep; and they retire to rest at the very hour when they should be rising, refreshed and blooming, to the duties of the day. The air of the dancing apartment is impure and unhealthy, and the dress indispensable on such occasions prevents free respiration. Add to this the unseasonable refreshments on such occasions, and we can hardly conceive any amusement more calculated to destroy instead of promoting health.

“A delicate female attends a ball. She dances in an apartment crowded to suffocation, till she is exhausted almost to faintness. The hour of closing comes at last, and she passes, all in a perspiration, out into the chilling air of early morning. A violent cold ensues; her lungs become affected; and in a little time, her form, beautiful even in death, is wrapped in the winding-sheet, and her weeping friends follow her to an untimely grave.”*

Nor is this mere theory or supposition, as the following will show:

“In one of the largest printing establishments of the West there might have been seen one of the swiftest of compositors. He would sooner dance than eat. Many a night would his feet patter to the sound of bewitching music, until the sun began to show its face in the east. Weary from the labor of the dance (for there is hard work in dancing), he was unfitted for the labors of the day; and so he nerved himself to the task by the power that there was in drink. One night would succeed another, until his frame began to break under the pres-

* Dr. Crane's Essay.

sure. Unable to toil in the day, yet so bitterly craving was his desire to dance that he began to take by little from his employer to pay the man who drew the fiddle-bow. He stole genteelly and well until he could no longer practice his fraud. The law did its work, and that young man danced himself into perdition."

Take another instance :

"In a beautiful town in our State there might have been seen a splendid mansion. This was the home of the only child of a wealthy banker. She was the idol of her father, and never had an ungratified desire. She was graceful as a fairy, and was called beautiful among women. Dancing was her passion. Frail in body, and predisposed to disease, yet she *would dance*, while with one hand she had to support her aching side.

"New Year came, and she was gorgeously attired for the evening's ball. Her suitor was proud of her that night as she danced, the fairest of the fair. The midnight came, and heated with the dance, she sat down at an open window and breathed the winter air. The minstrels struck up a livelier air than they were wont to play, and her feet, so fond of the dance, would not rest. Taking her partner's hand, she rushed upon the floor, and in a moment she was the wildest dancer there.

"The music grew stronger; the dancer's feet flew faster, until a shriek, which seemed born of hell, rang out in that place of mirth. The music hushed; the dancers' feet were still, and the fairest of the dancers had fallen into the arms of her partner.

"They bore her to the window where she had been a moment before, with the blood pouring down over the gorgeous dress, which had hitherto been spotless. They chafed her temples and sought to bring her to life. At last she opened her eyes into the face of him who was soon to have made her his bride, and cried out, 'I have

danced my body into the grave and my soul into hell; and died!

“In that early hour of the New Year’s morning that ball-room became the charnel-house for the dead. With the body of that dead dancer there went into the palace of the rich father a more awful woe, as he remembered the last utterance of his idol. She may have gained pleasure, but was there, can there be any compensation for the wrecking of her body and the losing of her soul?”*

But we need not multiply illustrations upon this point. Every dancer knows that after a night spent in the ball-room it takes two or three days for the system to recover its wonted elasticity and spirits. And hundreds of instances have occurred where females especially have taken cold upon leaving the ball-room in their thin dresses and slippers, and in a state of perspiration, and have paid for their folly by filling a premature grave.

VII. *The habit of dancing is necessarily opposed to all true piety and spirituality.*

Who ever knew a votary of the ball-room to pray in his family, or in prayer-meetings, or attend class-meetings? Who ever saw one laboring in a revival to bring sinners to Christ? No! If they attend church at all, they are silent in the prayer-meeting and love-feast, and are seldom or never seen at their class-meetings. And no wonder! They *feel* that the two things are incongruous—that to pray and dance is a contradiction.

“No Christian can go to a ball and dance without having a sense of demoralization, a feeling of condemnation and personal unworthiness and shame. ‘Be ye not conformed to this world.’ We do not believe that one in whom the love of God dwells will desire to attend balls. We have never known any but worldly, back-

* Rev. M. S. Hard.

slidden members of the Church to defend the practice or send their children to dancing-school. Ministers who favor it are more desirous to get the people's money than to save their souls. Churches that permit it have but little moral weight. All this we say in perfect kindness, but without circumlocution, and we could prove more than we have stated."

"Once in our pastoral work we met a young man who was proud, supercilious, and impudent; and when we courteously addressed him on the subject of religion, he assailed our Church in a most unchristian manner. Not long afterward this same young man went to a ball, danced nearly all night, went home sick, and gradually sank into the arms of death. Once he had been a happy, modest Christian, but had been misled, strange as it may seem, by a minister of the gospel, who told him the Methodist Church was too strict, that dancing was genteel, that *his* Church was the *true* Church.

"While on his dying bed this poor young man refused to let this cruel tempter come into his room. He did not wish to see a man who had betrayed him to death, but sent for pious men who had warned him against his vicious course. His dying prayers for pardon, his fearful testimony against the fatal delusions that had misled him, and the false minister who had deceived him, were affecting in the extreme. Calling to see him in the afternoon, we could not get away until the next morning, for he begged us to stay and pray for him if happily God would have mercy on him.

"Wrecks of Christ's children lie all along this same perilous shore of worldliness and guilt. The ball-room is an ante-chamber of hell, where souls dress for initiation into Satan's kingdom. It is impossible to pray for these with hope, as God's curse rests on its *folly*, *licentiousness*, and *intemperance*. We warn our readers against the

dance for all the reasons we have given, and we shall continue still to entreat them.”*

With the testimony of *Dr. Adam Clarke* upon this point, I shall close this chapter :

“I learned to dance. I grew passionately fond of it ; would scarcely walk but in measured time, and was constantly tripping, moving, and shuffling in all times and places. I grew impatient of control, was fond of company, and wished to mingle more than I had ever done with young people. I also got a passion for better clothing than that which fell to my lot in life, and was discontented when I found a neighbor’s son dressed better than myself.

“I lost the spirit of subordination ; did not love work ; imbibed the spirit of idleness ; and, in short, drank in all the brain-sickening effluvia of pleasure. The authority of my parents was feared, indeed, but not respected, and few serious impressions could prevail in a mind imbued now with frivolity.

“I in no case ever kept any improper company ; nevertheless, dancing was to me a perverting influence, an unmixed moral evil. It drowned the voice of a well-instructed conscience, and was the first cause of impelling me to seek my happiness in this life. And I can testify that as far as my own observations have extended (and they have had a pretty wide range), I have known it to produce in others the same evils that it produced in me. I consider it, therefore, as a branch of that *worldly* education which leads from heaven to earth, from things spiritual to things sensual, and from God to Satan. Let them plead for it who will, *I know it to be evil*, and that only.

“They who bring up their children in this way, or send them to those schools where dancing is taught, are conse-

* *Northwestern Christian Advocate.*

crating them to the service of Moloch. No man, in his senses, will dance, said Cicero, a heathen. Shame on those Christians who advocate a cause by which many sons have become profligates and many daughters have been ruined!"*

Such are a few of the obvious evils of dancing. To enumerate them all would fill a volume. But let us pass from the ball-room to the next stage downward—the *theatre*.

CHAPTER III.

EVILS OF THEATRE-GOING.

Is it necessary to prove to a *Methodist* that the theatre is evil and only evil, and that to attend upon it is a sin and shame? It scarce seems possible. And yet it is said there are professed Christians and even Methodists among us, who apologize for and even attend theatres, and allow their children to do so! Let us, then, consider the evil of this practice in the light of the *moral character* of the theatre, and its *invariable influence* upon society.

If any confidence is to be placed in history, the theatre has been one unmitigated moral pest through the whole twenty-five centuries of its existence.

I. *The ANCIENT PAGAN MORALISTS condemned the theatre as subversive of public morality.* †

* Clarke's Theology, by Samuel Dunn, page 400.

† Most of this chapter consists of an abridgment of portions of "*The Theatre: Its Character and Influence*, by REV. R. M. HATFIELD, D.D."—a thorough pamphlet of forty octavo pages upon the subject. Chicago, Ill.: Poe & Hitchcock, publishers.

1. Four hundred years before Christ, *Plato* said: "Plays raise the passions and pervert them, and by consequence are dangerous to morality." Again: "The diversions of the stage are dangerous to temper and sobriety—they swell anger and desire too much. Tragedy is apt to make men boisterous, and comedy, buffoons. Thus those passions are cherished which ought to be checked, virtue loses ground, and reason grows precarious."

2. *Aristotle* says: "The law ought to forbid young people the seeing of comedies, till age and discipline have confirmed them in sobriety, fortified their virtue, and made them, as it were, proof against debauchery."

3. *Cicero* denounces "licentious plays and poems as the bane of sobriety and wise thinking." He says "that comedy subsists on lewdness, and that pleasure is the root of all evil."

4. *Livy* says of the origin of plays among the Romans: "They were brought in, upon the score of religion, to pacify the gods, and remove a mortality;" and adds, "The remedy in this case was worse than the disease, and the atonement more infectious than the plague." The same author says, "that when a theatre was being built under the direction of the censors, Scipio spoke against it in the House, as a useless and debauching experiment, and got an order for pulling it down."

5. *Valerius Maximus* says: "The theatres of Rome were the occasions of civil distractions, and the state first blushed and then bled for these entertainments."

6. *Plutarch* condemns plays on the ground "that they tend to corrupt the young."

7. *Seneca* says: "Nothing is so pernicious to good morals as to be present at these spectacles. Vice easily finds it way into the heart through the pleasurable emotions which they excite. From such scenes I depart

more ambitious and luxurious than before." Again: he charges the theatre "with having produced the extravagance and debauchery of the age."

8. *Tacitus* censures Nero for "hiring unfortunate gentlemen"—poor gentlemen of decayed fortune—"to appear upon the stage;" and says, "he ought to have relieved their necessities, and by his bounty set them above an ill practice, instead of driving them into it."

9. *Ovid*, in a work in which he endeavors to make amends for the injury done by the pernicious poems he had formerly written, proposes a plan for the reformation of public morals, and among other suggestions advises "the suppression of plays, on the ground that they promote lewdness and dissoluteness of manners."

Such was the opinion which *heathen* moralists formed of the character and influence of the theatre, even centuries before the Christian era.

II. *The EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS were emphatic in their condemnation of the theatre as a school of vice.*

1. *Theophilus*, Bishop of Antioch, thus writes in the second century: "'Tis not lawful for us to be present at the prizes of your gladiators, lest by these means we shall be accessory to the murders there committed; neither dare we presume upon the liberty of your shows, lest our senses should be tinctured with indecency and profaneness. We are for seeing no representations of lewdness." * * * "God forbid that Christians should dishonor themselves by such wickedness as this."

2. *Tertullian*, towards the close of the second century, says: "We keep off from your public shows, because we cannot understand the warrant of their original. There is superstition and idolatry in the case, and we dislike the entertainment because we dislike the reason of its institution; besides we have nothing to do with the prizes of the race-ground, the lewdness of the play-house, or the barbarities of

the bear-garden." In an argument to dissuade Christians from these indulgences, he says that "the tenor of their faith—the bond of principle and order of discipline had bound them against the entertainments of the town. Some people's faith is either too full of scruples, or too lax of sense. Nothing will serve to settle them but a plain text of Scripture. They hover in uncertainty, because it is not said as expressly Thou shalt not go to the play-house, as it is said Thou shalt not kill. But this looks more like fencing than argument. For we have the *meaning* of the prohibition, though not the *sound*, in the first Psalm: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.'"

3. *Clement of Alexandria* says: "The circus and theatre may not improperly be called the chair of pestilence. Away, then, with these lewd, ungodly diversions, which are but impertinence at the best. What part of impudence, either in words or practice, is omitted by the stage? Don't the buffoons take almost all manner of liberties, and plunge through thick and thin to make a jest?"

4. *St. Cyprian* says of the play-house: "What business has a Christian in such places as these? A Christian, who has not the liberty so much as to think of an ill thing, why does he entertain himself with lewd representations? Has he a mind to discharge his modesty and be fleshed for the practice? By using to see these things, he'll learn to do them."

5. *St. Chrysostom* says of plays and public shows: "What need have I to speak of the lewdness of the spectacles and be particular in description? For what's there to be met with but lewd laughing, but smut, railing, and buffoonery? In a word, 'tis all scandal and confusion. I speak to you all. Let none who partake of this holy table unqualify themselves with such mortal diversions."

6. *St. Augustine* calls theatres "cages of uncleanness and public schools of debauchery."

III. MODERN CHRISTIAN WRITERS *have not been less explicit in their condemnation of the theatre.*

1. *Archbishop Tillotson* calls the theatre "the devil's chapel, a nursery of licentiousness and vice; a recreation which ought not to be allowed among a civilized, much less among a Christian, people."

2. The *Bishop of Flanders*, in 1697, issued a pastoral letter, in which he says: "A man must be very ignorant of his religion not to know the great disgust it has always declared for public sights, and for plays in particular. The holy Fathers condemn it in their writings. They look upon them as works of heathenism and schools of debauchery, and they have always been abominated by the Church."

3. *Jeremy Collier*, in 1698, declared that "nothing had gone farther in debauching the age than the stage-poets and play-house."

4. *John Wesley*, in 1764; wrote to the mayor and corporation of Bristol against the erection of a theatre in the town: "The present stage entertainments not only sap the foundation of all religion, but tend to drinking and debauchery of every kind, which are constant attendants on these entertainments."

5. *Wilberforce* admonishes Christians against patronizing such places, "which," he says, "the debauched, inflamed with wine, or bent on the indulgence of his licentious appetites, finds most congenial to his state and temper of mind."

6. *William Prynne* published in 1633 a quarto volume of more than a thousand pages, closely printed, entitled "The Player's Scourge." The book is a rare one, and he is a lucky man who possesses a copy of it. An author of our own day—a man of no less authority and right to

speak than John Angell James—says of this book: “It contains a catalogue of authorities against the stage, which comprises every name of eminence in the heathen and Christian world. It comprehends the united testimony of the Jewish and Christian Churches, the deliberate acts of fifty-four ancient and modern general, national, and provincial councils and synods, both of Western and Eastern Churches; the condemnatory sentence of seventy-one ancient Fathers, and one hundred and fifty-one modern Popish and Protestant authors.”

But more upon this point in the next chapter.

IV. *As a general rule the theatre is essentially evil IN ITS MATTER.*

Read the following from one who has thoroughly studied the subject:*

“The great mass of the plays presented to the people to-day are either insipid or vicious, or both. Any honest reader who will wade through the trash that attracts at the theatre will be perfectly amazed. I have searched whole plays in vain for one inspiring, manly *thought*. I have endured this dirty work as a physician endures the stench of the pest-house, because it is necessary for a right understanding of the work done in society by the stage. Let us take a few specimens:

“The ‘*Serious Family*,’ presented ‘at the Haymarket Theatre, London, where its *popularity excelled the attraction of Macready or the Keans in their best characters.*’ ‘At Burton’s Theatre, New York City, *its run has exceeded that of any other piece of the present day.*’ ‘*It may be adduced as a fair specimen of modern comedy.*’ So much on the word of Samuel French, who must be received as good authority, since a man will not lie against his own calling. Now what is the burden of this play? Aminadab Sleek represents Christian benevolence,

* Rev. C. H. Fowler, of Chicago, Ill.

and is held up as a hypocrite. Lady Creamly is a benevolent solicitor, but is put in the worst light as a female despot. Her antipathy to fast living and fast men is made the excuse for licentiousness and infidelity in her son-in-law. Sir Charles Torrens, an *admitted* rake, is held up as a model man. The restraints of virtue are the sufficient excuse for his crimes. Lady Torrens is a model wife. She is made to lie to avoid inconvenience, is ridiculed and pitied while inclined to be steady, and is praised when she goes into excesses to please her husband. Widow Delmaine is gay in excess, flirting indefinitely, no way religious, yet most generous and philanthropic as contrasted with the mock benevolence of Christians. Aside from the profanity that leavens the play, what but evil can come of it? Vice is a pleasant thing. Licentiousness is commendable. Religion is condemned. All good deeds are done by bad people, and all bad deeds by good people.

“The play takes a ‘Serious Family,’ inclined to be religious, and through the influence of a rake and libertine converts them into a *fast*, frivolous family. This is held up as a great reform, more to be desired than the reformations wrought by Christianity. If the work of Jesus was upward, the work of this play is downward. Choose ye which gospel you will embrace.

“I need hardly refer to the ‘Hypocrite,’ so popular on the American boards. A viler assault upon religion and all that can save society would be difficult to find.

“A play very popular in nearly all the theatres of this country, gives us another specimen of what is demanded of stage-managers and furnished by them when possible. ‘Camille’ carries the sympathy of the crowd through every extremity of crime and profligacy. She is accomplished and winning, but none the less an admitted and open prostitute. She is loved and almost worshiped,

though in her the rottenness of depravity breaks out in a running sore. All her lewdness and shameless sin are charged to the over-virtue of society. She is pitied as a victim, not of deception but of *public opinion*. Society is too good, and the mission of this play is to tone it down to a level, where the vicious shall be honorable and the virtuous despised.

“Take the ‘French Spy’ and ‘Mazeppa.’ The ‘French Spy’ has no merit calculated to attract. The motive power is in the peculiar *dress*, or rather *undress*, of the actress. Vulgarity and passion are the fruits of such representations. ‘Mazeppa’ may have some merit wanting in the ‘French Spy,’ but it depends upon its lewdness for its power. Its chief attraction is in binding the actress, apparently naked, to a horse, and in representations of the same class.

“Can any one be profited by witnessing the horrid scenes in the ‘Six Degrees of Crime?’ Will it not stain and corrupt a young heart? If I had space, this argument might be extended indefinitely by the analysis of such plays as ‘The Forty Thieves,’ ‘The Devil in Paris,’ ‘Devil to Pay,’ ‘Great Devil,’ and the like. There is not the same amount of poison in each of these plays, but what is lacking in some is made up by the actors.”

V. *The theatre is a SCHOOL OF PROFANITY and irreligion.*

It has come to be a great virtue in a popular actor to be able to *extemporize profanity*. The “gag,” as *impromptu swearing* is called, is a stated part of the entertainment. When the interest flags, and the “roughs” become restive, the actor must feast them with a little fresh swearing. It is a sad fact that no part is cheered more than this when the oaths are adroitly thrown in or voluminously poured out. It is to-day, as it was in the days of Addison, who laments that in his day rant, curses, and imprecations

would raise storms of applause, while sentiments of genuine beauty and virtue dropped dead from the actor's lips. Any one reading the comedies so much applauded at our theatres would hardly see the demand for more profanity than is already crowded into the text. Take "Handy Andy," or "Box and Cox," or "The Loan of a Lover," or any others of the class, and the oaths almost touch each other from beginning to end. The *best* characters are the *worst* swearers. But even in these the "gag" gives additional spice.

What defence can be made for the usual interlude, the *fancy dance*, so essential to the greatest success? Conceive of a woman dressed in short illusion skirts, whirling on one foot, with the limbs making an angle of 120 degrees. This may be entertaining, but it can hardly be called *refining*, or *elevating*, or *moral*.

The play of the "Hypocrite" was worked over into a worse form solely to ridicule religion and hold up God's ordained means of saving men to the contempt and railery of the crowd gathered for a special treat. A woman in a Chicago theatre "brought down the house" by saying: "The first woman plucked the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and gave it to the first man to eat, and thus brought death (a doubtful evil) into the world. But I, a woman, *uphold* and *glory* in the deed of the first of my sex."

These are but samples of the material and animus of the modern theatre; so that if bad plays, if profanity by wholesale, if familiarity with the worst crimes, if the ridicule of all that is pure, or good, or holy, if the defence and apology for falsehood, licentiousness, prostitution, and every flagrant violation of decency, and honor, and purity, and virtue, can make an institution evil, then the theatre of to-day is *evil—evil from its purpose, evil in its matter,*

*evil in its acting, evil in its fruit. It is evil, and only evil, continually.**

The following recipe for a modern theatrical performance is from the *Round Table*, which is anything but a religious periodical:

“Sixteen pounds of powdered brimstone for lightning; twenty-four peals of thunder; a dozen imps with tails; a dozen bloody daggers; a skull and cross-bones; forty battle-axes; six terrific combats, three of them double-handed; a course of violations; eight murders; a pair of ensanguined shirts; one comic song; three hundred oaths, and sixty-four pages of blasphemy. This is what our city’s Bowery masses and village loafers delight in. This suits the intellects of ‘Plug-Uglies’ and ‘Dead Rabbits.’”

VI. *The character of the theatre may be inferred from the EFFECTS produced in the neighborhood* in which one is located.*

No sooner is the flaming poster set up, the doors opened, and the gas lighted, than decency flies it as health would a plague-spot. The erection of a new theatre in a previously respectable quarter of one of our cities is well known to destroy that quarter for any future decency of life. The private house is turned into a bagnio, the shop of honest trade into the faro-saloon or bar-room; and the play-house stands a spectacle of vice, supported by its congenial aids of rowdyism, gambling, drunkenness, and prostitution. Now, these effects are marked, unmistakable and uniform. A theatre located in any neighborhood in this or any other city blights that neighborhood as with a moral leprosy. It breaks out upon the very surface of things. Not only the inhabitants, but the houses, become scabbed with moral corruption. It demands and must have accessories and surroundings answering to its own moral character. There must be a bar-room under the same roof, or so near that it can be easily reached between the acts. And those who

* Rev. Dr. Fowler.

have been there know what a stampede there is between the acts when the thirsty patrons rush out to wet their whistles. Theatre-goers insist upon these accommodations. They require that licentiousness, and rum, and gambling shall be convenient to the place where they convene, so that they can pass easily from one excitement to the other. Now, if any man can give me any explanation of this that does not injure the character of the playhouse, I should be glad to hear it. But these are just the facts that *ministers* and Christian men *dodge* when they come to their apologies for the theatre.

VII. *The REPUTATION OF ACTORS as a class furnishes additional evidence with regard to the character of the theatre.*

1. It is not said that there are no exceptions to this statement. There was one righteous man in Sodom, but that did not do much towards elevating the average character of its population. There was one righteous man among the antediluvians, but Noah's character only made more apparent and hateful the abominations and corruptions that prevailed everywhere else. But these individual cases with regard to actors and actresses are the exceptions to the general rule. It still remains true that as a class they have been in bad repute for two thousand years. How comes it that members of this profession can set all laws of morality at defiance in their private lives? How happens it that an actor can dismiss his wife and take to himself the wife of another man and it seem no glaring impropriety? How is it that he may live in scandalous and admitted wickedness and the fact scarcely excite attention? How comes it to pass that a man or woman in that profession is *notorious not for being vicious, but for being virtuous?* The whole world knows that a virtuous actor or actress is now and always has been the exception, and not the rule.

2. A Church Council in the year 424 declares: "That

the testimony of people of ill reputation, of *players*, and others in such scandalous employment, shall not be admitted against any person."

3. *Theophilus* of Antioch, two hundred years before, says: "Even those very magistrates who favor the stage discountenance the players; they stigmatize their character and cramp their freedom; the whole tribe of them is thrown out of all honor or privilege." That was over sixteen hundred years ago. He says: "They are neither suffered to be lords nor gentlemen, to come within the senate nor harangue the people, or so much as be members of the common council."

4. *St. Cyprian*, in reply to a letter that he received on the subject, writes: "You have asked my thoughts concerning a certain player in your neighborhood, whether such a person ought to be allowed the privilege of communing. This man, it seems, continues his scandalous practices, and keeps a nursery under him; he teaches that which 'twas a crime for him to learn; sets up for a master of debauch, and propagates the lewd mystery. The case standing thus, 'tis my opinion that the admission of such a member would be a breach of the discipline of the gospel; neither do I think it fit that the Church should suffer by so infamous a correspondence."

5. *Cicero* says of the Romans, "Their predecessors counted all stage-plays uncreditable and scandalous, inso-much that any Roman who turned actor was not only to be degraded, but likewise, as it were, disincorporated, unnaturalized, by order of the censors."

6. *Livy* says that common players "were expelled from their tribe and not allowed to bear arms." The Athenians had a law that forbid any judge of the Areopagus to write a comedy. And the Lacedemonians would not allow the theatre among them on any terms or under any circumstances. In the Theodocian code, players are

called "Persons maimed and blemished in reputation." The function of players was counted scandalous, and those who came upon the stage to divert the people had a mark of infamy set upon them. In an old English work actors are classed with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars. Then we have the councils and decrees of the Church excommunicating players and denying the sacrament to any woman who marries an actor.

7. *Rousseau*, the infidel, said: "I observe, in general, that the situation of the actor is a state of licentiousness and bad morals; that the men are abandoned to disorder, and that the women lead scandalous lives."

Everybody knows that such is the reputation of most of the stage-players of the present day.

8. *Henry Ward Beecher*, who is certainly quite loose enough both in his theology and his views of amusement, says: "Putting together, in one class, all gamblers, circus-riders, actors, and racing-jockeys, I pronounce them to be men who live off society without returning any useful equivalent for their support. It is within the knowledge of all that men who cater for public pleasure are excluded from respectable society. In the support of gamblers, circus-riders, actors, and racing-jockeys, a Christian and industrious people are guilty of supporting mere mischief-makers; men whose very hearts are diseased, and whose sores exhale contagion to all around them. We pay moral assassins to stab the purity of our children; we warn them of temptation, and yet plant the seeds which shall bristle with all the spikes and thorns of the worst temptations."

9. Not long since a paper of high literary order, published in the city of New York, making no claims to a religious character, used the following language: "Exceptions there may be, and are; but as a class, the members of the dramatic profession in this country to-day are

persons who are very properly debarred from respectable society."

10. After a full and successful trial of the actor's life, Macready gave it up, unwilling that his daughters should mature under its perverting influence. Go behind the scenes. Looseness of manners, lowness of conversation and recklessness of morals prevail there. The theatrical life itself is socially wrong. Go to the homes of actors. In the 'wee sma' hours' of the night they return thither, flushed with the excitement of applause or wine. They sleep heavily until near noon-time, and rise languidly to rehearsals.

11. "Actors and actresses," says Dr. Taylor Lewis, "never have and never can be regarded as a reputable class in society." The red-handed assassin who butchered our beloved President made it his boast that he had received \$20,000 for his performances on the stage for a single year; and not many years since a notorious woman, for publicly dancing and indecently exposing her person on the stage, received the sum of \$60,000 in fifteen weeks. Madam Rachel, when she died, left each of her illegitimate children a large fortune.

12. One more test that will bring the matter home to our own bosoms. You, reader, may be a father, with sons and daughters growing up around you; would it be a pleasant fact for you to know that your daughters are intimate with the actors who visit your city from time to time? You have sons, it may be, just going into life at a time when its perils gather thickly about them, and when a step makes or mars their destiny forever; would you like to know that they are given a free entrance at all times to the green-room and are familiar with its mysteries?

Perhaps you have children in whom your thoughts and wishes are bound up, as they can be in nothing else

in this life. In all your bright dreams for their honorable future, did it ever cross your mind that your boy might become an actor? You have thought of medicine, of the law, of trade, of his being an editor, or filling the pulpit—almost everything possible of honor, has passed before your vision as you have dreamed upon this subject. And you have, perhaps, prayed alone in your room, and have prayed together, that, as he passes through the world, he might never be too harshly exposed to its temptations and perils. Did it ever cross your mind that he might avoid these sharp temptations by connecting himself with the theatre?

Let me ask you, young man, justly proud of your sister, would you not about as soon follow her to her grave as to have her marry an actor? And so, parents, as to your sons and daughters; would you not about as willingly follow any one of them to the grave as to have them marry an actor or an actress?

The corrupters of others necessarily become debauched themselves. Men and women whose nightly business it is to *act a lie*, to *seem* to be what they are not, who are trained to *assume* the most contradictory passions and moral states, have no power to prevent this life of falsity and sham from reacting most disastrously upon themselves. What God hath linked together as cause and effect let no man think to put asunder. There is absolutely no escape from the injury inflicted upon the character by this reflex influence. The actor who does not become thoroughly depraved is a spectacle to angels and to men. The actress who passes through this terrible ordeal unstained and unsuspected is more to be marveled at than if she had walked blindfolded in the midst of red-hot plowshares without being burned.

VIII. *All the affinities of the theatre are for vice and*

corruption, in the midst of which it naturally lives and flourishes.

1. This proposition will scarcely be doubted by any reader. And how is it to be accounted for, except upon the theory of the inherent moral corruption of the theatre itself?

2. "Most theatres," says the *Central Christian Advocate*, "are houses of assignation, liquor-saloons, and gambling-hells combined,—or so intimately connected that you cannot separate them. No theatre can live and be decent. The gallery for bawds is necessary to the success of any play-house. Some decent people affect not to know these things, but if they will inquire of any honest policeman, they will find out some things they never knew perhaps."

"We repeat it, the theatre is attractive to most people on account of its impurities; and many men go there often to make assignations. It stands next to the brothel in vileness, and holds the same relation to it that the water of the mill-dam does to the mill; that is, it runs it. Its ways are the ways of death."

From first to last it was an evil place;
And now such things were acted there, as made
The devils blush; and from the neighborhood,
Angels and holy men, trembling, retired.

3. Go back to the time of the French Revolution. The vilest corruption and crime openly prevailed, and the theatres in Paris were increased fourfold during that Revolution.

"While the courts of justice were thrust out by Jacobin tribunals," says Edmund Burke, "and silent churches were only the funeral monuments of departed religion, there were in Paris no fewer than *twenty-eight* theatres, great and small, most of them kept open at the public expense, and all of them crowded every night.

Among the gaunt, haggard forms of famine, amidst the yells of murder, the tears of affliction and the cries of despair, the song and the dance, the mimic scene and the buffoon laughter went on as regularly as in the gay hours of festive peace. Even under the scaffold of judicial murder, and the gaping planks that poured down blood upon the spectators, the space was hired out for a show of dancing dogs. The society of Paris was like a den of outlaws upon a doubtful frontier—a lewd tavern for the revels and debaucheries of banditti, assassins, and paramours, filled with licentious and blasphemous songs appropriate to their brutal and hardened course of life. The crowd went at night to the theatre to be diverted with the representation of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and turned in the morning to the congenial work of butchering babes and half-grown girls.”

IX. *To attend theatres is to put yourself in the company of the lowest and vilest classes in society.*

1. No effort that has ever been made, or can be made, has induced, or will induce, Christian people to patronize the theatre to any great extent. As a rule, therefore, it is a place to which the God-fearing and prayerful and virtuous never go, or allow their children to go.

2. A few decent, reputable, and sober people may attend the theatre, but they are not there in such numbers as to give character to the audience. But whether you find them there or not, you will find another class there. You will find the rakes and the gamblers; the fast men and the loose women; the harlots and the libertines; and it is not the kind of company into which a young man should go. I don't say that you will make these men your associates, but the best characteristics of youth—its ingenuousness, its frankness, its susceptibility to impressions, its very best traits—render him peculiarly liable to yield to these bad influences. Can a man take

pitch in his hands and not be defiled? Can he take fire into his bosom and not be burned? He *may* associate with these people and not be injured. But it is not a thing to be expected. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." The very air of some places is so loaded with moral contagion that a man cannot breathe it without being rendered worse for it. And much of the company that gathers in and about the theatre is of such a character that every young man especially ought to shun the place as he would shun the very gates of hell. No lazaret-house or hospital for the diseased, with small-pox or cholera patients, is so dangerous to a young man as the company that convenes night after night about the theatre.

X. *The theatre HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN TO DO ANY ONE ANY GOOD, while it has led its tens of thousands to ruin and eternal death.*

1. A long and earnest conflict has been going on in the world, *pro* and *con.*, as to the utility of the theatre. Its advocates have all along claimed that it was a school of virtue and an instrument of reform and moral exaltation. Where, then, are the specimens or illustrations? Christianity can point to her millions which she has rescued from drunkenness, profanity, and other vices. Where are the men and women reformed and made virtuous by the theatre? Who will point to the first man or woman who has been reformed or elevated, or even strengthened or encouraged, in the ways of virtue and sobriety.

"We are told," says a secular New York paper, "that theatres reform the wicked. Where they reform one they ruin thousands. The Ticket-of-Leave-Man, lately so popular, once led—as the story goes—an absconding clerk to return to his employers £1500 out of £2500 which he had stolen. So the theatre taught him to ease his conscience by returning only a part and retaining £1000 of

his plunder. Grand moral teaching that! and yet it is not at all probable that this partial restitution of stolen money by a theatre-going thief ever took place.

"We know that good men and wise will differ with us in these views. They will tell us that the pure, the true, and the cultured have patronized and participated in theatrical representations. That may all be, but they were not made what they were by these; they remained what they were in spite of them."

2. Hear this secular and irreligious paper still further:

"The youth entranced by the syren power of the theatre becomes no worthier son or truer brother. The friends of home are not his links of life. The spell of a magician mightier than they is upon him. The thronged galleries, the brilliant stage, the tinsel actors, the stirring utterances, and the exciting applause, come to him as from Calypso's isle. When all is over, what wonder that the bar-room and the brothel, the debauch and the misery ensue! These are not necessarily or universally the concomitants of the theatre; but they are so much craved by many after the theatrical fever, fitful and ephemeral, is over, that it is almost impossible to banish them from the precincts of the stage."

3. "Young men," says the *Central Christian Advocate*, "who habitually attend the theatre are not to be trusted; they are generally neither virtuous nor honest. No young man can go to the theatre three or four nights in the week and keep a pure mind one month. It is the half-way house between the honest family and the brothel. Girls who habitually go to the theatre will most likely go to the city stews and sell themselves. These things are so palpable that no one half posted will venture a denial."

4. To patronize the theatre involves a foolish expenditure of money; and a foolish expenditure of money in

a young man is an extravagance which tends to one of these results—either to poverty, or to dishonesty, or to crime, and very often to all three. Aside, therefore, from all moral considerations, what broker, or banker, or insurance company, or merchant wishes to employ a young man who is in the habit of attending a theatre once or twice a week? Even with Deists or Atheists, if such are to be found, it would be no objection that a young man attends church or labors in a Sabbath-school. But the most loose and irreligious business firms regard it as an objection to any young man that he is a votary of the theatre. This fact at once suggests more beyond—brothels, gambling-hells, bad faith, money purloined, etc. How conclusive this undeniable fact as to the moral influence of the theatre!

If, therefore, a young man wishes to keep his influence and standing, and rise in the world, it does not become him to waste his money in supporting the dancing Jezebels and riff-raff who live by pandering to the pleasures and ministering to the vices of society.

5. Theatricals—such, at least, as are now most popular—of the French and Italian school, must and do create a disrelish for domestic life. They make home joys less attractive, and home duties more irksome. They blunt the natural sensibilities by a false excitement of them in view of imaginary suffering. The heart then becomes hardened towards actual woe. Whatever thus diverts the mind and perverts the heart from the true ends of social life must have an immoral influence.

XI. *The theatre never has been, and never can be, reformed or made better.*

1. The whole history of the past, and the experience of ages, are summed up in these few lines of *Pollok*:

“The theatre was, from the very first,
The favorite haunt of sin, though honest men—

Some very honest, wise, and worthy men—
 Maintained it might be turned to good account;
 And so perhaps it might, but never was."

2. "The theatre," says the *Central Christian Advocate*, "has always been hopelessly vile. It has nothing to redeem it from utter wickedness. Its literature for the most part is the shameless travesties of noble works and the imbecile driveling of obscure wittings. Its actors, with few exceptions, are the very vilest men and the most abandoned characters. Its plays are generally vulgar and immoral. Its paraphernalia wanton and impure. Its surrounding as bad as possible."

3. To reform the theatre—that is, to make it virtuous, in its matter, acting, and influence—would be to destroy it. It is chiefly supported by those who are attracted by its vileness—men of a low order of intellect, without mental resources upon which they can draw for entertainment, who need somebody to amuse them, and are willing to pay to be amused. These men, who are in quest of impure excitements, and who love to have their ears tickled with profane and impure jests, are, to a large extent, the patrons of the theatre—so large that if their patronage could be withdrawn the play-house would die. The theatre, purged of its objectionable features, would be as dull and uninteresting to these men as a Methodist class-meeting. Theatrical managers, therefore, who would live by their business, must cater to the depraved appetites of this class. It is for this, among other reasons, that the reform of the theatre is impossible.

3. Another insurmountable obstacle to the "reform" of which we have heard so much is found in the fact, already stated, that Christians cannot be induced, in any considerable numbers, either to patronize the theatre or waste time in vain efforts for its reformation. They know too well the folly of all such endeavors. They know too

well that the *object* is to induce them to patronize the theatre, *not* to lift *it* up to morality and virtue, but to break down the public conscience, induce others to follow their bad example, and thus debauch both them and the general public at the same time.

Such is our general indictment against the theatre. During all its history it has been an evil institution. The ancient Pagan moralists condemned it—the early Christian writers condemned it—modern Christian writers and ministers almost invariably condemn it—it is evil in its *matter*, evil in its *manner*—a school of profanity and irreligion, and a moral and social blight wherever located. Its actors are generally persons of bad reputation, dissolute and immoral, and its affinities are all for corruption. Its supporters are to a large extent tipplers, gamblers, debauchees, and prostitutes. It has never been known to do any good, while it has ruined tens of thousands; and it is utterly incapable of being reformed or becoming anything better than a moral pest-house in every community in which its loathsome existence is tolerated.

And yet (enough to make angels weep if they had tears to shed) there are found professed *Christians*, and even **METHODISTS**, who patronize, and thus sanction and approve by their presence and pecuniary support, this God-dishonoring and soul-destroying curse.

From these notices of the evils of card-playing, dancing, and theatre-going, which are but specimens of many similar follies, let us now turn to the Holy Scriptures, to see what light, if any, they throw upon the subject.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VOICE OF THE BIBLE.

To every *Christian* the BIBLE is the end of all controversy. He should do whatever it enjoins, and shun whatever it condemns. And as we all recognize this Book as the rule of our faith and practice, it shall be our next business to compare the amusements already noticed with the tenor and spirit of the word of God.

It is not, of course, claimed that the Bible condemns dancing, billiards, etc., *by name*. Neither does it so condemn gambling, lotteries, betting on elections, horse-racing, forgery, or arson. But it inculcates *principles* which cut up all such follies and sins root and branch. And it is upon this ground that we contend that participation in the popular amusements of the day, such as dancing, card-playing, billiards, theatre-going, etc., is incompatible with the Christian profession, spirit, and life, and should therefore be discountenanced by all true friends of Christ and of the Church of God.

I. *The Scriptures represent conversions to Christ as A GREAT CHANGE, to be followed by a corresponding change in the OUTWARD LIFE of its subjects.*

2 Cor. v. 17: "If any man *be* in Christ *he is* a new creature; *old things are passed away*; behold all things are become new."

But men of the world "mind earthly things," and look wholly upon "things that are seen and temporal." In these they seek and find their only earthly enjoyments—to eat and drink, and dress and amuse themselves, and get money and spend it. Such were the lives of the early Gentile converts, at least, before conversion; and so live the unconverted now. But in conversion, old things are

to pass away. New associations are formed, new relishes, aspirations, and hopes are implanted in the soul, and new sources of enjoyment are opened up. Henceforth we are to look, not at the things that are seen, and temporal, but at things not seen, and eternal. Our affections are to be on things above, and not upon things on the earth. If, then, we are thus renewed and changed in the current of our relishes, desires, and hopes, a new life necessarily follows, as when the tree is changed the fruit also will be changed. This general principle covers the whole case. If "old things are passed away," and "all things are become new," we shall hereafter seek our delight in the things of God, and shall abandon forever the vain pleasures and delusive follies of an unbelieving world.

If professed Christians are to live like others so far as worldly pleasures are concerned, how are the world to see that there has been any real change wrought in their hearts? "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good," said the Saviour, "or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit." If the tree professes to be good, let the fruit or life correspond with the profession.

II. *The Scriptures bear a general testimony against a life of worldly pleasure, as inconsistent with a Christian profession.*

1 Tim. v. 6, St. Paul says, "but she that *liveth in pleasure* is dead while she liveth;" that is, if she lives a gay and pleasure-seeking life, she will be dead in religion. And let none suppose that the phrase "liveth in pleasure" means something worse than mere worldly gayety. It means precisely such a life as all those lead who follow the fashionable amusements of the world, and nothing else.

Donnegan in his Greek Lexicon defines the original word rendered pleasure thus: *spatalao*, "to live luxuriously or sumptuously; to riot in luxury—to frolic." A perfect

picture of a modern "hop," with a luxurious supper at twelve, with plenty of champagne, and a general frolic till daylight; but not the slightest intimation of impurity, unless the "frolic," implies it.

Parkhurst's Lexicon defines the word to mean "to live extravagantly, luxuriously, or voluptuously."

Dr. Albert Barnes says, "the Greek word *spatalao* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, except in James v. 5: ['Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth,' etc.] It means to live in luxury, voluptuously; to indulge freely in eating and drinking; to yield indulgence of the appetites. *It does not indicate grossly criminal pleasures*, but the kind of pleasure connected with luxurious living, and with pampering the appetites."

Dr. Adam Clarke thus renders the passage: "*She that liveth delicately—voluptuously* indulging herself with dainties. It does not indicate *grossly criminal pleasures*; but simply means one who indulges herself in good eating and drinking, pampering her body at the expense of her mind." And after citing an ancient Greek author to justify this definition, he says: "I have introduced this long quotation the better to fix the meaning of the apostle, to show that the life of pleasure mentioned here does not mean *prostitution* or *uncleanness* of any kind, though such a life may naturally lead to dissolute manners."

Dr. MacKnight, than whom there are few better Greek scholars, says, "the word *spatalao* signifies *one who fareth deliciously*;" and his paraphrase or commentary upon the whole verse is, "But the widow who liveth in gayety and luxury is dead while she liveth in that manner," etc.

In the general Epistle of James, v. 1, 5, addressing certain rich men in the church who were corrupting it, as some are doing now, he says, "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you." "Ye have *lived in pleasure* on the earth; ye have nour-

ished your hearts as in the day of slaughter." Here the same Greek word is used as in the passage last cited—*spatalao*, "to riot in luxury, to frolic;" and the same unchristian practices are solemnly condemned.

All this shows how specifically and emphatically St. Paul condemned a gay and pleasure-seeking life as utterly incompatible with the life and power of religion in the soul. If we live in pleasure, we are dead while we live.

Gal. v. 19–21: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

In this passage we find "revelings and such like" enumerated among the works of the flesh. This phrase plainly covers dancing, wine-drinking, gay, festive parties, and all worldly folly. But to break its force as against worldly amusements, it has been alleged, as in regard to the preceding passage, that "revelings and such like," has no reference to feasting and dancing, but to licentiousness! This I emphatically deny, and will give the proof:

1. The passage itself shows upon its face that this cannot be the meaning of the phrase; for the apostle had already mentioned "adultery, fornication, uncleanness," and "lasciviousness;" and hence, to represent him as again using a phrase which means lasciviousness is to accuse him of the strangest tautology. But when we take it to mean worldly amusements, its position is natural and comprehensive—"drunkenness, revelings, and such like." And who does not know that dancing, and billiards, and theatre-going, and drinking are usually associated?

2. The Greek word *komoi*, translated revelings, does not refer to lasciviousness, but to precisely what answers to a modern ball or "hop," with its accompaniments of wine and music, dancing and late hours. Let us consult the Greek lexicons:

Parkhurst defines the word thus: "*komos*—reveling, lascivious, feasting [not *conduct*, mark] with songs and music." *Donnegan* defines it to mean—"A jovial assembly of friends, who met at an entertainment, or to celebrate a festival, with *music*, DANCING, and singing hymns, and odes—a band of revelers, etc." Here you see that the *komoi* forbidden by the apostle included music, dancing, and a sumptuous supper, and *tendencies* to lasciviousness, but did not include lasciviousness itself. It means *an ancient ball, and NOTHING ELSE*. And the phrase "and *such like*" covers all *similar* worldly pleasures and follies. There is no evading this fact, unless we are determined to wrest the word of God to accommodate our own carnal appetites and longings. And if we do this, we may as well cast off God's authority over us and our conduct at once, and give up all pretensions to piety and all hope of heaven at last.

3. Do not fail to notice that these "revelings and such like" are specifically designated as "works of the flesh," and are classed with adultery, murders, drunkenness, etc. And nothing of the kind is found among the fruits of the Spirit; for *they* are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." And the apostle immediately adds that "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;" that is, they have put down and overcome all these fleshly lusts for the pleasures and vanities of the world, and are seeking happiness in Christ alone and the things of religion. Depend upon it, brethren, if we are Christians,

we are "debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; 'for if we live after the flesh, we shall die: but if we through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live.'" Rom. viii. 12.

4. Mark with what solemn emphasis the apostle concludes the passage. After having enumerated the works of the flesh, even to "revelings and such like," he adds: "Of the which I tell you before [before the day of judgment and final retribution], as I have also told you in time past, that *they which do such things* SHALL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD." May God in mercy help us all to heed the solemn warning!

1 Pet. iv. 3, 4: "For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the some excess of riot, speaking evil of *you*."

Here observe (1) that Christians were not to live as formerly, and like other men, in folly and dissipation. (2). That "revelings" and "banquetings" are specified, which covers all balls, hops, and masquerades, at least. (3.) That the early Christian had ceased to "run with *them* that walked in these follies." (4.) That the ungodly thought this very "strange" and over-rigid, and (5) that they spoke evil of the children of God, on account of their peculiar abstemiousness and self-denial. And to-day the same course meets the same treatment, even at the hands of some who profess religion, and ought to be found wholly upon the Lord's side.

2 Tim. iii. 1-8, St. Paul says: "This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, etc., despisers of those that are good, traitors [to God and religion], heady, high-minded, *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*;

having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away."

Further on he says that "as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth."

A more perfect portrait of a modern pleasure-seeking professor could scarcely be drawn. The love of pleasure stands associated with its kindred vices, contempt of the truly pious, unfaithfulness to Christ, pride, formality without religion, and hostility to God's faithful watchmen, who, like Moses of old, contend for the truth. And mark the stern decree of the apostle—"from such turn away;" that is, as Barnes well expresses it, "have no intercourse with them as if they were Christians; show no countenance to their religion."

1 John ii. 15: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Here "the world" does not mean the *globe*, nor its *inhabitants*, but its amusements, follies and carnal pleasures. Hence it is added, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." And no such love of pleasure, it is declared, can co-exist with the love of God in the same bosom. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

III. *The Scriptures constantly enjoin SELF-DENIAL as an indispensable Christian duty.*

Matt. xvi. 25: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

Mark viii. 34: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

Luke ix. 23: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Also, ch. xiv. 27: "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

In his letter to Titus, ii. 11, 12, Paul says: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*, we should live *soberly, righteously, and godly* in this present world;" and then adds, "these things exhort and teach."

Heb. xi. 24-26: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Here we have an *example* of self-denial set before us—Moses discarding the pleasures of sin, which were but for a season at best, and choosing even affliction with the people of God, that he might finally inherit eternal life.

But if Christians indulge in all worldly amusements and follies like others, where is the *self-denial*? where the *cross*? where the *peculiarity*? where the *difference in the life*?

IV. *The Scriptures plainly require Christians to COME OUT FROM THE WORLD, and NOT TO BE CONFORMED TO ITS SPIRIT AND PRACTICES.*

Rom. xii. 1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service*. And *be not conformed to this world*; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*."

But if the world dance, and play cards and billiards, and attend theatres, and we do the same things, are we not conformed to them, instead of their being conformed to Christ? In what sense is our body a living sacrifice to

God if we use it to play billiards and dance polkas and waltzes? Oh, how far are we from the divine standard, when thus swept away by the spirit and vanities of a prayerless and ungodly throng, who seek their only good in this world, and are hastening with every passing day to a dark and terrible hereafter! And yet professed *Christians* join the wild revel, and help to lead them on to death and destruction! Oh, may God pity and have mercy upon these professed Christians—Methodists, especially—who have thus helped to deepen their blindness, increase their carnal security, render their conversion to Christ more difficult, and their final and eternal ruin more probable!

1 Peter i. 14: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy."

But if we live a gay and pleasure-seeking life, as we did before conversion, are we not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts? Where, then, is the holiness in conversation and deportment? Where the conformity to Christ, and the example that leads others to him and his service?

2 Cor. vi. 17: "Wherefore *come out from among them, and be ye separate*, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*, and I will receive you. And will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Here the prohibition "not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers," is enforced by the general principle that Christianity and the world are not to be blended in the life of the same person. The Christian is to deny himself, even as to the choice of an irreligious

companion, to "come out from" the irreligious and "be separate," that the Lord may receive him.

V. *Christians should avoid even the APPEARANCE of evil.*

1 Thess. v. 22: "Abstain from all *appearance* of evil;" not merely from that which is *intrinsically* and *obviously* sinful, but from that also which may be indifferent, but which *others* regard as wrong. Now who will deny that for a professed Christian to be seen playing cards or billiards, dancing or attending a theatre, *appears* wrong to nine-tenths of the people of God, and also to a vast majority of non-professors? And if this be so, no matter what such practices are in themselves, this text forbids Christians indulging in them.

VI. *We must not unnecessarily cause or allow our Christian profession and character to be brought into disrepute.*

Rom. xiv. 16: "Let not then your good be evil spoken of." Do not practice those things, whether it be eating meat offered to idols, or anything else, which will bring a reproach upon Christianity, and give the unconverted occasion to speak evil of the religion which you profess. But for professed Christians to play cards, dance, or attend theatres, *does* give occasion for the world to reproach the cause of Christ; and therefore no Christian should ever indulge in such practices.

VII. *We must not indulge in anything, however innocent in itself, if thereby a brother Christian is grieved or stumbles in the way to heaven.*

Rom. xiv. 21: "It is good neither to eat flesh nor drink wine, nor *anything* whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak."

The subject under consideration was, whether a Christian should eat the flesh of animals that had been offered in sacrifice to idols. The Church were divided upon the question. Some ate and others were grieved, stumbled, and

made weak in faith and love. Now how did Paul decide? "There is nothing unclean in itself." Abstractly considered, it is a matter of indifference. But "let no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." And soon after comes the general declaration, "It is good neither to eat flesh," etc., as already cited.

Now, for professed Christians to play cards and billiards, and dance, and attend theatres, *does* grieve and afflict, and stumble a vast majority of their fellow disciples; and I have no doubt has in various ways "destroyed" hundreds of our fellow immortals for whom Christ died. How then can Christians be justified in these practices in the light of this passage of Scripture?

VIII. *We are to do nothing that we cannot do to the glory of God.*

1 Cor. x. 31: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or *whatsoever* ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Here the same question is under discussion, and the apostle inculcates the same doctrine. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." But can men and women dance polkas, and play billiards, and go to circuses and theatres "to the glory of God?" Will such conduct *honor* the Christian name and profession? Do Christians, by so doing, "let their light so shine before men that others [the irreligious], by seeing their good works [their good *dancing* and *card-playing*], will glorify their Father which is in heaven?"

IX. *We are to SET OUR AFFECTIONS UPON THINGS ABOVE, as we cannot do if we indulge in worldly amusements.*

Col. iii. 2: "If ye then be risen with Christ [have been

raised up from the death of sin and folly] seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

But whoever gives himself up to worldly amusements soon becomes so fascinated by them that his affections are much more upon them than upon God and eternity. His heart is not upon the things that are unseen and eternal, but upon those that are seen and temporal—the fashion of this world that passeth away. Such a life of pleasure is, therefore, utterly at variance with that spirituality and heavenly-mindedness which this passage enjoins.

X. *Indulging in such amusements is incompatible with that SPIRIT OF PRAYER in which Christians are expected to live and die.*

Our Saviour taught, Luke xviii. 1, that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" and St. Paul's advice, 1 Thess. v. 17, is that Christians "pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks." In his first letter to Tim. ii. 8, he says, "I will that men pray *everywhere*, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting." Now while these passages do not teach that Christians should be always upon their knees, or uttering vocal prayer, they certainly teach that Christians are to pray *much*, to pray *constantly*; that is, not to live days and weeks without praying; and that they are to maintain a *spirit of prayer* at all times, and wherever they are.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air;
His watchword at the gates of death,—
He enters heaven with prayer.

But how can such a spirit be maintained while playing cards? What person carries a prayerful spirit to the ball-room? Who ever prayed even in his heart in a

theatre? Every votary of these amusements knows that the two things are as utterly opposed, the one to the other, as light and darkness. If, then, we obey Christ and his apostles, and maintain the spirit of prayer as they enjoin, we must give up our worldly amusements and follies, for the two are utterly incompatible, the one with the other.

Such, then, is the general tenor and spirit of that blessed Book which is our only guide as to our conduct here, and the results thereof hereafter. It teaches us that at conversion old things should pass away, as the dry leaves of the beech are shed from the boughs and disappear when the buds are swelled by the warmth of spring—that we cannot live gay and pleasure-seeking lives and enjoy the love of Christ in our souls—it classes “revelings” among the works of the flesh, that debar their votaries from admission to heaven—that the early Christians ceased to indulge in “excess of wine, revelings, banquetings,” etc., when they embraced Christ—that we are not to be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God—that we are not to love the world, if we wish the love of God to abide in us—that we are to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Christ—that we are not to be conformed to this world, not to fashion ourselves according to the former lusts—that we are to come out from the world and be separate, that God may receive us—that we are to avoid even the *appearance* of evil, and not let our good be evil-spoken of—that we should do nothing which will grieve, or stumble, or offend our brethren in Christ, as card-playing, dancing, etc., does—that we are to set our affections on things above, as we cannot if we follow the vanities of the present life—and that we are to live in and cultivate such a spirit of prayer as is utterly incompatible with a life of pleasure and worldly amusements.

These are but specimens of the general teachings of

the Bible upon the subject ; but enough to show that the practices against which I plead are entirely incompatible with the Christian profession, spirit and life. Whatever may have been our practice, therefore, or may be our present inclinations or preferences, such is the voice of God. It is not more certain that Christ came into the world and died to save us, than it is that, the Bible being our guide, a life of pleasure and worldly amusements is incompatible with the Christian name and profession.

CHAPTER V.

THE VOICE OF THE WATCHMEN.

THE Church of Christ is his flock on earth. He is the chief Shepherd, and his ministers are under-shepherds, to feed and watch over his flock and guard them from evil. These ministers are also his watchmen, who are to stand on the watch-towers of Zion, and blow the trumpet and warn the people when they see the sword coming. Now, there is no reason on earth why they should wish to prohibit the members of the Church from the enjoyment of anything that does not interfere with their spiritual safety and progress, and with their eternal welfare. On the contrary, the tendency is rather to interpret God's word too leniently, and to make broader the way that leads to heaven.

But with all this liability and tendency to lower the standard of self-denial and of piety to please the natural appetites and desires, a note of warning has rung out through all the ages from the trumpets of the watchmen against the follies we herein condemn. That they are condemned by Christ and his apostles, and by the early

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Christian writers, we have already shown. And that the modern watchmen have been equally faithful we shall now proceed to show.

I. *The general rules of our Church have been a standing testimony of the ministry against worldly amusements for over a century.*

We have already cited the section bearing upon this subject, page 3, and refer to it here as embodying the religious convictions of the Methodist ministry throughout all our history. And for long years it was no more possible for a person to remain in our societies and play cards or dance than it now is to remain and steal, or lie, or get drunk. The line was drawn just as God draws it between the Church and the world, and the preachers administered accordingly. Scores were cut off for breach of this rule, but thousands were thus kept from the downward way, proved faithful, and now inherit the promises. And so far as spirituality and moral power and influences were concerned, who will deny that these were the golden years of Methodism, both in Europe and America?

II. *The ministry of our Church and of other Churches have not ceased to warn the people and to remonstrate against the ingress of this sin and folly into the Church.*

1. BISHOP MORRIS, the senior Bishop of our Church, thus speaks through the columns of the *Western Christian Advocate*:

“That some people join in these trifling amusements who *profess* to be Christians is admitted; but they are self-deluded, their life contradicts their profession. ‘The tree is known by its fruit.’ Such professors ‘have a name to live, but are dead.’ And this is specially true of our own denomination, who know their calling better. To call men and women Methodists who dance, pitch quoits, play ball, or the like, is a contradiction of terms, as much as to speak of humble fops, sober drunkards, or honest thieves. Let every Methodist pastor see to it that no dancing or gambling members are allowed to remain in our Church, unless they confess their sins and

forsake them; and if any Methodist pastor refuses or neglects to enforce the rules, let his Annual Conference attend to his case."

2. BISHOP PIERCE, of the M. E. Church South, is equally explicit:

"Dram-drinkers and dancing Methodists, without prompt confession of wrong, deep humiliation, and solemn pledges never to repeat, will be—or they ought to be—cut off. The preachers, I trust, will cease to rely upon talking and coaxing, and let all these old offenders know that the Church cannot, will not, tolerate these vices and fooleries. If it be said that our young members will quit us, and go to other Churches, I answer let them go. We lose nothing but numbers, and others gain nothing that a Church of Christ ought to have. For one, I say, any Church desiring such accessions, is welcome to all the Methodists, so called, who can be bought off by the privilege of dancing."

3. The entire board of Bishops of the Southern Methodist Church thus speak in their Episcopal Address of the 18th of May, 1867:

"This is no time to abate our testimony against worldliness in all its forms. Our Church has never faltered in its teaching or modified its tone in relation to dancing, theatres, the manufacture and sale of ardent spirits, drunkenness, revelings, and such like, as demoralizing and fatal to godliness. Now, that we are threatened with these evils, coming in like a flood, we renew our warning."

4. BISHOP McILVAINE, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, thus speaks in one of his pastoral letters:

"Let me now turn to two objects, in which there is no difficulty of discrimination—the *theatre* and the *dance*. The only line I would draw in regard to those is that of *entire exclusion*. And yet, my brethren, I am well aware how easy it is for the imagination to array both of these in such an abstract and elementary simplicity, so divested of all that gives them their universal character and relish, that no harm could be detected in either. And the same precisely can be easily done with the card-table and horse-race. The exercise of graceful movement in the dance, and the exercise of speed in the horse-race, may easily be conceived of in such a light as to make them very innocent. But what if they were attempted to be got up under such an abstract form, and made common amusement in such elementary simplicity—how would they succeed? Their deadness as to all that makes their usual interest would be

their sufficient condemnation. The question is not what we can imagine they may be, but what they always have been, and will be, and must be in such a world as this, to render them pleasurable to those who patronize them. Strip them bare, till they stand in the simple innocence to which their defenders' arguments would reduce them, and the world would not have them. To be genial to the taste of those who most sustain them, they must be matters of worldly fashion and gayety; and not only so, but designed to promote the spirit of such things, and so dependent on them that in proportion as these condiments are lacking they are rejected as insipid. Were the trial made of a series of dancing assemblies, conducted in all respects as becomes the sobriety and spiritual-mindedness of the Christian character, so that it would be nothing inconsistent if every attendant were a devout and earnestly pious person, it would need no prophet to predict their entire failure. The world would ridicule such a dance, and Christian people would think that they had something else to do than to attend to it."

5. The venerable BISHOP MEAD thus indorses the views of his honored colleague of Ohio. Speaking of dancing, he says :

"As an amusement, seeing that it is a perversion of an ancient religious exercise, and has ever been discouraged by the sober-minded and pious of all nations, on account of its evil tendencies and accompaniments, we ought conscientiously to inquire whether its great liability to abuse, and its many acknowledged abuses, should not make us frown upon it *in all its forms*? I will briefly allude to some of the objections to it: When taught to the young at an early age, it is attended with an expense of time and money which might be far better employed; it promotes the love of dress and pleasure, to which the young are already too prone; it tempts to vanity and love of display; it induces a strong desire to enter on the amusements of the world at an early period, in order to exhibit the accomplishments thus acquired, and to enjoy a pleasure for which a taste has been formed; it leads the young ones exactly into an opposite direction to that pointed out in the Word of God and pledged in the baptismal vows. Thus educated, they are, in this respect, at least, trained not in the way they ought to go, but in the way they ought to forsake, according to almost universal consent, if by Divine grace they are ever turned to God in true penitence and faith."—(See "Baptismal Vows and Worldly Amusements.")

6. Within the last year (1866-7) almost every Methodist Episcopal Conference has had the matter under con-

sideration, and has taken special action upon the subject. The following may be taken as specimens of the action of the Conferences :

NEW YORK CONFERENCE.

Resolved, 1. That we, the members of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, deeply regret that the members of our Church should ever be found attending dances, theatres, circuses, operas, negro minstrels, playing those games which do not tend to godliness, "taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus," and mingling in those associations which contradict the Divine idea of that pure religion which keeps its possessor unspotted from the world.

2. That as those who must give account to God, we affectionately and earnestly beseech all the members of our Church within the bounds of this Conference who have to any extent been guilty of these wrongs, to consider whether the laws of Christian expediency, the teachings of the word of God concerning our influence, the effective power of our example, the danger of association, the evident tendency of all these things to unfit the mind for devout worship, the general judgment of the most pious of all Christian Churches, the example and expectations of the Master, the claims of the gospel of Christ, and the desire to do all the good in our power, do not call upon them to cease at once and forever to indulge in any of these or kindred amusements.

3. That this preamble and these resolutions be read by the pastors connected with this Conference to the congregations to which they minister the word of life, so that the desire and position of this Conference on this subject may be clearly understood before the Church and the world.

NEW YORK EAST CONFERENCE.

Whereas, There is cause to fear that the examples and practices of worldly society are steadily pressing upon our members and their families, endangering our simplicity and purity, especially in the form of drinking vinous and other liquors; of card-playing and dancing; of visiting the theatre and the opera, and of taking part in lotteries;

Resolved, That in the judgment of this Conference, indulgence in such customs and practices is directly contrary to Christ's requirement of Christian discipleship: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me;" contrary to both the spirit and letter of the Discipline of the Methodist Epis-

copal Church respecting the conduct of its members; is deleterious to the growth of pure and undefiled religion in the individual soul and in the body of believers; and is calculated to obliterate the lines of distinction between the Church of Christ and the world.

Resolved, That the preachers of this Conference are requested to place themselves more than ever in opposition, both by word and deed, to the indulgence in such customs and practices on the part of the membership of their respective charges.

(On motion, each preacher was directed to read the above resolutions to his church and congregation.)

NEWARK CONFERENCE.

Resolved, That the influence of the fashionable amusements above-named is most pernicious, and especially if indulged in by a professed Christian; and that the danger from this source is such at the present time as to call for one united voice of warning and remonstrance from every pulpit in the land, that we may stay the plague if possible before it is for ever too late. And

Second, That if, after kind and faithful admonition, private and public, there are those among us who have run into these follies, and will not forsake them, but still persist in violating their baptismal vows and the rules of the Church, and encouraging others to do the same, whether they be high or low, rich or poor, it were better far to call them to account before the Church, even if in some cases it should cost us trouble and denunciation, and personal hostility, and the loss of their pecuniary support, than to allow them to corrupt the whole Church, and finally write Ichabod over the gates of our beloved Zion.

BLACK RIVER.

Resolved, 2d, That theatres, circuses, dances, and kindred amusements, are in their very nature antagonistic to pure Christianity and vital piety, and that the members of our Church, who either apologize for or attend such gatherings, are guilty of a violation of our General Rules and their own Church covenant.

These are but samples of the general voice of the Methodist ministry throughout all our borders.

We have thus in this one denomination the united remonstrance of some seven thousand of as faithful, and devoted, and successful ministers of Christ, and spiritual watchmen, as can be found in this or any other land. All these lift up the voice together, with scarcely a dis-

cordant note among them all, and warn and entreat us not to be engulfed in the deceitful maelstrom of worldly amusements.

III. *The religious press of the country, and of the Methodist Episcopal Church in particular, has been faithful to its trust in this solemn hour of danger and responsibility.*

Signs of apostasy and corruption appearing in certain quarters (often encouraged by vain and worldly ministers), the religious press of the country has been for months sounding an alarm in the ears of the people, lifting up a standard against the flood of corruption which was seen to threaten the purity and future efficiency and honor of the Church of Christ. I take twelve religious weeklies, besides quarterlies and monthlies, and do not remember one of the number which has not borne testimony against the popular amusements of the day during the last year.

We must not take the space to quote these warnings at length, but may cite a few specimens.

The *Christian Advocate*, after citing our General Rule, says:

"We will not attempt to prove that among the 'diversions' thus prohibited, *dancing* must be included, because we cannot believe that any Methodist, who is not a reproach to the name he bears, can have any doubt about it. Before our members become a class of dancers, it is our earnest prayer that Methodism may cease to be known in the earth."

2. A Presiding Elder, writing for the same paper, says:

"Surely, now, when the world, with its trickery, and fashion, and folly, is coming in upon us like a flood, God calls his faithful ministers and people everywhere to lift up a standard against it—the standard of earnest protest from the pulpit and the press, the standard of private exhortation and a prudent but firm administration of discipline."

3. The *Northern Christian Advocate* thus speaks:

"This demand for amusement by Christian professors is, in itself, painfully suspicious. We fear such demands arise from leanness of

soul spiritually. How can a soul, filled with God, or one hungering and thirsting after God, crying out for the living God, desire amusements? How startling the incongruity! An earnest and devoted Christian seeking amusement in dancing, or card-playing, or in the whirl of the gay saloon! A consecrated, earnest Christian life, with time on hand for worldly amusements! We have never known one such life to have a single golden hour for such folly. Life is too short, there is too much work to do for God and humanity, to have time on our hands for amusements. Such a life needs them not."

4. *The North-Western Christian Advocate*, after quoting several extracts from other Church papers, thus concludes :

"To these extracts from our own papers we might add others from various Evangelical denominations. The extract in another column, entitled 'Presbyterians and Dress,' is indeed of the same character. The religious portion of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and even the Romanists, are lifting up the voice against these things. It is of the utmost importance that this tide of trifling, and amusement, and sin be stayed, or it will drown out the life of the Christian Church."

5. *The Methodist* thus speaks upon the subject of masquerades :

"To say nothing of the gross immoralities that may be perpetrated under cover of a mask, how can it be that men and women who have either self-respect, intelligence, or a desire for their best interests, can consent to disguise themselves in hideous masks or theatrical costumes and play the clown for each other's amusement? We have even heard of instances where members of the Church of Christ have frequented such scenes of frivolity. Let such put this fact side by side with the solemn baptismal vow, and THINK! I 'renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh.'"

IV. *The Friends or Quakers of every land have borne a noble testimony upon this subject throughout all their history.*

So well is this understood that no proof need be offered. They may possibly have gone to the other extreme in the matter of dress, and singing, and the use of "the plain language," and the discarding of titles; but this does not

prove them wrong as to dancing, theatre-going, etc., any more than it proves them wrong in regard to war or the freedom of the enslaved.

V. *The Presbyterian ministry and churches of this country have always condemned worldly amusements as incompatible with Christianity.*

1. In 1818 the General Assembly adopted and published the following opinion :

“On the fashionable, though as we believe, dangerous amusements of theatrical exhibitions and dancing, we deem it necessary to make a few observations. The theatre we have always considered as a school of immorality. * * * With respect to dancing, we think it necessary to observe that however plausible it may appear to some, it is perhaps not the less dangerous on account of that plausibility. * * * When the practice is carried to its highest extremes, all admit the consequences to be fatal; and why not, then, apprehend danger even from its incipient stages? It is certainly in all its stages a fascinating and an infatuating practice. Let it once be introduced, and it is difficult to give it limits. It steals away our precious time, dissipates religious impressions, and hardens the heart. To guard you, beloved brethren, against its wiles and its fascinations, we earnestly recommend that you will consult that sobriety which the sacred pages require,” etc.—*Minutes* 1818, p. 890.

This testimony has never been repealed or modified, but has stood and still stands as the solemn deliverance and judgment of this influential and honored body of Christians throughout their American history.

2. At the session of the New School Presbyterian Church, held in Brooklyn, New York, in May, 1865, the following declaration was adopted and published :

“In regard to theatres and theatre-goers, this Assembly reaffirms the action of the General Assembly in 1818. In this action the Assembly declared the theatre to be a school of immorality. This Assembly, seeing no occasion to modify the opinion then given, earnestly exhorts all the members of the Church in their practice to avoid, and by their influence to discountenance, all such dangerous amusements, as being inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel and detrimental to the best interests of piety in the heart.

“In respect to the custom of fashionable card-playing referred to

by the memorialists, and represented as being countenanced in many of our Christian households, and also participated in by members of the Presbyterian Church, this Assembly would affectionately exhort all the members of the Church to practice the most careful watchfulness in avoiding all recreations and amusements, whether in the form specified in the memorial or otherwise, which are calculated to impair spirituality, lessen Christian influence, or bring discredit upon them in their profession as members of a Christian Church."

3. In January, 1867, the session of the Central Presbyterian Church, in Rochester, New York, issued an address to the members of their church, in which they say:

"We desire particularly to give our solemn testimony against such practices, on the part of professing Christians, as card-playing, theatre-going, and dancing. We regard these things as unedifying, as giving offence to pious minds, as dissipating serious thoughts, as leading to practices that are very reprehensible, and as presenting an example unwholesome to the world.

"Therefore, in all kindness, charity, and forbearance, we do earnestly entreat of you, one and all, to abstain from these things, and from others like them; and to conspire together to maintain for our beloved Church that good name which it has hitherto enjoyed."

4. Rev. T. L. CUYLER, pastor of one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the land, thus writes upon the subject:

"Brethren, I have a prodigious fear for our metropolitan churches. I fear that fast-growing wealth is impoverishing the Church's piety; I fear that an unparalleled prosperity is making our churches luxurious, fashionable, worldly-minded, self-indulgent. The religion that walks on life's sunny side in Paris laces, and sips its choice wines in freestone mansions, is not the religion that breeds missionaries or fights Goliaths."

"Don't you remember reading in your childhood's favorite fiction about Sinbad's voyage into the Indian Ocean? Do you remember that magnetic rock that rose from the surface of the placid sea? Silently the vessel was attracted toward it; silently the bolts were drawn out of the ship's side, one by one, through the subtle attraction of that magnetic rock; and when the fated vessel drew so near that every bolt and clamp were unloosed, the whole structure of bulwark, mast, and spars tumbled into ruin on the sea, and the sleeping sailors awoke to their drowning agonies.

"So stands the magnetic rock of *worldliness* athwart the Church's path. If the Church draw too near, then bolt after bolt of godly purpose will be drawn out, clamp after clamp of Christian obligation will be unloosed, until the sacred argosy, that is freighted with immortal hopes, shall tumble into a shattered and disgraceful wreck. Depend upon it, brethren, that God will never suffer this to be. He will not let us rob him. Depend upon it, that if we lie down to luxurious slumber on couches of rosewood, while the world is perishing, he will snatch the couch from beneath us in financial judgments. If we persist in paving the way to our places of amusement and our parties of pleasure with his silver and gold, he will wrest it from us with the terrible rebuke: 'Ye may no longer be my stewards!' Oh! for a Pentecostal fire to consume this 'wood, hay, and stubble' of pomp and luxury! Oh! ye who long to see the self-pampering Churches brought back to a hardier self-denial and a holier self-consecration, I pray you that ye besiege the mercy-seat, and labor, too, for a soul-humblng, Church-purifying revival."

5. Rev. ALBERT BARNES thus utters his convictions:

"Dancing, balls, parties, and theatres, are by many thought innocent. But they are a profitless waste of time. They lead to forgetfulness of God. They nourish passion and sensual desire. They often lead to the seduction and ruin of the innocent. They are *unfit* for dying creatures. From the very midst of such scenes the gay may go to the bar of God. How poor a preparation to die! How dreadful the judgment-seat to such!"—*Notes on Matt. xiv.*

Such are the views and feelings of the great majority of the Presbyterian ministers and churches in this land. They fully realize that devotion to worldly amusements is destructive to personal piety, and dishonoring and ruinous to the Church of Christ.

6. Rev. HENRY WARD BEECHER thus gives us his opinion upon the subject of the theatre:

"The Church has had an intimate acquaintance with the theatre for eighteen hundred years; during that period every available agent for the diffusion of morality has been earnestly tried; the drama has been tried. The result is that familiarity has bred contempt and abhorrence. If, after so long and thorough an acquaintance, the Church stands the moral enemy of theatres, the testimony is conclusive. It is the evidence of generations, speaking by the most sober, thinking, and honest men. Let not this vagabond pros-

titate pollute any longer the precincts of the Church with impudent proposals of alliance."

7. Rev. J. P. THOMPSON, D.D., of the Tabernacle Church (Congregationalist), New York, thus warns his people against the theatre :

"Parents should use their utmost endeavors to keep their children from the theatre. What father who desires to see his children virtuous, prosperous, and happy, can foster in them a fondness for the amusements of the stage, or can know that they frequent the theatre without deep anxiety and grief? What mother could introduce her daughter to such a place? Parents sometimes argue that their children will surely visit the theatre, and that it is therefore better to go with them till their curiosity is satisfied, relying upon good instruction at home to counteract the evil influences to which they are subjected. But the example of the parent in going to the theatre is more likely to be remembered than his counsels on returning. As you prize the moral welfare of your children and your own future peace of mind, keep them from the theatre."

VI. *The Wisconsin Union Religious Convention, held in Milwaukee in December, 1866, thus speaks of dancing and the theatre :*

"Dancing, we hold, has evil tendencies, and therefore should not be practiced. Even parlor dancing tends to frivolity and dissipation, which are utterly opposed to that sobriety which is especially enjoined upon the young in the gospel. It also sanctions the dance in other places, and among all classes, even among those where, it must be admitted by all, it is used as the occasion and means of downright crime.

"Theatres contain impurities and corruptions, and therefore should never be visited. No matter though the corruption be excluded from the first and second play, if introduced in the third or the last, the theatre is positively condemned. No matter even if the evil be shut out for a single night or a week, the institution that will even foster corruption, that will rehearse or insinuate any impurities, that will for once descend to the excitement and grati-

fication of base and sinful passions, should be utterly forsaken. It can never be patronized without violating that injunction, 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' Besides, there seems to be something in the theatre or histrionic art itself that tends to debasement and corruption. A Christian theatre never existed. We lament that some professing Christians bring reproach upon the cause of Christ by attending the theatre; or are pained even to see the name of a Church member in a call for a benefit to an actor or actress. The opera we condemn on the same general grounds that we do the theatre."

VII. *The Young Men's Christian Associations of the country condemn such amusements as dangerous to the Christian and dishonoring to Christ.*

At the General Convention of Delegates for the United States and British Provinces, held in Albany, N. Y., in 1866, the following, introduced by Dr. Baldwin, of the Baptist Church, Troy, were adopted :

Whereas, The time has arrived when circumstances make it our duty as a Convention of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States and British Provinces, to express our judgment upon the relations of amusements to Christianity as embodied in this organization; therefore be it

Resolved, That we bear our energetic testimony against dancing, card and billiard-playing as so distinctively worldly in their associations and unspiritual in their influences as to be utterly inconsistent with our profession as the disciples of Christ.

Resolved, That in view of the fact, in addition to the purely spiritual needs of young men, *their natures crave some form of amusing recreation, we earnestly advise the adoption of any kind of amusement which may be harmless in itself, and not made injurious by worldly association, and which shall impart a home atmosphere to our rooms.*

Under the operation of the clause which we have put in italics, some of the Associations introduced amusements into their rooms; but at the next General Convention, held in Montreal, June, 1867, and after a year's experience of the evil effects of such amusements, the following preamble and resolutions were adopted, after full discussion, and by a very emphatic vote :

" *Whereas*, The younger Associations have sought counsel of the Convention with reference to the methods and instrumentalities to

be employed in the work, especially as to the use of games of amusement in their rooms; and

“Whereas, We consider this a subject of vital importance to the whole work of Christian Associations throughout the land and the world; therefore

“Resolved, That this Convention regards the introduction of games into the rooms of Young Men's Christian Associations, for the entertainment or amusement of young men, as fraught with evil, dangerous to the best interests of Associations, compromising the Christian integrity, and dishonoring to the blessed Master and Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

VIII. *Even the Roman Catholics condemn dancing as tending to immorality.*

At the “Plenary Council,” held in Baltimore in May, 1867, they thus warn their people:

“We consider it to be our duty to warn our people against those amusements which may easily become to them an occasion of sin, and especially against those fashionable dances, which, as at present carried on, are revolting to every feeling of delicacy and propriety, and are fraught with the greatest danger to morality.”

These are but samples of the utterances of the ministry, the religious press, and the Young Men's Christian Associations of the country upon the subject under consideration. And while it is admitted that some who *profess* to be ministers of Christ openly countenance these things, it still remains true that more than nine-tenths of all the Protestant ministers in this land are of one mind in warning their flocks of the pernicious influence of popular amusements. Will the reader ponder this fact? These men make the Bible their study, and are trying to know and teach the right way, and to lead their people, through grace, to God and eternal life. How is it, then, if such amusements are innocent and suitable for Christians to indulge in, that all these watchmen unite in lifting up a warning voice against them? Ought not this fact alone to cause any Christian to pause and consider, before he yields himself up to the amusements and follies of the world?

CHAPTER VI.

THE VOICE OF REASON AND CONSCIENCE.

FROM the testimony of the Bible, and the voice of the watchmen, I make a still further appeal to the *Reason* and *Conscience* of the reader. And in so doing I shall call attention to a series of *indisputable facts*, all of which go to show that indulging in worldly amusements is incompatible with the Christian profession, spirit, and life, and should therefore be refrained from and discountenanced by all who desire to please God, do good in the world, honor their profession, and find their way safely to heaven.

I. *No young convert ever DESIRES such amusements.*

Let there be a revival in progress, and souls being converted to Christ. Happy in the love of the Saviour, their mouths are filled with singing, and their hearts with a divine joy. You, reader, have often seen this in our revivals, and probably experienced it when you first entered the heavenly way. Had you *then* any desire for worldly amusements? Did you ever know a young convert who had? I never did. And why not? Simply because they are satisfied with their *religious* enjoyments, and *feel* that the vain pleasures of the world are incompatible with the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto them. Young and tender in the cause of Christ, they are sensitive to opposing currents, and are better tests of their downward and chilling influence and true moral character, than they will be when they have grown cold and worldly and eager for the pleasure of sense, as too many have done.

Again: let a young convert be overcome in an evil hour, induced to go to a ball or a theatre, and one of two

things will invariably follow—either he will confess his wrong under compunction of conscience, and thus reinstate himself, or from that hour will he go downward, till his religion is little more than a profession, or he utterly departs from the living God. And the same cause will produce the same effect upon an awakened sinner. Let him be convinced of sin, and inquiring what he shall do to be saved, and let him be induced to stifle his convictions and attend a ball or theatre, and it will drive the awakening Spirit of God from his soul, perhaps forever.

“A few years since, a young lady in one of our large cities was awakened to a sense of her guilt, and seriously asked, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ Just then a splendid ball was to be given in honor of a stranger of great literary fame. She had delighted in such scenes. She wished to be present in this. But conscience remonstrated. The conflict was severe; but she concluded to go, and *afterwards* attend to her soul. She went, but, alas! her convictions had left her, and in a few days she died without hope.

“Another young lady was absent from home in a place where God was pouring out his Spirit. With others, her own mind was deeply impressed. But she was on a visit; she must appear gay and cheerful; and how could she attend to the subject of religion *then*? She resolved that on her return home it should be the first business. But at home she was waited for to attend a ball which had been purposely delayed on her account. She had been the charm of the circle, and they could not go on without her. Of course she was soon invited. But she remembered her vow and declined. Every excuse but the right one was given; among others, she had no dress. Her parents promised her a splendid one if she would go. She at length yielded, but *did not attend the ball*. She was smitten with sudden disease and sent for her minister,

not to learn the way of salvation, but to leave her solemn warning to others, *not to resist the Holy Ghost*. She was directed to the Saviour; but refusing all comfort for herself, she died in despair."

Such sad examples might be multiplied almost indefinitely. Is not the reader satisfied that such is the natural and legitimate effect of such things upon the minds and hearts of young converts and of awakened sinners? And such being the case, how conclusive is this fact alone against the innocency of such amusements?

II. *Indulging in such amusements never sits with perfect ease upon the CONSCIENCE of any professed Christian.*

At the best there is always more or less of misgiving and doubt whether they have not done wrong. Despite the specious pleas of some, and the countenance of some professed Christians and even professed ministers, conscience *will* ring her bell of warning and admonition.

"Yet still there whispers the small voice within,
Heard through gain's silence, and o'er glory's din."

It whispers to us at the communion-table, at the funeral, under the preaching of the word, in the hour of sickness, "*Are you not wrong?*" Have you not dishonored the Lamb of God, whose yoke you profess to bear? Have you not caused his sacred name to be reproached and blasphemed?" I appeal to every professed Christian who reads these lines, and who is a votary of pleasure and amusements, if what I write is not true? As you must answer before God at the last and solemn day of judgment, be honest with your own soul, and answer now, if *conscience* does not condemn you whenever you let yourself down from your high and holy profession to join the gay and giddy throng in the amusements and follies of the world?

III. *The irreligious world generally regard such practices as unbecoming in professors of religion.*

For the truth of this statement I appeal to the unconverted reader. Do *you* like to see a Presbyterian dance? or a Baptist in a theatre? Would *you* think nothing amiss if you saw a Methodist playing cards? "Look at her! Don't she dance splendidly for a Methodist!" said a looker-on at a private "hop," where one of our silly young women took the floor. And with what a laugh of scorn did he and others near him look at the horrible spectacle! How was she disgraced in their estimation, while she thus "crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." And more than one unconverted person has said when this subject has been under discussion, "Well, I make no profession of religion, and I like balls and theatres, but I don't like to see *professors of religion* at them." No! the public sense of propriety and consistency condemns the letting down of religion to the low standard of the gay and unbelieving world. Men feel that they must die—that they may hereafter wish to turn to God—and if so they want a better religion to lean upon than a religion of pleasure and dissipation.

A star actor was playing in the city of Washington. He drew crowded houses. Mr. and Mrs. B—— were members of a Christian church in an Eastern city. They wished to hear this actor. It was Saturday evening, and that night was to end the engagement. They had many scruples; but they were away from home and friends, and no human eye would probably recognize them. The tempter prevailed, and they went.

In the very first act, a gentleman sitting by them, a perfect stranger, said sneeringly to his companion, "A pretty place, I should think, for church members Saturday night!" He did not refer to them; he pointed to another part of the house. Yet none the less did the thrust go home. They were humbled and sorrow-smitten. They could not stay, but went back to their home filled with a

humiliating sense of how easy a thing it is for one of Christ's little ones to become a stumbling-block and rock of offence.

When the writer was pastor of the old John Street Church in New York, in 1854, he invited a local preacher from Northern New York, with whom he was well acquainted, to preach for him one Sabbath evening. As we were leaving the house a stranger called us aside, and inquired, "Who was that who preached to-night?" We replied, and he responded, "Well, I saw him in a *theatre* last night, and *I don't wish to hear any such preachers!*" Thus was the cause of God wounded in the house of its professed friends, and the Christian ministry scandalized.

IV. *Such practices DESTROY THE RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE of those who indulge in them.*

You who indulge in these things may think otherwise, but it is so. You are the last persons to admonish others of the error of their ways. You have no *heart* to do it, and if you had it would be of no avail. "Physician, heal thyself," would be the pertinent reply. Perhaps you only play cards and dance, and wish to keep your children from "Niblo's" and the "Bowery." But they ask, "What is the difference?" and you have no satisfactory answer. If one is right, why not the other? You may keep up your church connection, and not be disciplined, and get along in a cold and dead way till death comes; but so far as your religious influence is concerned, your "salt has lost its savor," and your light has become gross darkness. Your religious influence is lost to God and his cause, and you are leading sinners, not to religion, God, and heaven, but down the broad road which many travel, ending in eternal death.

These are plain words, but they are written in love and from a full heart. Let me illustrate my meaning more fully.

Suppose, reader, you were under religious awakening, or about to die, and wished some one to pray with and for you, that God might be merciful to your soul; whom would you send for? Would you send for Mr. A., that you saw leading a polka, or Mr. C., that you saw whirling in a waltz a week before? Would you prefer the man of cards and ninepins, and billiards and theatres?

Never! *You have no confidence* in the prayers of such professors. Nay, rather your heart and confidence would turn to the self-denying, cross-bearing, covenant-keeping disciples of Jesus, who, at the expense of being called singular and "straight-laced," and even hated by some of the irreligious and by formal and cold-hearted professors, have "kept the faith," walked humbly with God, abstained from all appearance of evil, led praying and cross-bearing lives, with their affections anchored beyond the stars, and are

"Watching the opening of the eternal gates,
To the eternal years."

These are the men and women that sinners send for to talk and pray with them when they come to die, and not for card-players, dancers, and theatre-goers. *You know this is so*; and what a testimony is this to the incompatibility of such amusements with the Christian profession and a life of prayer and true piety!

IV. *Indulging in worldly amusements is FATAL TO REVIVALS OF RELIGION in the Church.*

Most Christians believe that revivals are necessary, and to be prayed and labored for, and that when the Lord pours out his Spirit in answer to prayer, it is the duty of Christians to talk with the irreligious, pray for them, in private and in public, and warn and exhort them to flee from the wrath to come. But what dancing professor ever did this, or had any heart to do it? What dancing or theatre-going Methodist, for in-

stance, ever felt like going into the altar during a revival, and weeping and praying with penitents seeking God's mercy? We never heard of such an instance. And so far as evangelical Christians are concerned, this question of amusements is really the question whether the spirit and pleasures of the world shall overflow the churches, extinguish their revival altar-fires, obliterate all distinctions between saint and sinner, and write "the glory is departed," over the doors of all our Christian temples; or, when the enemy comes in like a flood, we shall lift up a standard against him, warn and admonish our young people, point to the old paths, make the voice of God to be heard, and, whether popular or unpopular, blessed or condemned by worldly-minded and pleasure-seeking professors, save the Church of Christ from utter apostasy, and the name of Christian from everlasting reproach.

V. *Such practices invariably destroy all relish for spiritual and divine things.*

The devoted, self-denying, and faithful Christian *loves* the things of God. To him God's commandments are not grievous, but joyous. His *delight* is in the law of the Lord. He *loves* the Bible, the Church, the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the worship of God, and all the ordinances of his house. And the more heart-searching and spiritual the meeting or service, the more he delights in it. Hence he loves the class and prayer-meetings and love-feasts, and the society and conversation of the truly spiritual and devoted. But let him imbibe a passion for chess, or cards, or dancing, or the theatre, and how soon will all this be changed! How soon will the heart begin to lose its relish for the things of God, duty become a burden, religion degenerate into mere form and profession, and the spirit and power and divine peace he once enjoyed, all depart from the soul! Such I believe to be

the universal experience. If we love the world, and the things of the world, the love of God and divine things cannot and will not abide in us.

VI. *No votary of these amusements ever looked upon his past life with pleasure and approval in the hour of death.*

The bed of death is certainly a proper stand-point from which to look at this question.

“A deathbed’s a detector of the heart.”

We are traveling to the grave; and, if not before, we shall be honest before God and our own souls when we come to lie upon our dying pillow, and await the moment of the giving up of the ghost.

Now, although thousands die every year who bless God in their last hours that they were enabled through grace to renounce the world and sin, deny themselves, and live cross-bearing and consistent lives, who ever heard of *one* who looked back from before the gates of death and blessed God for the hours spent at the card-table, or in the ball-room, or in the theatre? Nay, rather the thoughts of such a life plant thorns in the pillow of death. I *know* whereof I affirm. I have buried not a few who have confessed before death, and with burning tears and sorrow, their wanderings from God; and that they were first seduced from his ways by the very amusements for which some plead. And unless some who now indulge in these things repent, and take a different course, a gloomy hour of death is before them; and similar confessions and regrets will be expressed when it may be too late for ever! In view of my past experience as a pastor, I could weep when I think of such scenes and realize the effects of worldly amusements and dissipations upon the closing scenes of mortal life. May God so awaken all the Churches upon this subject, that the blood of slaughtered souls may not be found at the last in the skirts of our garments!

VII. *No parent or child was ever comforted by the thought that a departed relative was a lover of cards and dancing, or a frequenter of the theatre.*

When death enters a family, and removes a beloved son or daughter to the cold and silent grave, what a consolation it is if the parents can say, "Well, we went to the house of God in company! She loved the church and its services, was devoted to the class-meeting and Sabbath-school, and her young life seemed all given to the service of the Saviour, into whose presence she has now been called." Oh! how many tears have such recollections wiped away! How many otherwise aching hearts have they relieved and comforted!

And so with surviving children, whose parents are gone. How precious the memory of the hours of family prayer—the voice of the father, now hushed in death, as he used to read to us the Word of Life, and lift up his hands and voice morning and evening in prayer to the Father of all mercies! What a legacy are such hallowed memories, treasured in the hearts of children! and how salutary their influence not only in mitigating the sorrows of bereavement, but in restraining and directing their footsteps in coming life!

But how different the recollection of time spent with the departed in the theatre or the ball-room! What parent who has buried a promising son was ever comforted by the recollection that he was passionately fond of billiards, or cards, or an excellent player, or that the theatre was his delight? What child was ever comforted or benefited by the thought that a departed father or mother used to dance and play cards, and go to theatres and operas with them? There is no consolation in such thoughts. Such memories are ever unwelcome. We would sooner forget than linger over them. They are unpleasant even to the unconverted. And why? Because even

their conscience and sense of propriety and moral right tell them that such practices are incompatible with a safe and happy death, and a bright and glorious hereafter. The very thought throws a shadow over the eternal prospects of the departed, in spite of all our charity and affection, and apologies and excuses.

All this, it seems to me, shows most conclusively that a life of pleasure and indulgence in worldly amusements is not the life by which we are to become prepared for the world beyond the grave. And if not, why should *Christians*, who profess to be seeking a home above, indulge in them or countenance them? If no young convert, warm in his first love, ever *desires* such vanities—if they are fatal to early piety and destructive of religious seriousness—if they never sit with ease upon the conscience—if they destroy the religious influence of those who indulge in them—if such indulgence is fatal to revivals of religion—if it destroys our relish for things spiritual and divine—if no votary of pleasure ever looked upon his past life with pleasure and approval in the hour of death—and if no parent or child was ever comforted by the thought that a departed relative was a lover of billiards, or cards, or dancing, why should Christians indulge in or apologize for them? Why not renounce them wholly and for ever, and henceforth be altogether on the Lord's side?

No candid reader, it is believed, will deny the truth of *any one* of the above propositions. How, then, *can* you, if a professed Christian, *practice* or *excuse* a course of life which produces results so disastrous to souls, destructive to Christian influence and heart religion, injurious to the cause of Christ, and ultimately painful to our own hearts in a dying hour, and to those who survive us when we are gone?

Do not all these considerations stamp such indulgences as wrong, and say to all who fear God, "Enter not into—

the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men? Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

CHAPTER VII.

APOLOGIES AND EXCUSES CONSIDERED.

AFTER what has been said of the intrinsic evils of card-playing, dancing, etc., and of their effects upon Christian influence and personal piety, this chapter ought not to be necessary. If what we have written be true, there *can be* no excuse for indulging in these things, or sufficient apology for those who do it. And yet, for the sake of some who are doing wrong, and perhaps think they have good reasons for their course, it may be well to devote a few pages to the notice of some of their excuses.

I. *It is said by some that* "THEY ARE NOWHERE FORBIDDEN *in the word of God.*"

In one sense this is true. They are nowhere forbidden by *name*. Neither is horse-racing, gambling, lotteries, arson, or piracy. And yet they *are* forbidden *in fact*, as we have elsewhere abundantly shown. And to attempt to satisfy one's conscience by such a plea is not only to trifle with a most serious subject, but to offer an excuse which we would not presume to offer in regard to any other folly.

This excuse is as old as the days of Tertullian, in the second century; and in reply to it he says, "Some people's faith is either too full of scruples or too lax of sense. Nothing will serve to settle them but a plain text of Scripture. They hover in uncertainty, because it is not said as expressly 'Thou shalt not go to the play-

house,' as it is said 'Thou shalt not kill.' But this looks more like fencing than argument. For we have the *meaning* of the prohibition, though not the *sound*, in the first Psalm: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.'

II. "*The Bible says 'THERE IS A TIME TO DANCE,' and therefore dancing must be right.*"

By no means; for the same passage says, "To *everything* there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens—a time to "*hate*" and "a time of *war*." Eccl. iii. 1, 8. Now if the expression "a time to *mourn* and a time to *dance*," means that dancing is right, then the fact that there is a time to *hate* and a time of *war* proves that *hatred* and *war* are right. And as it is said that there is a time to *everything*, it follows that *everything* is right—theft, arson, adultery, and murder! And yet such is the reasoning by which some professed Christians seek to satisfy their consciences that it is right to unite with the ungodly in dancing polkas and waltzes!

III. *It is said, "WE MUST HAVE SOME AMUSEMENTS. No man can live without them."*

1. If it is said that we must have some *relaxation* from severe study, or business, or physical toil, no one will dispute it. The appointment of a Sabbath for man and beast, and of a night for sleep, is a recognition of this necessity. So far, then, there is no dispute. But granting that recreation of some kind is a necessity of our nature, there is a long list of innocent exercises and diversions, such as walking, riding, skating, rowing a boat, singing, cheerful conversation, concerts, lectures, debates, visiting public libraries, galleries of art, museums of natural sciences, navy yards and arsenals, manufactories of various kinds, &c. So that even if "we *must* have recreations," it is by no means necessary that

we should go to a cock-fight or a horse-race, a ball or a theatre.

2. If such amusements are indispensable to our well-being, how is it that so many tens of thousands in all ages have got along without them, and been all the better for it? As a class, the professed Christians of all ages have, to a very large extent, abstained from such things. And have they been any the less happy on that account? Have any great numbers of them become insane or broken down prematurely for want of recreation?

The truth is, that the amusements herein condemned are *not* a necessity of our present well-being or indispensable to our happiness. They only *become* a necessity when we have given ourselves up to their fatal spell, and lost all relish for more rational and innocent diversions; as strong brandy becomes a necessity to one whose fine sensibilities are all burned out by alcohol. And the fact that thousands never know any thing about this "necessity" for the excitements of the billiard room or the stage, shows that it is an *artificial* want, rather than one that has its foundation in nature.

3. Men and women do not visit places of amusement, or dance or play billiards at home, because they think it necessary to their mental and moral well-being, but because they have a *passion* for such things. Why not, then, say so frankly? "I *love* the ball-room and the theatre, and therefore attend them." For this, after all is the *real*, and usually the *only*, reason. There is no weight, therefore, in this specious plea of "necessity."

IV. *Of the same class is the plea that such amusements are NECESSARY TO HEALTH AND LONG LIFE.*

1. No ingenuity or invention can make it appear that to sit motionless and in a profound study for hours at a time, and often till late at night, over cards or chess, or dominoes, is conducive to health. There is no muscular

exercise whatever in such games, and the inaction and fixed attention, often combined with strong excitement and late hours, are positively injurious to health, rather than beneficial.

2. The same may be said of *dancing* and *theatre-going*, as elsewhere shown. They are *destructive* of health and life, and lay hundreds in premature graves every year.

"I'm numb all over. My hands and feet fall asleep without a moment's warning. What does it mean?" asked a lady of a physician in Washington. He looked at her in amazement. Could she possibly be so obtuse as not to know the price she paid for nature's broken laws? "Mrs. —," said he, in a spirit of Christian frankness, "you are living too fast. Five nights at the theatre this week, and five late suppers! Nature is giving you a gentle hint. By-and-by she will give you a blow, if you do not mend your ways." The woman colored and said nothing. Her face was haggard with what she called her harmless dissipation. She had two little ones in a Northern city, and all around her in Washington were sick and dying soldiers; yet she could not live, she said, without the excitement of the stage.

And so it is with thousands. They dance, and carouse, and attend theatres and operas, and sit up nights and sleep days, and eat at unseasonable hours, till health is broken, and premature decay overtakes them. Then they resort to artificial beautifiers of various kinds, try all remedies, sink down under consumption, and are borne to the grave. And yet we hear *Christians* plead for such amusements *as necessary to health!*

3. Perhaps no people on earth have been more self-denying as to such amusements than the Friends or Quakers. And yet they are a proverbially healthy and long-lived people. Next to them, I presume, the Methodists have as generally discarded these things for the last

hundred years as any other people. And yet who ever heard of a Friend or a Methodist who died for want of billiards and hornpipes? What philosopher ever made the discovery that Methodists die earlier than the votaries of the ball-room and the stage? The fact is, that if there be any difference, it is in favor of those who abstain from such things, and not against them. And the well-known fact that, whatever men may argue, no person goes to such places of amusement from considerations of health, is a sufficient answer to all such reasoning.

4. It is probably true that ninepins, and playing ball and pitching quoits are, in some cases, promotive of health. But not as usually practiced. The exercise is *too violent and irregular* to be of any essential service. This is taught by both physiology and experience. Exercise, to be beneficial, must be moderate at first, and increased gradually. It must also be *regular*, day after day—conditions that are seldom met in playing ball or ninepins, and much less in dancing. So that even here the plea of healthfulness is altogether fallacious.

5. But even if it be true that two or three of the popular amusements are healthful, yet, as there are other diversions quite as healthful, and not liable to the abuses and evil associations to which these are exposed, is it not the duty of the *Christian* to forego the physical good that might possibly result from their use, rather than expose himself and the cause of Christ to reproach, and set an example which may lead others far beyond where he goes, and perhaps prove their eternal ruin.

The plea of "*healthfulness*," then, is a mere subterfuge, and one which no one of us will ever wish to name at the judgment-seat of Christ.

V. *Others tell us that "such amusements are all right in themselves—it is only their ABUSE that should be condemned."*

Such persons will ask you, "Is there any sin in a piece of pasteboard with a few spots on it? Is it a sin to take it up? to look at it? to lay it down?" And so they go on to analyze card-playing. So as to dancing: "Is it wrong to hear music? to lift up the right foot, the left foot? to move it this way, that way? to take hold of hands?" How puerile all such reasoning! As well might one inquire when forbidden by law to carry a revolver, "Is there any sin in *lead*? any in *powder*? any in the *steel barrels*? any in *percussion caps*?" Of course there is no danger from any one of these by itself; but let all be combined in the loaded revolver, and then put it into a hand that has a passionate heart behind it, and it becomes a weapon so deadly that it requires to be banished from civilized society.

So of worldly amusements: in themselves, as mere sounds or movements, there may be no wrong in them. But they are never found separated from their attendant evils. We must take them *as they are*, and not as we imagine they might be. The *fruit* is invariably bad, and the trees that bear such bitter fruits should be cut down or plucked up by the roots.

An exact parallel to this reasoning was the argument we used to hear a few years since, that "*slavery* was not wrong *per se* (in itself); its *abuses* only were wrong." But as the abuses were never divorced from the institution till they found a common grave, so will it be with popular amusements—the "abuses" will always attend them, till they all die together under the beaming light of a purer and more exalted Christianity.

VI. *It is said that "the way to prevent the people from resorting to criminal and dangerous amusements is to provide them with innocent and safe ones."*

There may be an element of truth in this proposition; but the question is, which are the "innocent and safe"

amusements? Men bet now on games of ball and chess, as well as upon dice and cards and horse-races. Select concerts and lectures are innocent and safe. So is parlor singing, with the piano or melodeon. So of many other things already mentioned in this chapter. But whoever attempts to guard his children against the desolating current of worldly amusements, with all their surroundings and influences, by providing amusements at home—parlor dancing, cards, &c.—will find out at last, and perhaps when it is too late to counteract the fatal mistake, that to attempt to keep our children from the “gambling-hells,” and public ball-rooms, and theatres, by giving them a substitute at home, is like giving them ale and wine at home to prevent their using gin and brandy in public. We cannot thus counteract poison by poison in morals, as we may in medical practice. We rather create an *appetite* which leads on to ruin.

This specious argument is thus ably disposed of by Rev. Dr. Lore :

“We fault the philosophy of the advocates of amusements for Christians, because it teaches that the evils of excess, in doubtful practices, are to be avoided by engaging in them moderately. The falsity of this as a principle has been practically demonstrated a thousand times. The true philosophy is, never to begin a doubtful practice. To swear a little, lie a little, break the Sabbath a little, gamble a little, dance a little, read novels a little, drink a little, in order to avoid becoming a drunkard, or a novel-reader, or a gambler, or a Sabbath-breaker, or a liar, or swearer, or a gay, giddy trifler, is wretched teaching. Yet this is the teaching of the amusement advocates. Christian fathers and mothers are advised to introduce the lively dance, the absorbing game of whist or euchre, and the interesting novel; only those recommended by religious papers, or, it may be, written by a

minister of Christ and published in the *New York Ledger*, just to make home attractive for the children; for they *must* have amusement, and thus save them from excess and ruin. What infatuation! How sugar-coated this pill of poison! The road to drunkenness is not more direct from the wine party, than to gambling and trifling from the dancing party and whist table in the social circle. These are the beginnings, leading to the legitimate end. All may not reach this end; yet safety consists in touching not, tasting not, handling not the unclean thing; but avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. Such is the direction of Divine Wisdom. Contrary teaching, from the pulpit, or the religious press, we are constrained to say, is exceedingly dangerous in its tendency. The fruits of it already appear in the lost children of hundreds of Christian families, who attempted to save them on this false principle."

VII. There are other apologies and excuses to which we might devote attention and space—such as the example of other professed Christians; the plea that we only indulge in *private*; that we indulge in only a *few*, and not in *all*; that we wish our children to be "accomplished," etc. But they are unworthy of serious consideration. No man's conscience was ever satisfied with any such excuses; and why should we labor to refute them when his own conscience and judgment condemn them?

The truth is, that no Christian ever had or ever can have a sufficient reason or excuse for breaking covenant with his God, and going back again to the beggarly elements of the world. And every man and woman who professes religion, and especially every Methodist who indulges in these things, knows that they are doing wrong, that they do not stand where they once did in religion, and that they have lost ground and are still losing ground.

How is it with you, reader? Perhaps you are one of our rich and fashionable city Methodists, indulging in most of the amusements and follies of the world. *Do you enjoy religion as you once did?* If a father, do you pray in your family? Do you read the Bible and pray in secret? In a word, are you half as faithful and happy in religion as you were years ago? And if not, are you half as safe? Most certainly not. For our prospect for heaven depends upon our meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. And one great reason why you have lost your religious enjoyment, and become cold and worldly, is probably because you have given way to the spirit of the world, and have thus been shorn of your strength, and become like other men. Oh, may you see where you stand, and come back fully to God and his service, before you go hence and be no more!

CHAPTER VIII.

OUR COVENANT OBLIGATIONS.

THE sacredness of treaties, marriage contracts, and other covenant obligations is recognized by all civilized communities, whether religious or otherwise. How much more, then, should solemn religious covenants be held sacred and binding by a people bearing the sacred name of Christian! Let us inquire, then, what are our covenant obligations, and the vows that are upon us, in regard to this question of amusements.

I. *Is not indulging in the popular amusements of the day, such as dancing, chess, billiards, dominoes, theatre-going, etc.,*
 A BREACH OF THE RULES OF THE CHURCH to which you belong, and which you have solemnly promised to keep?

The General Rules forbid “the *taking of such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus;” and certainly you cannot play cards, or dance, or go to a theatre in the name of the Lord Jesus. To indulge in these things, therefore, is to trample upon the rules of the Church of Christ, of which you profess to be a loyal member. Is that either consistent or morally right?

II. *To indulge in such follies is to WANTONLY DISREGARD AND BREAK YOUR BAPTISMAL COVENANT.*

When you stood before God’s altar for baptism you were asked, “Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow or be led by them?” And your answer was, “*I renounce them all.*” That covenant was between God and your soul, and was made before God’s altar, in the presence of the church and the witnessing angels. It was written in the book of God’s remembrance, as a covenant well ordered and sure, and never to be forgot. And the lapse of twenty or thirty years, perhaps, since you entered into it, and the death of many who heard it, in no way weakens its binding obligations, or palliates the guilt of now disregarding it. *You know* that it was a covenant not for a few years, but *for life*. God lives to witness your faithfulness or your apostasy. And if you now cast this covenant from you, and go again into the sins and follies of the world, what are you but a covenant-breaker? And how do the prophets denounce, in God’s name, all who in their day “despise the oath in breaking the covenant?”—Ezekiel xvi. 18. And you know also that St. Paul classes “covenant-breakers” with “haters of God,” fornicators, and murderers.—Rom. i. 31. And if it be a sin to break covenant with man, how much more to break covenant with God!

You may think this a trifling matter ; but depend upon it, it is a very serious one. God, and the minister who took your vows in God's name, and baptized you in the name of the Trinity, and the people who were witnesses and prayed for you, and have gone on, some of them, to the better land, were all serious and in earnest. And so were you. And still more, you then understood the covenant just as I now apply it—as a renunciation of all worldly pleasures, pomp, and folly ; and you *meant* all that you said.

Beware, then, how you break the covenant of your God. It is for your *soul*, your *life*, for *long eternity* ! If you have sinned already in this thing, oh come back to your allegiance, confess your error, and plead for mercy, and ask God to renew the covenant which you have broken, as he renewed the tables of stone to Moses ; and then henceforth *keep the covenant of your God* till life is over, and you are beyond the tempter's power for ever.

III. *The low and unspiritual views and evil example of other professed Christians in no degree absolve you from the obligation to keep these solemn religious covenants inviolate till the hour of death.*

You may have been told, and even come to believe, that the Methodists of the last hundred years were too strict in such matters—that the rules and covenant which you solemnly promised to keep were unnecessary, and therefore are not binding. “Episcopalians, Unitarians, Swedenborgians, and Spiritualists dance and go to theatres,” say some among us, “and why may not Methodists?” And even some professed ministers of Christ advocate these things. Well, if you dare trust your endless salvation to such a type of Christianity, so called, there is no reason why you should deny yourself anything in this world. But you should go with them openly, and

not profess to be a Methodist while you are living like a Universalist or a Mormon.

The opinions of false teachers, and the practices of backslidden and pleasure-seeking professors, will be no excuse for *you* in the day of judgment. The vows of God are upon you. *You* belong to a Church that for a century has borne a noble testimony, both by precept and example, against these sins, and God has made her like the stars of heaven for multitude. And her voice from press and pulpit is still against these corrupting and soul-destroying practices. And if you lead the way, or in any wise aid in dragging the noble and God-honored Methodist Episcopal Church down to the dead level of Unitarianism and Ritualism, and thus rob her of her spiritual power for good in this land, depend upon it God will hold you responsible for the wrong when it will be too late to correct it.

CHAPTER IX.

FINAL COUNSELS AND ENTREATIES.

A FEW additional suggestions and entreaties, addressed to different classes in the Church, and I am done. And,

I. *To those who are already indulging in those popular amusements.*

1. I cannot believe it possible, that in view of the preceding facts and arguments, you can believe such practices either expedient or morally right. They lead to evil, grieve the Spirit of God, eat out vital piety and Christian enjoyment, dishonor the cause of Christ, destroy religious influence, grieve your brethren and sisters in Christ, cause your ministers anxiety for you per-

sonally, and for the welfare of the Church of God, wound and harden your own conscience and religious sensibilities; and thus tend to hinder your usefulness, separate you from your brethren, and, as I honestly believe, jeopard your eternal salvation. Is this an over-estimate of the case? I do not believe it is.

And all this for what? What *good* is accomplished? What end attained that is of any real value to you or others, either for this world or the world to come? It may gratify an unfortunate passion you have acquired for these things, and please you for a few days, or years even, but how will it be in the end thereof? What will there be left to cheer and strengthen the heart when the face is wrinkled with age, the eye dim, and the locks thin and white? Can you afford, as an immortal being traveling to the bar of God, with but one fleeting life before you, and perils on every hand, to take any unnecessary risks of losing your soul? If there is even a *doubt* as to the innocence of such amusements, ought you to indulge in them?

2. But you may be convinced that you are wrong, and resolve to do differently in future. If so, let me suggest a course that I think will be most effectual, most safe for the future, most honorable to Christ, and most satisfactory to your own soul now and in the hour of death.

(1). From this day onward *renounce all such amusements*—games, dancing, theatres, &c., and indulge in them no more. I say ALL, for no half-way self-denial will answer here.

(2). Come out and confess your error before the church, in some public prayer meeting. This will wipe out the stain you may have brought upon religion and Methodism, reinstate you in the confidence of your brethren, strengthen you in your new purpose by a public commitment, and give to Christ and his cause the benefit of your

example and influence in reforming others, or warning them of a like error. If you have erred in this thing, you owe it to your brethren, whose feelings you may have injured, and to that Saviour who "sought you when a stranger wandering from the fold of God," to do as I suggest. It may *seem* unnecessary, and a humiliation, but *do it*, my dear brother or sister. It will do you good, in conscience, influence, standing and enjoyment. By all means take this decided, thorough, and Christian course; and if so, you will never regret it.

(3). If you have a family who have been influenced by your opinions, conversation and example, talk with them plainly upon the subject, confess to them your mistake, tell them of your new purpose, and thus acquire again in your own household that confidence which hath great recompense of reward.

(4). Then take hold with others, who are alarmed for the purity and future efficiency of our God-honored Church, and help us to stay the tide of worldly conformity that threatens her spirituality and usefulness for the century to come. Send this pamphlet to your rich Methodist brother, who ought to read it, or, if need be, send for a dozen or twenty through your minister, and circulate them among your acquaintances, to whom it might become a blessing. May our God enable you not only to do all that is right in regard to your own past course and future peace and usefulness, but to become a messenger of good to others in this respect, so long as God shall spare you in this world.

II. *To our younger members, who are sometimes tempted to mingle with the ungodly in their worldly pleasures.*

Perhaps you were once fond of these things, embraced religion, renounced them, and have thus far lived a cross-bearing and self-denying life; but recently, seeing others members, older than yourself, indulging in them, and

hearing their excuses for so doing, are often tempted to relax your former purposes, and go back, in this respect, to your habits before conversion. If this be the case, I entreat you to weigh the matter well and seriously before you take such a step. It may cost you your eternal all. God says, "Be not conformed to this world." Are you prepared to take the risk and go back, now, after all that God has done for you, grieve the Spirit, break your solemn vows, dishonor your profession, grieve your brethren, and perhaps throw yourself out of the Church of Christ, and out of heaven at last? May God forbid! No, my young brother or sister. Rather let your right hand forget its cunning. You have made a good profession before many witnesses, oh *honor it* to the end of life! Be a *living, consistent, self-denying, cross-bearing Christian!* Christ *needs* such witnesses and laborers; and to this end were you called to the fellowship of his saints. And now, as it is a time of special effort to corrupt the Church, and divest her of all spiritual power to reform the world, show yourself true to your Saviour who died for you—enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May I not hope, as I pen these lines, that the young men and young women of the Church will show, by their consistency and steadfastness, that if the Church is dragged down by the gay and rich families of our cities and villages to the level of the unbelieving world, they shall take all the responsibility themselves, and never truthfully say that the younger members desired or encouraged it. May every young reader "stand up for Jesus."

III. *I appeal TO ALL CLASS-LEADERS to aid us in resisting the flood of worldly pleasures that now seek to overflow the Church.*

I assume that you agree with the views set forth in this pamphlet, and realize the present danger. You are sub-pastors and under-shepherds, having a special charge to

watch over a portion of each local church. Will you not cast your influence fully upon the Lord's side in this hour of peril? I believe most of you will. Speak in your classes of the dire effects of such amusements. Talk with individuals upon the subject. If necessary, "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." Read portions of this tract to them, or lend it, or, still better, if you can do so, get a copy for every member of your class. Many need light upon the subject; and if we preserve our beloved Church in its original simplicity and power, we have a hard battle to fight, and need all the resources at our command. And upon any such subject few things are more effective than a concentrated and well-written printed treatise. The enemies of evangelical Christianity are now doing much by such means. Let us fight them with their own weapons, and trust God for the victory.

IV. *Especially do I appeal to THE MINISTRY—the watchmen upon the walls of Zion—to do their full duty in this crisis in our history as a Church.*

I need not write to convince you that if the things I deprecate are tolerated in and overflow the Church, our aggressive revival spirit dies out, and our future will be less prosperous than the past. This we all know. Neither is it necessary for me to labor to convince *you* of the wickedness of these corruptions. We are agreed here also. Thank God, I have never yet heard a *Methodist* minister plead or apologize for card-playing or dancing, or chess or theatres.

But may it not be true, nevertheless, that some of us may have failed to do our whole duty in warning and admonishing the people of the threatening danger? God has made us watchmen to the house of Israel, to warn the people from him. We have many duties and cares and responsibilities, and cannot give prominence to every-

thing, but have we said anything in our pulpits in regard to this new and special danger? If not, let us give it our formal and solemn attention. There is no time to be lost. Take it up deliberately and prayerfully, make full preparation, give notice of your purpose, that all who desire may hear you, and, if necessary, give two or three Sabbath evenings to the subject. If there is anything in this tract that will help you, use it freely. It will be no plagiarism; for this is one of the *objects* of its preparation. As stated in the advertisements, this and others of the series are "designed toward Christian pastors in meeting the various forms of skepticism and irreligion so rife in our country at the present time." If, then, you find anything in these pages that you can use to the glory of God in preaching, appropriate it as freely as if found in any library, or by personal and original investigation. And may the God of our fathers bless you in every effort to do your whole duty in his holy fear!

2. After preaching upon the subject, you may deem it expedient to supplement your labors by a supply of these tracts. The printed page gives opportunity for deliberate weighing of its contents. If this pamphlet goes into a family, it will be read by many who will not hear the sermons, and will remain to be read when your voice will be heard with your present flock no more.

I speak the more freely upon this point, from the fact that I am not the publisher of these pamphlets, and have no profits from their sale beyond a small copy-right for the time spent in writing it. And being in earnest upon the general subject, and having confidence in the truth and in the printed page, I *do* feel that if a copy of this pamphlet could be placed in every Methodist family in the land within a year from this date, it would help to settle this question of amusements among us for the next twenty years. And a few dollars and a little effort

would accomplish this in each individual charge in the Church. May we not count on the *ministry* to stand together as one man in this emergency, till the whole world shall again see that, whatever others may do, the Methodist Episcopal Church is not to become a fraternity of prayerless, card-playing, tippling, dancing and theatre-going professors? If the enemy comes in like a flood, let us lift up a standard against him.

V. *I appeal to ALL METHODISTS to act wisely and religiously in this hour of peril.* Ponder the truths you have been reading—the intrinsic evils of fashionable amusements—the voice of the Bible—the voice of those who watch over you in the Lord—the voice of reason and conscience, and the vows you are under to your Maker, and plant yourselves “on the Lord’s side” in this matter, in word and deed, and by influence and example.

Though it does not become us to claim to be more religious than other evangelical denominations, it is not egotistic to say that we have, so far, as a Church, a good record before God and man upon this subject, and that, next to the Friends or Quakers, we are the last denomination which the irreligious world expect to see strike our colors to sin and worldly folly. This is seen in the fact that we are still ridiculed for our peculiarities in this respect; and also from the fact that though little is thought of it when the ungodly see a Unitarian or an Episcopalian dancing or at a theatre, the same thing in a *Methodist* is greeted with hisses of derision or a shout of satanic triumph. Why is this, if it be not that the world expect better things of us as a people? Here, then, arises a special responsibility. We are regarded as the chief moral breakwater in this land against sinful amusements in the Church, both on account of our professed position and record upon the subject, and our great numbers and moral influence in the nation. Other denominations,

who mourn over recent signs of apostasy in their own ranks, and are struggling to avert the ingress of worldly folly, look to us with outstretched hands and prayer, to be faithful to our principles and our antecedents, and to stand up firmly with them, rank to rank and hand to hand, till victory again turns on the Lord's side.

That we are recognized as the "pioneer Church," in revival efforts and successes, the whole world now admits, That we are numerous, and widespread, and influential for good or evil, is not denied. That other denominations can successfully fight the battles of truth and righteousness in this land without us, none are willing to affirm. Strong and true and zealous and successful as they may be, they look upon the M. E. Church as the "Imperial Guard" of evangelical progress in this country—the "forlorn hope" of the cause of God against quietism and formality, and ritualism and Popery, and worldliness. And if we strike our colors or waver in our ranks, the true and faithful legions of Immanuel will mourn and falter all over the globe. They expect us to be true, and lean upon us on every moral battle-field. Shall we disappoint them? May God forbid! Heaven and earth expect every *Methodist* to do his duty. O reader, if you bear that once odious and persecuted name and symbol of self-denial, zeal, and holiness, *be faithful to your profession, your vows, your conscience, and your God.* Stand firmly for Christ and a pure Church. "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward." May the great Head of the Church, who died for us and rose again, imbue us all with his own spirit, defend his Church from all evil, and bring us, at last, to the land of pure, spiritual, and eternal joys, for his Name's sake!

The following from *The New York Evangelist* is too valuable to be lost, and may appropriately constitute the closing page of this pamphlet:

“Any reader of *The Independent*, for a few months past, might suppose that the desire for worldly amusements had become epidemic in the Church in spite of all sanitary regulations. * * * This special pleading for amusements to relieve the surplus piety of the Church, reminds me of a crazy clergyman I once met. He thought the process of this world’s conversion altogether too slow. He believed that the prophet had really predicted that a nation should be born in a day, and his study was now to fulfil the prediction. He hit upon the expedient of reforming the devil. His plan was to baptize the devil, and thereby regenerate him and take him into the Church and make him subject to its watch and discipline, which he thought would leave the world free to be converted by the gospel.

“Why can’t such Christians and Christian ministers as need worldly amusements to reduce the plethora of their piety, baptize social dissipation, and regenerate it for the use of the Church? Then one evening of the week could be devoted to cards, another to drams, another to prayer, another to dancing, another to the theatre, and another to billiards, and so on to the end of the chapter. It might be needful at first, to quiet any existing superstition, to open each exercise with prayer, and close each prayer-meeting with a dance, or a game of whist. When the things of the world are thus baptized and regenerated, and taken into the Church and put under its watch and care, surely the millenium cannot be far off.”



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