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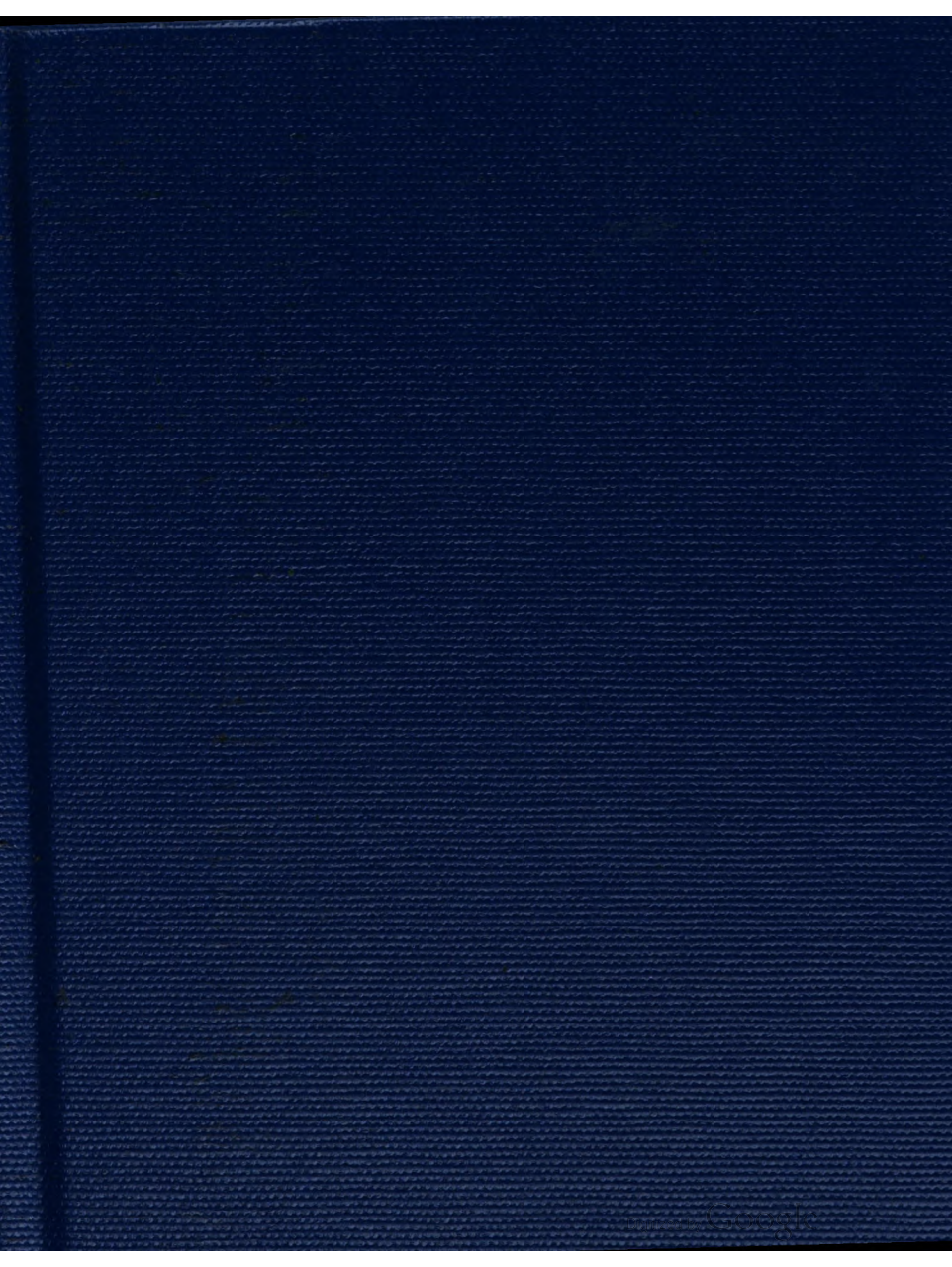
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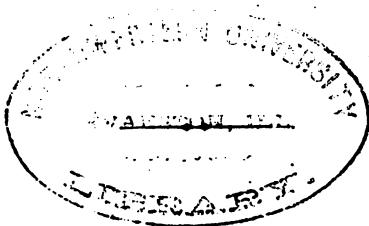


/AMUSEMENTS

IN THE

LIGHT OF REASON, HISTORY, AND
REVELATION,

By REV. S. M. VERNON, D. D.



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PREFACE.

THE substance of the following pages was first delivered in the form of Sermons in Roberts Park Church, Indianapolis, at a time when the amusements, here condemned, were seriously threatening the life of the Churches. It soon appeared that the divine blessing attended the Word in arresting many who were already in the way of folly, and in arousing the consciences of Christians on the subject. Ministers and members of different denominations expressed their appreciation of the service done the cause of Christ, and requested that a more permanent form be given to the spoken word.

U. In complying with this request, I have not materially altered the form of the discussion, except in breaking it up into chapters, in adding a few passages not proper for a public

address before a promiscuous audience, and in omitting a few not necessary to the argument.

The careful reader will detect both the excellencies and the defects of my work, and I need not therefore offer any explanation as apology for them. I have brought to it the fruits of careful thought, wide observation, and diligent reading, and I now send it forth as a warning voice beyond the walls within which I am accustomed to speak, in the earnest hope that God may make it a blessing in saving some souls from the pleasing devices of the great destroyer.

S. M. VERNON.

*Indianapolis, Ind.,
Aug. 1, 1882.*

CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
AMUSEMENTS DESIGNED OF GOD,	7
CHAPTER II.	
AMUSEMENTS NECESSARY,	12
CHAPTER III.	
PROPER AND IMPROPER AMUSEMENTS,	17
CHAPTER IV.	
THE HISTORY OF THE THEATER,	36
CHAPTER V.	
TESTIMONY CONCERNING THE CHARACTER OF THE THEATER,	40
CHAPTER VI.	
THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH CONCERNING THE THEATER,	48
CHAPTER VII.	
THE WELL-KNOWN CHARACTER OF ACTORS AND ACT- RESSES AN OBJECTION TO THE THEATER, . . .	54

CHAPTER VIII.	
	PAGE.
THE CHARACTER OF THE PLAYS IN USE,	62

CHAPTER IX.	
THE THEATER'S DEFENSE,	68

CHAPTER X.	
THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THE THEATER,	73

CHAPTER XI.	
THE THEATER AND CHRISTIAN LIFE,	80

CHAPTER XII.	
CAN THE THEATER BE REFORMED?,	87

CHAPTER XIII.	
THE DANCE IN HISTORY,	95

CHAPTER XIV.	
THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH AGAINST THE DANCE,	99

CHAPTER XV.	
THE DANCE UNFAVORABLE TO HEALTH,	103

CHAPTER XVI.	
THE DANCE UNFAVORABLE TO INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,	106

CHAPTER XVII.	
THE DANCE REQUIRES A WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE OF MONEY,	109

CONTENTS.

5

CHAPTER XVIII.

PAGE.

THE DANCE CONDEMNED FOR ITS EVIL ASSOCIATIONS, 113

CHAPTER XIX.

**THE DANCE UNFAVORABLE TO THE RIGHT RELATION
OF THE SEXES, 115**

CHAPTER XX.

THE DANCE DESTRUCTIVE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE, . . . 122

CHAPTER XXI.

CARDS, BILLIARDS, AND GAMES, 131

CHAPTER XXII.

A CLOSING WORD WITH PROFESSING CHRISTIANS, . . 144



CHAPTER I.

AMUSEMENTS DESIGNED OF GOD.

MAN has been called "the laughing animal." This definition, if not exhaustive, is at least philosophical and suggestive. In the crown of superior faculties with which the Creator was pleased to endow man, he placed this sparkling gem as a peculiar divine gift. Laughter is the efflorescence or sportive action of the nobler powers—reason, judgment, fancy, taste, and even of conscience itself. The sense of humor is a strong element in human nature, appearing in all grades of society, growing with advancing civilization and culture, adapting itself to all religions and philosophies, and running through all the experiences of life, like a golden thread, essential to the integrity of the fabric. If God included the faculties for amusement in the outfit with which he launched man upon the sea of time,

it is clear that he intended him to use them, in keeping upon a safe course, in preserving him from despondency when the way seemed dangerous, or in reinvigorating and fertilizing his nobler powers for renewed effort. The Creator gave man an eye that he might see, an ear that he might hear, and faculties for amusement that they might be used. The faculty proves the intention of the Creator. If God made man with a propensity to laugh it is clear that he intended him to laugh, that in itself it is right, and that it ministers to the highest good.

This propensity, like all others, must, of course, be subject to law, or what was designed for a blessing may become a curse. The purest and most useful of all our faculties may be so used as to destroy themselves and corrupt the character, but the fact that they may be, and often are so used, is no argument against their proper and lawful use. The abuse of a good thing is an argument for its disuse only to superficial thinkers and unreasoning fanatics. The fact that the fire in our dwellings sometimes consumes instead of warming them; that trains sometimes dash off

instead of gliding along the tracks, does not lead us to abolish them, but rather to study the best methods of security against such accidents. Every good involves a possible evil, and the problem of life is how to secure the good and avoid the evil. If you have an Eden, be sure there lurks somewhere amid its bowers a serpent. A war against the good, because possible evil is associated with it, is a war against human nature itself, and against the established order of divine Providence.

The reaction against licentiousness, avarice, ambition, and worldliness to the other extreme of forbidding all amusements, beginning in the first centuries of the Christian Church and still continuing in some of its branches, known in history under the name of "asceticism," was one of the greatest blunders the human mind ever made in its search for truth. It was possible only in a state of partial illumination, when the eyes, not fully opened, "saw men as trees walking," and were unable to distinguish between the shadow and the substance. A pall of darkness was thrown over the day God had made; the joys he had instituted and sanctified were excommunicated and out-

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lawed; the natural propensities ordained for man's good were cursed and forbidden; the sweet relations and companionships of life were abandoned for solitude in caves and mountains; pleasure was a sin, penance a duty, suffering a virtue, and man was made fit for heaven by making himself unfit for earth; while all the music, sweetness, beauty, and joy of the world were attributed to the Devil and were remanded to him. It is not strange that a religion so at war with the divine will, as recorded in human nature and the constitution of things, should have failed to win the hearts of men, causing a reaction that carried vast numbers into infidelity. When the Lord's goods are thus deliberately turned over and accredited to the Devil by those who ought to understand and defend their just title, it is not strange if many choose the arch traitor instead of the righteous Sovereign.

God is the author of the body as well as of the soul, of the social instincts as well as of conscience, of the sense of beauty and humor as well as of the moral affections, and he intends all the powers of the one to be used and governed according to his law as

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fully as the other. We dismember "the body of Christ," "put asunder what God has joined together," and introduce disorder and confusion when we forbid what God has allowed. To forbid amusements is to charge God with folly in giving us faculties for them, and so to mar and disorder his work in nature as to pervert or render difficult his work of grace.

CHAPTER II.

AMUSEMENTS NECESSARY.

IF we look thoughtfully at the practical benefit of amusements, we shall find the law of the "highest good" justifying and demanding them. It is a law of our natures we dare not ignore, that hard toil must be followed by rest and recreation. The jaded faculties must have time and conditions favorable for regaining wasted energies. Our fast and feverish American living furnishes us examples enough of worn-out nerves and exhausted brains in men at middle life to assure us that God never fails to find an officer strong enough to enforce the penalty of his law, and that the profit of disobedience is poor compensation for the penalty sure to follow.

[Rest is not found, however, in inaction, so much as in a change of activities from the laborious to the agreeable, exhilarating, and joyous. A good evening laugh is one of nature's best antidotes for the weariness of a

hard day's toil. Music sets the nerves tingling, and carries rest to the tired brain and muscle. To lie down, like the tired ox as soon as the yoke is removed, is to carry the weariness of the day into the night, and to rise in the morning as a drudge, and go jaded to a task in which we should be fresh, buoyant, and vigorous. The weary mind should drop its work when the day is done, and for a time wander amid scenes of beauty and delight, drink in the harmonies of music, join in the prattle and laughter of children and friends, taste the sweets of literature, wander on the swift wings of thought over the vast and variegated fields of knowledge, or seek amid the charms of pure social intercourse to drown the memory of toil and care; then will sleep be sweet and the return of toil welcome.]

Amusements are a preventive also of monotony in life, one of the greatest impediments to happiness and usefulness. To bow the head and bend the frame to an unchanging round of exacting daily toil; to shut out the sunlight, the songs of birds, the beauty and fragrance of flowers, and compel the soul to sit with folded wings within some dismal work-house,

calculating cost and profit, is the worst and most destructive form of servitude. The most solemn and important occupations lose their interest and profit and become dull, spiritless, and perfunctory, if the mind has not occasional release to wander amid other and very different scenes, from which it comes back with new zest and spirit to its more important tasks. Satiety begets loathing, and when the mind has feasted to the full at any table, it must be allowed to go abroad upon such rambles as are open to it, that it may come back with renewed appetite. This law holds even in devotion. The mumbling priest, who is always engaged in some religious ceremony; the long, solemn face, rarely visited by the sunlight of a smile or a hearty laugh; the demure, sanctimonious disciple who denies God's beauty a place in his life; and the man who is always thinking of eternity, death, and the judgment in a gloomy, somber way, are not those who best please the Master and win most souls to him. Man is a wondrously constructed instrument, with many keys, capable of producing the sweetest and sublimest melodies to the praise of God, when swept by a master hand.

If the maker of the instrument and the operator are to receive the highest glory, it must be by the use of every key and capacity of the instrument, bringing out the greatest possible variations and the highest and tenderest bursts of melody, so as neither to mar the instrument nor to produce discord or monotony to the listener. A continual drumming upon one or two keys, even upon the key of religion itself, sublime and soul-stirring as it is, will become monotonous and disgusting; but if the fingers occasionally wander away to the lighter strains of fancy, when they drop back again to this, its awful thunder will be as the voice of God to the soul. Monotony kills its thousands, and disables for useful or happy living many more than it kills. The sad, spiritless, unattractive lives, which many lead, might be transformed into gardens of beauty for themselves, with fountains of blessing for others, if enough of God's sunlight and sparkling dews could be distilled into them to break up the monotony which has fallen upon them like the blight of death.

Amusements minister also to the health of mind and body. Physicians know the influ-

ence of a cheerful spirit, of laughter, and of a wise use of amusements upon the bodily health. They are often better, and are certainly cheaper, than medicine. The intellect needs air, sunshine, and variety on the playground, in the fields, or in society for its proper health. Mental disease, and insanity itself, is often the effect of long continued thought upon one subject, without the relaxation and recreation by amusements or otherwise ordained by a wise Providence for our health. As the birds rest and plume themselves for flight, so must the intellectual toiler, if, like the eagle, he is to soar above the clouds, and, like the lark, to sing while he soars. Life would be longer, work easier, the soul sweeter and happier, and our moral power greater, if, when jaded and worn, we would turn to the pleasant recreations within the reach of all.

CHAPTER III.

PROPER AND IMPROPER AMUSEMENTS.

THAT God intended man for joy and gladness is as evident as that he intended the sun to shine and the birds to sing. How is this design to be realized? Did God make man for religious joys only? To what extent may we seek joy and pleasure in the world?

It may be admissible in a high state of religious fervor as a kind of exaggerated sentimentalism to sing:

"Other knowledge I disdain;
"T is all but vanity:
Only Jesus will I know,
And Jesus crucified."

He who literally knows and loves "only Jesus" is a monster unfit for this world as for that which is to come. The world is full of things which it is our duty to know, love, and enjoy. If we love Christ truly we must love whatever he has made; and what we love, we enjoy, and naturally wish to know and

understand. We dishonor God when we neglect or refuse to use the powers he has given us, or the provisions he has made for our happiness and well-being. While in the world and in the body we owe them a proper recognition, the neglect of which is nothing less than rebellion against the divine order.

Are these joys to be such as are derived from manly effort and honorable success in our chosen occupation? The joys of success in an honorable business life are sweet, far-reaching in their influence, and permanent in their character, but the tired nerves and the careworn brain insist upon the occasional play-day for which God has made in nature such abundant provisions. The old adage, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," is true to nature and history, as it is also that all play and no work will make him a worthless boy.

The joys of solitude, of literature, of art, and of meditation are of great value in enriching the life, broadening and cultivating the intellect; but man is by nature intensely social, and has powerful impulses to other and more social forms of amusement and diversion.

When a company of bright and happy children come together, how quickly and naturally they ask, "What shall we play?" This question runs through all grades of society and through all history, and we come now to its consideration.

There is, however, another question preparatory to this; that is, "*Where* shall we play? At home, or in the public hall? At the house of a friend, or with the public in the theater? In the fields, or in the street?" "Where" will help us to determine "what," and is therefore first to be considered.

The one fundamental institution which survives all revolutions; dates from the earliest period and is co-extensive with the race; comprehends in itself the essentials for the perpetuity and welfare of man, the shelter of helpless childhood and old age—the sanctuary, at the altar of which woman's beauty and man's strength find pure and happy union; the unit of civilization and the corner-stone of the state; the institution first in importance as it is first in the order of time, is the family. The home was designed by God to furnish most of these helps which are needed to cheer

us in adversity, to comfort us in sorrow, and to rest and soothe us after toil. The purest, best, most helpful and joyous amusements are those where parents and children join after the tasks of the day are over in the sanctuary of the home. Can any better relief from care and weariness be found, or any surer means of keeping the heart young and fresh than this contact with childhood in the sports and amusements of the home? Shall the father come home at night jaded and worn, and sit down sullen and morose to brood over the day's mishaps, or seek unnatural society and amusements as an escape from care instead of finding in the love and cheerfulness of his wife, and in the buoyant, sparkling, happy little natures God has given him, the brightest and best retreat from toil and care this world affords? The great Dr. Lyman Beecher was accustomed, after his heaviest days of toil in preaching or speaking, to turn the home into a play-ground, himself the leader in all the fun and frolic. He used to say he never made such rapid progress in his work as when down on all fours with the baby on his back, playing horse. With such a home-life as this

it is not strange that he maintained such remarkable vigor, and that so many of his children have risen to eminence in carrying forward the same work that engaged his heart and brain.

Life would be longer and happier, the influence of parents over their children immeasurably greater, and home the sweetest place on earth, if parents would thus keep themselves in sympathy and contact with the child-life of the home. To laugh and play with a child that never knew a care and is free as a bird will shame a sordid, careworn soul into a better frame of feeling, and will magnetize a sluggish, stupid mind into a semblance at least of life and freshness. Its influence upon childhood and youth can not be computed. It rarely occurs that the father who descends to the plane of his children in games, plays, and amusements fails in leading them to his in religious life and moral integrity. If the parent respects and enters into the child's life he will himself be a great gainer, and he will find the child generously responsive in respecting and entering his life in its highest and noblest forms. I therefore

assume that the home, or a union of homes in the larger social circle, is to be the chief though not the only theater of those amusements which Providence has designed for our welfare. There are games, plays, and amusements of sufficient number and variety to suit every age, grade of intelligence, and circumstance if only there is genius enough to use them.

[The history of public amusements, with paid performers, and prizes for contestants, with a manager back of the scenes inspired by love of money to make the strongest possible appeals to the taste of the multitude, as the means of increasing his gains, whether we consider it in Grecian, Roman, mediæval, or modern times, is a history of demoralizing and corrupting influences. The principle involved in hiring another to amuse and entertain you is false and pernicious. You corrupt him by your money to become a clown or an actor, while you buy exemption for yourself from the obvious duty of actively engaging in such recreations and amusements as will answer the wants of your own nature and be helpful to others. The fields, forests, riv-

ers, lakes, and oceans are open to all and afford opportunity for a variety of innocent and healthful amusements; but, after all, the home will be found to furnish the best staple of daily recreations. }

The question as to what these amusements may be seems very much like a request for rules by which to be happy, joyous, humorous, or witty. The spirit is always more than the form, must go before it, and will easily devise it if necessary. If one has the spirit of amusement he will not need much instruction as to the form it shall take; and if he has the form without the spirit, as in all such cases, it is but a sepulcher, he may whiten and garnish it as he will and call it a playhouse, but it is still only a sepulcher. "A merry heart is a perpetual feast," and the simplest trifles are wonderfully amusing and entertaining if a loving, humorous heart is back of them.

It is asked, however, "Is it wise to introduce games into the home?" The love of games seems universal in the race, must have been implanted by God, and under proper control may be indulged with advantage. By

introducing fictitious rivalries, contests, and ambitions they effectually call off the mind, for the time, from the real, thus affording relief from anxiety and care, while they exercise, gratify, and amuse a variety of faculties without necessarily corrupting or injuring any. The dangers to be carefully avoided are the waste of time, morbid excitement, and familiarity with, and fondness for, the methods of gamblers. You may choose to walk on the brow of a precipice to enjoy the view and the bracing air, but it is with the distinct knowledge that one step to the right or left may be destruction, and that safety depends upon your power of self-control.

Many Christians feel that they may with safety employ billiards and other gambling games in their homes, but the peril involved here can justify the risk only under peculiar circumstances. A recent attempt was made in Princeton College, under the careful and able presidency of Dr. McCosh, to restrain the students from improper gaming and dissipation by supplying the college with billiard tables. After a few months' experience a committee, including Dr. McCosh, was appointed

to examine the practical results. They found, to their amazement and sorrow, that it had greatly increased the evil they sought to cure, that many young men had been led by it into gambling and dissipation. They pronounced the experiment a disastrous failure, and it was at once abandoned. An Episcopal minister of New York City, believing that billiards in connection with a church might serve a good purpose in attracting and interesting young men, made the experiment under his own direction. He became very fond of playing himself, and was compelled at length to resign his Church because of the power the habit had acquired over him. He made yet another attempt of the same kind in a neighboring city, and became more deeply involved than before, contracted the habit of drinking, and died a drunkard. If we walk in the light of experience, which seems to be the only safe rule in such a case, we will be forced to the conclusion that games used for gambling can not be safely introduced into the home, the school, or the Church. The world is wide, and there are games and amusements without number free from these dangers, which leaves

us without excuse for employing those that are even doubtful.

It will be difficult for those accustomed to the excitements of the theater, the dance, and the billiard room to appreciate the pure and rational joys of legitimate and innocent amusements, until their tastes are reformed by wise discipline, and the intoxication under which they are living has passed away. To such, home is a stupid place, books are dull, society is stiff and formal, music has nothing in it, innocent games are childish, concerts and lyceums are a bore, and nothing that does not intoxicate by its excitement is acceptable. Let me remind these persons, however, that the great mass of the human race has appreciated, and the wisest and best have greatly loved, these things, and it is no compliment to you that you esteem them so lightly. The world is full of beauty, loveliness, and joy; but your eyes are so blinded you do not see it, and you cry out as if about to be impoverished forever when the Church raises its warning voice against the corrupt amusements of the time and say, "what then shall we do?" It is the cry of the ignorant and de-

praved in every vile pursuit. The rumseller says, "Would you have me give up my business? I can't live without it. What, then, would you have me do?" The gambler says, "Give up my gambling? How can I live? What shall I do? Life would be a blank to me." The licentious say, "Do you want me to give up all pleasure? Am I to have no amusement? Would you make life a prolonged funeral?" The evil is in the existence and cultivation of a false taste and of corrupt passions. Correct the taste and purify the affections, and then you will find greater joy in things that are pure.

One great error in treating this subject has been in condemning what is wrong without pointing out what is right. The law that deals only in "shall nots" will fail. The first and great commandment is, "thou shalt," and men must be governed by a law that directs and develops the forces that are within them. You might as well attempt to shut up the steam in the boiler with a glowing fire beneath, as attempt to shut up the forces of a young life and deny it the development of its natural powers and impulses; explosion and

death is the result of such a course. Not repression, but education, is the law here as elsewhere. A young lady asked an aged minister, "What, then, shall I do for amusement?" The answer was, "Walk out into the field, or lie down and sleep." A very sleepy answer, and a powerful, practical argument to the young lady's mind in favor of the theater and the dance. Want of occupation is not amusement, nor is rest always to be found in doing nothing. It is our duty to study and understand the provisions God has made in nature and in the development of society for the amusement of the young and of all classes, and ignorance and indifference here are no less criminal than in other departments of divine truth.

Society carries with it from generation to generation a great number of innocent games and amusements, needing no mention here, since they are well known to all. The magazines and papers of the land are full of suggestions to those who need them, and a sharp eye will soon detect enough to stock the home or community for any reasonable demand. There are also many books of games and

amusements to which one may resort when invention runs low.*

No enumeration of games and amusements, even if it were to descend to minute details, could satisfy the abnormal craving for new and exciting entertainments every-where found among the patrons of the theater and the dance; neither would it quench the insatiable thirst of those who have never by hard work earned the right to amusement, or created the need and healthy appetite for recreation. How such people are to be amused, I have no skill and little disposition to say; to them "one thing is needful," honest toil with hand or brain, all else will naturally follow.

I must close this chapter with a few general remarks about the character of amusements.

1. *They should not be expensive.*

Many people live in rented houses all their

* The following books, though containing some things I can not approve, will be found full of suggestions that may be turned to good account: "The American Home Book of Indoor Games, Amusements, and Occupations;" "Evening Amusements;" "The Home Book of Pleasure and Instruction;" "Appleton's Home Amusements;" "The Play-ground and the Parlour."

days, and yet patronize expensive theaters, operas, and parties; they can not afford books or higher education for their children, but they have money for a low clown or actor, who will make them laugh, or play upon their passions. Many professing Christians worship in debt-burdened, struggling Churches, and yet give more every year to the support of the theater than to the cause of God.

2. They should be used among adults *only for rest and recreation after toil*. The true object of life is realized only in some useful employment, the pursuit of knowledge, works of charity, or the exercises of religion. When amusements usurp the place of these, or of any one of them, and become the chief object of life, the thing most eagerly sought, the divine purpose and plan for life is utterly frustrated, God's whole law broken and trampled upon, and the life becomes a wretched failure. Amusements are designed to rest and refresh the weary powers after toil. Keep this design in view, and there is not much danger of going astray. The idle, languid multitudes who clamor for amusements, who live for them, and find their only relief from *ennui*

and stagnation in the excitement they afford, of all other classes have least need of them. They are debauching their powers, defying the laws of God and of their own being, killing time, wasting opportunities, and dwarfing intellect and heart. What they do need is solid work, hard study, earnest purposes, lofty aims, and sincere convictions. The frivolous, worthless multitudes, who clamor continually for some new excitement to relieve the terrible burden of an aimless being, who swarm about our large cities feeding the haunts of vice, poisoning the moral atmosphere, and threatening the very existence of society; who, knowing neither the exquisite pleasure of hard toil nor the sweetness of the rest that follows it, are driven to find a substitute for both in the intoxication of amusement and folly, need nothing so much as to have this abnormal appetite cured by the healthy discipline of hard work.

3. They should be *innocent and pure*. To work with saints through the day and play with sinners in the evening; to pray with God's people in the Church and to laugh with the children of Satan at impurity in the thea-

ter, is not in harmony with the teaching of the Word of God or of sound reason. To engage in such amusements as are furnished by performers of known corrupt character, or that attract to them most powerfully the vile classes, must of necessity be perilous to good character. No amusement ought to be touched in which there is a well understood drift or tendency toward evil; in which there is any improper association of the sexes, exposures, or attitudes of the body; or in which there is any suggestion or allusion to coarse or base passions, otherwise than in severe condemnation. To associate with vile persons, look upon impure scenes, or patronize corrupt institutions, is the sure beginning of moral degeneracy.

4. They should be such as *not to detract from our Christian influence.*

The world laughs at theater-going and dancing Christians. Satan rejoices over them, and good men mourn for them. The Christian's power for good, a power of more value than any other, is greatly injured, if not destroyed, the moment he is seen to engage in doubtful amusements. The consciences of un-

converted men are very tender upon this point, and whatever they allow themselves, they at least require that professing Christians shall make no compromises with the world and sin. Doubt and suspicion of the integrity of Christian character, as well as of the truth of religion, spread abroad like a deadly blight in communities where Christians discredit their profession by these sinful amusements.

Even the use of innocent and pure amusements by Christians is not entirely free from danger. When a man who professes to be consecrated to the work of saving men, hundreds of whom surround him daily, as he professes to believe in the broad way to destruction, gives up a whole day at a time, from sunrise to sunset, to some trivial game, proper enough for an hour's recreation, he lays himself liable to a suspicion of insincerity and a want of moral earnestness. The day laborer who gets his two dollars a day can not afford to spend his time thus; and if the Christian, who professes to be working for God and souls, can, it is construed as an indication that he has not a very high opinion of the importance of the work or of the wages

he is to get. The wasting of time and opportunities in innocent recreations may prove destructive of Christian influence.

"We scatter seeds with careless hand,
And dream we ne'er shall see them more,
But for a thousand years
Their fruit appears
In weeds that mar the land
Or healthful store.

The deeds we do, the words we say,
Into still air they seem to fleet,
We count them ever past;
But they shall last.
In the dread judgment they
And we shall meet.

I charge thee by the years gone by,
For the love's sake of brethren dear,
Keep thou the one true way
In work and play,
Lest in that world their cry
Of woe thou hear."

A very safe rule for the Christian is never to go anywhere or do any thing upon which he can not ask God's blessing. Another equally good was thus expressed by Dr. Charles Hall: "I have a great desire to see a tragedy performed by a great actor, but I have made up my mind never to go to any

place where I would be unwilling to die. Now, I should be very sorry to die while seeing a play in a theater." Hannah More gives the following safe counsel to Christians: "A Christian's amusements must be blameless as well as ingenuous, safe as well as rational, moral as well as intellectual. They must have nothing in them which may be likely to excite any of the tempers which it is his daily task to subdue, any of the passions which it is his constant business to keep in order. His chosen amusements must not deliberately add to the weight which he is commanded to lay aside; they should not imitate the besetting sin against which he is struggling; they should not obstruct that spiritual-mindedness which he is told is life and peace; they should not inflame that lust of the flesh, that lust of the eye, and that pride of life which he is forbidden to gratify."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HISTORY OF THE THEATER.

THE theater is an institution of civilization, though germs of it may be found in semi-civilized tribes as early as a thousand years before Christ. Its universality proves that its existence depends upon no accident of time, place, or circumstance; that it is founded upon human nature, and gives expression to natural faculties, and satisfies tastes and aspirations common to all men. In spite of the severe and just criticisms to which it is everywhere subjected because of its immoral influences, it flourishes and holds a position of power in all civilized lands.

The disposition to represent real or fictitious scenes from life in drama, has been universal in the history of the race. Traces of it are found in the rude war dances of savages, in which the scenes of combat are dramatized, and it appears in all the comic and tragic performances of more cultivated nations. Dark

as the history of the theater has been, and futile as have been all attempts to reform it, I must suppose that God gave man this talent and love for dramatic representation that it might be developed and used for his good. The failure of all attempts in the past, points to the conclusion that the theater as an institution for the amusement of the public can not be reformed, yet we may still hope that in other forms the exercise of dramatic talent may be made to serve the highest interests of society.

Turning from all speculations, however, we find that as matter of fact, the good and the great of all times have pronounced the theater "*infamous*;" that is the word chosen and consecrated by the use of the world's nobility. We can trace it to a definite beginning in the feasts of Bacchus, five hundred years before Christ; from which time, hand in hand with the wine-god, its first lover and life-long companion, it has journeyed through the world, spreading demoralization and desolation on every hand. It is quite remarkable that, like the destructive plague, intoxication, its bosom companion, it flourishes best in Christian

lands, being the devil's most successful scheme for ensnaring the intelligence and culture which a vigorous Christianity always begets, even in the unchristian masses of the communities where it exists. The theater, the saloon, and the brothel are the three confederate tempting devils of civilization, seeking to despoil the flower of humanity, and to rob Christ of the honor achieved by the triumphs of his Gospel in the elevation of men. The theater insinuates lust, murder, theft, hypocrisy, and profligacy upon overworked and sensitive minds under the name of amusement and recreation; it inoculates our fairest sons and daughters with the most deadly poisons, corrupting personal purity, destroying domestic happiness, and dishonoring the sanctuary of home under the guise of music, oratory, and fine scenery; it has proven "a school of vice and the home of debauchery" under the name of the temple of art and good literature. It is black with the curses of the souls it has ruined, infamous for the social impurities it has nursed into life, and abhorred by every one who studies its work of degradation and death. Whether maintained by the classic

Greeks, or carefully guarded by the laws of ancient India and China from the vices allowed in connection with it in modern Christian nations; whether called into being as a pagan religious ceremony, as among the Greeks and Indians, or drifting into the Christian Church, blending with and taking the place of the elaborate ceremonials of its apostate services, with the clergy for actors in the churches and out of them, as was the case for three or four centuries during the Dark Ages, always and under all conditions, the theater has proven a demoralizing agency. That this arraignment may not seem too severe, and be credited to personal hostility or over zeal in a good cause, I will here give the corroborating testimony of men whom all must respect.

CHAPTER V.

*TESTIMONY CONCERNING THE CHARACTER OF THE
THEATER.*

WE are now to examine the character of this ancient institution, whose whitened locks, as it stands before us clad in the robes of its own history, might awaken our veneration were it not for the blood-spots on its hands, the demon leer in its eye, and the foul odors from its filthy raiment proclaiming it one of the vile monsters that still lingers on the earth because mankind have not had virtue enough to exterminate it. We will proceed by the fair and rational method of calling in competent witnesses who have known and studied the institution, to testify as to the character of the accused for common virtue. Passing by the great lights of the Christian Church, the martyrs, the regenerators of the nations, and the godly fathers and mothers whose voices would of course be against the accused; passing also those who have made

the theater a source of gain as actors, managers, or advocates, knowing that "a gift perverteth judgment," I will go into the world's high court of philosophers, thinkers, and sages, and ask the men revered by all ages to testify.

The first I introduce with an apology to the reader for presenting a pagan, and with a request to the witness to be careful to say nothing to shock the fine moral sensibilities of my Christian reader, is the philosopher Plato. Hear him: "The diversions of the stage are dangerous to the temper and sobriety of mind. They rouse the feelings of anger and desire too much. Tragedy is prone to render men boisterous, and comedy makes them buffoons. Thus those passions are cherished which ought to be checked, virtue loses ground, and reason becomes uncertain." Let us try another pagan, even though our Christian cheeks were made to tingle by the words uttered by the master thinker, Plato. Here comes Aristotle, one of the world's greatest thinkers, dominating pagan and Christian thought for many centuries, a man who saw deep into the soul and inner life of things.

He declares: "The law ought to forbid young people the seeing of comedies till they are proof against debauchery." Solon, the wisest of the Greeks, and their lawgiver, forbade "theatrical exhibitions as pernicious to the popular mind."

But let us turn from these ancient dreaming Greeks to the more modern and common-sense Romans, and hear what they have to say. The first shall be the greatest thinker of them all, the prince of orators, the powerful advocate, the versatile and elegant writer, the incorruptible patriot, the savior and the glory of Rome, Cicero. He declares: "Comedy subsists on lewdness," a short sentence, but a lightning-stroke from a brain surcharged with truth, the shock of which is still felt by the forces of evil. We next invite the great historian, Livy, to the stand, and ask him, in his calm, deliberate way, to tell us what occurred under one of the Scipios throwing light upon this subject. He says: "A theater was being erected under the direction of the Censors, and Scipio Nasica urged in a motion or decree before the senate that the theater was a useless establishment, and its exhibi-

tions destructive of good morals. By these and similar reasons the senate, feeling themselves to be the guardians of the welfare and virtue of the citizens, passed a decree which leveled the walls of the unfinished theater to the ground." It is also said "that all their materials were sold by a common crier. The senate passed a law that there should be no benches allowed for the audience in any theater within a mile of the city." We may lift our hands in holy horror at this infringement of liberty; but remember, dear reader, these were unenlightened pagans, and it is highly probable they knew no better, the light of the nineteenth century not having yet dawned. Seneca, the great heathen moralist, says: "Nothing is so injurious to good morals as the loitering in theaters, for then vice makes an insensible approach and steals upon us in the disguise of pleasure."

Rome has other witnesses ready to testify, but I wave them aside, as nothing they could say would add to the overwhelming force of the testimony already given. If any thing more is desired, read it in the history of the growth of theaters and gladiatorial exhibitions

in Rome as its virtue declined and its fall approached; read it in the light of that conflagration kindled by the bloody Nero, a patron of the theater and an actor on the stage; read it in the words of the master historian, Gibbons, who, among the causes of the fall of Rome, names the corruption of the people by theatrical exhibitions and shows.

Let no one attempt to break the force of these testimonies by saying that they do not apply to the case in hand, since they allude to the ancient theater, which all must confess was corrupt. The elegant writer, Joseph Addison, gives the following testimony upon the corrupt character of the English theater as compared with the Greek and Roman: "Were our English stage but half so virtuous as that of the Greeks and Romans, we should quickly see the influence of it in the behavior of all the politer part of mankind, It is one of the most unaccountable things that the lewdness of our theater should be so much complained of, so well exposed, and so little redressed."*. From the days of Addison till now the critics have not ceased to

* Spectator, 446.

bewail the continued demoralization of the theater.

If we descend to modern times we do not find the advanced age of the institution winning for it that respect of the good and great which they are accustomed to bestow upon virtuous old age.

If we may accept the testimony of those most to be trusted, the theater grows worse, rather than better, as it grows older, a strong indication that its character is essentially bad. Sir Matthew Hale, one of England's most honored sons, says "that when he was at Oxford University he made great proficiency in his studies, but the stage players coming thither he was so much corrupted that he almost entirely forsook his studies. He then came to the solemn resolution that while he lived never would he again enter a theater." Mr. Wilberforce, known and honored wherever freedom unfurls her banner, affirms, "The debauchee, the sensualist, the profane, have ever found in the theater their *chosen resort for enjoyment.*" He asks: "How can a virtuous mind seek pleasure in such a place, amid such companions, and from such persons as the

actors and actresses are generally known to be?" Sir John Thomkins, in his life of Dr. Johnson, remarks, "The play-house is the very hot-bed of vice, and wherever planted becomes surrounded by a halo of brothels." I have thus called up the men most honored and revered to testify of the character of this institution, and they give it with united voice such a character as should deny it the patronage and company of every virtuous and right-minded person.

There are many utterances by the legislative and judicial bodies of England and America showing the character of the theater in the opinion of patriots and thinkers in more recent times. An English judge, in charging a jury in London, said: "One play-house ruins more souls than fifty churches are able to save."* In 1778, when the American colonies, struggling for independence, felt their dependence upon God and their need of his aid, Congress passed a law providing for "the dismissal from office of any officer of the United States who should be found in attend-

* Judge Bulstrode charging the jury of Middlesex (London) April 12, 1718.

ance upon a theater." Soon after the declaration of independence the following resolution was adopted by Congress:

"WHEREAS, True religion and good morals are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness;

"*Resolved*, That it be and is hereby earnestly recommended to the several States to take the most effective measures for the encouragement thereof, and the suppression of theatrical entertainments, horse-racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners."

Our municipal governments have been compelled to pass very stringent laws to protect society against the evil classes and influences that gather about and go out from the theater.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH.

IF pagan philosophers, poets, and historians speak of the theater as we have heard them in the last chapter, what may we expect of the Church of Christ but indignant denunciation when it comes in sheep's clothing, pretending to be the friend of virtue, and seeking Christian patronage? With only an occasional exception, the Church has faithfully witnessed against the monstrous iniquities nourished and propagated under this assumed ministry of the fine arts.

It must be confessed with pain, that the Roman Catholic and the Greek Churches have not stood unitedly with the reformed Churches in their opposition to this great evil. In nominal Christian countries, where the Sabbath is a holiday, given up to games, concerts, and theatrical exhibitions, in which even the priests participate, we could not expect to find a lively conscience on this subject. And yet,

even here, in time of Lent, or great religious solemnities, and among the orders making special claims to sanctity and religious earnestness, the theater is forbidden.

Among the reformed Churches, where the Sabbath is held sacred, where a personal religious life is enjoined and cultivated, and where vigorous efforts are made for the salvation of the souls of men, there is but one voice in regard to the theater. John Calvin exterminated it in Geneva, and gave the Presbyterian conscience such a decided tonic on this question that ever since his day, when you find a good, true Presbyterian, you find an uncompromising foe of the theater. John Knox did for Scotland what Calvin did for Geneva and the continent of Europe, and the Scotch Presbyterians are a solid phalanx against the theater. Whatever may be true of particular congregations or communities, the Presbyterian Church has stood like an iron wall against the theater and all the grosser worldly amusements. There are always some people who are neither one thing nor the other on any question, and, though the Presbyterian Church is an uncomfortable place for such

people, a few of them may have strayed in thither.

The early Methodists imbibed the spirituality of the Quakers, the strict morality of the Puritans, and the conscientiousness of the Presbyterians, cementing these qualities together with the best parts of the ritual of the Church of England into a strong, world-wide, century-enduring structure, which has always been understood as a house of the Lord having no fellowship with the theater. John Wesley found the clergy of his day, attending Sunday afternoon races and games, going with the people to the play-house, while the masses were given over to worldliness and vice, with "no man to care for their souls." Against this condition of things he lifted his voice in loud and earnest protest, as the large denomination of which he, under God, was the founder has not ceased to do to this day. Methodism has always been a foe to the play-house, more by its general spirit of earnest piety than by special enactments. To be a soundly converted Methodist, "going on unto perfection," to be happy in religion, faithful

to the class meeting, and earnest in revival work for the salvation of souls, has been considered, within and without the Church, as involving, as a matter of course, strong hostility to the theater. The general rule in the Book of Discipline forbidding "the taking such diversions as can not be used in the name of the Lord Jesus," has always been interpreted as a condemnation of the theater. In the General Conference held in Brooklyn, in 1872, a more explicit rule was adopted forbidding "attending theaters."

The Baptists stand side by side with the Methodists and Presbyterians, while the Congregationalists and Episcopalians are not far behind in the war against "Satan's chapel,"—the theater.

"An English writer in the time of Charles II made a catalogue of authorities against the stage, which contains 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 the Western and Eastern Churches; the condemnatory sentence of seventy-one ancient fathers and one hundred and fifty modern Catholic and Protestant authors."

It may be useful here to give the utterances of a few of its great leaders to show the opinion of the Church in regard to this institution. Clement called it, "the chair of pestilence." Augustine calls it, "a cage of uncleanness and a public school of debauchery." Archbishop Tillotson, speaking of the conduct of certain parents, says, "They are such monsters, I had almost said devils, as not to know how to give their children good things. Instead of bringing them to God's Church, they bring them to the *devil's chapels, play-houses*, places of debauchery, those schools of lewdness and vice." John Wesley says, "The theater not only saps the foundation of all religion, but also tends to drinking and debauchery."

These testimonies, given without a bribe and with no conceivable reason for their utterance save the conscientious convictions of these eminent servants of God, must have great weight with all right-minded persons as

to the relation of the theater to spiritual religion and good morals.

Pollok says :

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

CHAPTER VII.

*THE WELL-KNOWN CHARACTER OF ACTORS AND
ACTRESSES AN OBJECTION TO THE THEATER.*

IF it can be shown that the maintenance of the theater requires the corruption of a large class of men and women as actors, who for hire are required to appear in scenes on the stage and in the green-room that surely undermine virtue, every pure mind must look upon it with horror, even if it were possible to show, as it is not, that the contagion could not possibly spread from actors to auditors. No Christian man who will stop to think of the matter can consent to contribute the price of a ticket to the fund necessary to hire men and women to lives of shame and folly. The man who pays the price in such a transaction is as guilty as he who accepts it. The giver and the receiver of bribes stand on the same moral footing.

It is not here assumed that every actor is a vile person, nor that virtue is necessarily

excluded from the stage. I gladly recognize and proclaim the fact that there have been commendable examples of integrity and virtue among actors, the more conspicuous and the more to be lauded because of the difficulties overcome. I assume that the profession is such as to demoralize, degrade, and corrupt the character, and therefore he must be a paragon of virtue who keeps himself pure in it. If the ministers, the physicians, or the judges of the land were to turn actors and go upon the stage, ten years would probably find them as corrupt as the present occupants of the stage. I have not a word against the unfortunate class, driven, beguiled, or howsoever brought to this profession, but I have maledictions and curses for the institution that has corrupted and destroyed them, and sorrowful rebuke and condemnation for the professing Christians who have contributed to the fund that bribed them to their shame and ruin.

It is not strange that actors become corrupt. The man who simulates a feeling or emotion he does not possess; who for a price, by strength of will or power over his feelings, raises abnormal passions and emotions to en-

ertain and please, or who sells himself to act an unreal part on the stage or in the open field of life, sets at naught and defies those laws of God and of human nature by which good and strong characters are formed. To assume that a man may act the part of deception, fraud, hypocrisy, cruelty, murder, intemperance, and debauchery, and do it well, with heart and brain fully awake and active in his theme, and not be corrupted by it is a monstrous absurdity. History, no less than common sense and philosophy, teaches us that when one sells himself to play the clown or the mock-hero for public amusement, he trails the flag of virtue and grasps hands with infamy. Cicero, in his treatise, "De Republica," informs us that Rome passed a decree by which "common players were expelled their tribe, and, like the felons of our penitentiaries, deprived forever of all rights of citizenship." Another decree was passed called the Prætorian edict, "that whoever appears on the stage to speak or act *is declared infamous*." The laws of England, from a very early period, until recently spoke of actors as "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars."

These edicts and laws express sufficiently the verdict of history as to the character of this profession.

Those who complain most bitterly of such an arraignment are the first to justify and emphasize it when the occasion arrives. In a fashionable boarding-house on Fifth Avenue, New York City, there were a number of wealthy ladies very fond of the theater, of which they were regular patrons. There was also a young lady in the same house of fine personal qualities, good character, and lady-like deportment. It became known to our theater-loving ladies that the young lady was preparing for the stage. Their indignation rose so high that they waited on the proprietor and informed him that the young lady must leave the house or they would, on the ground that it would injure their reputations for it to be known that they associated with one who was preparing for the stage. Nothing was alleged against the young lady's character but the well-known character of actors and actresses, and the sentiment of the public was such that they felt themselves in danger from the presence of one in the house who

was even preparing for the stage. The common feeling is that when a young man or a young lady goes on the stage they are lost to good society. There is not a mother who would not rather bury her daughter than give her to the green-room and the stage. The common sentiment has a basis of facts to rest upon, and society refuses to receive actors unless vouched for, because, as a class, they have earned distrust and suspicion.

A bold and fearless announcement of these facts ought to be kept before the public, if for no other purpose, to save, if possible, the multitude of "stage struck" young girls and boys to be found in every theater-going community, many of whom are so unfortunate as to have silly, foolish parents who seem not to know or care that their children are on the way to shame and death. Let the ministry imitate the Christian heroism and fidelity of the noble Canon Wilberforce in Westminster Abbey on the occasion of Sarah Bernhardt's visit to London, when he said: "She has dared to come to London, bringing her illegitimate children with her, and flaunting her skirts in the very face of royalty." Then,

turning to the Prince of Wales, he said: "It is the nation's disgrace that Briton's future king should so far forget what belongs to the dignity of his station that he should visit this woman in the theater green-room and speak face to face to her in flattering words." Then, in closing, the canon said: "O how deeply virtuous England regrets the premature death of the good Prince Consort! Had he been living to-day this could never have happened."

The strongest testimonies to the truth of these remarks upon the character of actors as a class come from the honorable men and women whose exceptional purity and integrity in the profession have retained for it the respect which still lingers to some degree among the intelligent and pure-minded. The modern stage has no brighter ornament for splendid abilities and pure character than Edwin Booth. He declares that he does not "permit his wife and daughter to see a play without previously ascertaining its character;" that the theater has become "a mere shop for gain, open to every huckster of immoral gim-cracks." This well-known criticism of modern plays and actors, as well as those of the great

army of critics who make this their business, are quite as severe as any I have made in these pages.

Charles Sprague thus expresses the corruption of the stage and its actors as it appeared to him:

“Lo! where the stage, the poor, degraded stage,
Holds its warped mirror to a gaping age;
There where to raise the drama's moral tone
Fool Harlequin usurps Apollo's throne;
There where grown children gather round to praise
The new-vamped legends of their nursery days,
Where one loose scene shall turn more souls to shame
Than ten of Channing's lectures can reclaim;
There where in idiot rapture we adore
The herded vagabonds of every shore;
Women unsexed, who, lost to woman's pride,
The drunkard's stagger ape, the bully's stride;
Pert lisping girls, who, still in childhood's fetters,
Babble of love, yet barely know their letters;
Neat painted mummers mocking nature's shape,
To prove how nearly man can match an ape;
Vaulters, who rightly served at home, perchance
Had dangled from the rope on which they dance;
Dwarfs, mimics, jugglers, all that yield content,
Where sin holds carnival and wit keeps lent;
Where shoals on shoals the modest million rush,
One sex to laugh and one to try to blush,
When mincing Ravenot sports tight pantalettes,
And turns fops' heads while turning pirouettes;
There, at each ribald sally, where we hear

The knowing giggle and the scurrile jeer,
While from the intellectual gallery first
Rolls the base plaudit, loudest at the worst."

My argument, then, is that the circus, the theater, or any other institution which maintains itself by corrupting the persons it employs is of necessity vile in character, and is an agency employed by the prince of darkness for the ruin of the souls of man. And, further, that whoever puts funds into the hands of such an institution is "*particeps criminis*," and is jointly responsible for paying the devil's price for a service he can not get without it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PLAYS IN USE.

IT is freely conceded that the theater is not necessarily evil, but I am not dealing with ideals, or supposable possibilities, nor with abstract theories, but with a visible fact and reality, a tangible something, called the theater, which touches the every-day life of the masses in our great cities, which every man may put under the microscope or into the crucible and study for himself. The evil is not in the curtains, the costumes, the scenery, the stage, nor the acting; neither is it wholly in the fact that the only object is to amuse and entertain. It is chiefly in the fact that immoral and impure plays are put upon the stage, corrupting both actors and auditors. Take the popular pieces for a season in any of our cities, analyze and study them, and what are they? I will not even give you the name or outline of any one of them, but if you doubt the truth of what I am about to

say, I challenge you to buy them, which you can do anywhere for ten or fifteen cents apiece, and examine for yourself.*

You will find the majority of these, studies in vice, shrewd apologies for crime, an attempt to make shame honorable, to give lying and

* Dr. J. M. Buckley, editor of the *Christian Advocate*, New York, made a careful examination of more than sixty plays produced in "the best theaters of New York" during three years, and gives the results of his research in his admirable book on, "Christians and the Theater." More than fifty of these plays he declares to be corrupt, and sustains this assertion by giving the names and outlines of some of the most popular of the number. Dr. Herrick Johnson made a similar study of the plays presented in the four best theaters of Chicago in the Fall and Winter of 1881, and published the results in his "Plain Talk about the Theater." "At Hooley's, thirteen evenings were given to the so-called standard drama, and seventy-six evenings to trash. At McVicker's twelve evenings were given to Miss Anderson, six to Joe Jefferson, twelve to Denman Thompson, and forty-eight to trash. At Haverly's, eighteen evenings to the standard drama, and fifty-one to trash. At the Grand Opera, all the seventy-nine evenings to trash." In the three best theaters of Indianapolis for the Winter of 1881-2, the showing is even worse; the aggregate being, ten nights for the legitimate drama and one hundred and seven for what Dr. Johnson calls "trash." If the best theaters are thus corrupt, what may be said of the others?

falsehood the respect due to truth, to give robbery and theft the immunity and protection claimed for honesty, to elevate the profligate rake to a favorite of society, to make the seducer a gallant hero, and to subvert the whole order set up in God's law and by pure Christian society. The heroes of the stage are eminent as they excel in irregularities, in cunning duplicity, prodigality, and passion. These are the qualities set forth in the most favorable light, securing favor, preferment, and prosperity; while virtue, honesty, sobriety, and piety are made ridiculous by being associated with stupidity and dullness in some blockhead, with shameless hypocrisy, or with disheartening misfortune and failure. The man of low, base character is always revealing some unexpected noble quality; while the man of professed virtue and religion always surprises you by some base deed or by downright hypocrisy. Vice is hailed with applause, virtue with hisses. Gambling, drunkenness, profanity, and libertinism are considered as chivalric weaknesses, rather to be regretted, and yet to be expected in "a really good fellow," while intelligence is ranked as cool

villainy, honesty as stupidity, virtue as an outward garb for greater security in vile practices, and religion as a sham and pretense. It is precisely on the plane of the argument criminals always make in their defense. The thief says, "all men steal, the merchant in a mean, sneaking way, by overcharging, I, in an open, manly way." So says the play. The gambler says, "I use my brain power just as the lawyer or the physician, for after all every business is but a game of chance; therefore all men are gamblers in some form." The libertine says, "There is no such thing as virtue, the only difference is some are a little more discreet than others." These are the principles taught in most of the popular plays, and they are the principles discussed in the haunts of bad men and vile women wherever found. Such teaching tends to destroy the very idea of virtue, to wreck all confidence in human nature, to obliterate moral distinctions, and infiltrates in this soft, subtle way the ideas of debauchery and crime. The sublime plays of Shakespeare will not hold an average theater audience, and when presented, it must be with such accompani-

ments as make the appeal to the lower and baser nature, not found in the words of the great master, by which the patronage of the multitudes is maintained.

If any one supposes this to be an extreme view, the result of hasty or partial investigation, let him consider the strong words of a great scholar and writer, who surely will not be accused of being a Puritan. In Taine's chapter on the theater of Charles II we have these words: "The audiences of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher were in that transient and strained condition in which the imagination, adult and pure, laden with desire, curiosity, force, develops man all at once, and in that man the most exquisite feelings. The roisterers took the place of these. . . . Authors laid it down as a rule that all women were impudent hussies and all men were brutes. Debauchery in their hands became a matter of course; nay, more, a matter of good taste; they profess it. Rochester and Charles II could quit the theater highly edified, more convinced than they were before that virtue was only a pretense, the pretense of clever rascals who wanted to sell themselves dear."

Henry Ward Beecher, who I think will not be accused of Puritanism, in commenting on these words, says: "Some devils are even blacker than they are painted. This one was; blacker than he can be painted. And it took less than a century for the drama to descend from Shakespeare to Wycherley. Keep on 'the safe side of certainty.' He that doubteth is condemned if he eateth. Avoid the dangerous. If you do not know whether to go or stay at home, stay at home. It is better sometimes to go hungry than to eat poisoned food. The evil of a licentious picture does not depart when the eye turns from it; the photograph remains in the brain. The evil of a vicious suggestion does not depart when the bell rings down the curtain. No man can touch pitch and not be defiled. It is better to lose all of Shakespeare than to suffer the contagion for a single night of some of the modern dramas."

ences, may have in them many excellent passages and characters. Even the devil, in his interviews with our first parents, with Christ, and concerning Job, spoke some truths, quoted a little Scripture, and gave some valuable hints on questions of practical life, but they were only shrewd disguises in his effort to hurl his victims into the pit. If a vile and disreputable person or institution is charitable to the poor and unfortunate, as is often the case, so far from atoning for vice, it only makes it more apparent, as the lightning flash makes more sensible the darkness which it relieves for but a moment.

It is further claimed that the theater is an educator of the ignorant masses. This can be true, if at all, to a very limited extent. The plays in common use contain a smaller per cent of knowledge than may be found of solid nutriment in the intoxicating drinks of the country. Even if the claim could be allowed it would be but a doubtful encomium upon the institution. The ox that is fattened to be killed owes few thanks for his good feeding, and the fish that is taken makes no mention of the excellence of the worm used for bait.

If the knowledge imparted is sandwiched with folly and vice it is only a disguise for a deadly poison.

It is claimed for the theater that it affords the amusement and recreation needed after hard toil. If it would do this without demoralizing and destroying; if it would please without raising vile passions; entertain without insinuating lust and impurity; amuse without profanity and vulgarity; afford diversions without infusing poisons; give rest to tired brain and muscle without doing violence to conscience and moral affections, then would it indeed be an angel of light. The theater, like intoxicating drinks, amuses, excites, and entertains, but the other half of the story is too dark and terrible for human words to utter.

It is also said that the theater has greatly aided the growth of good literature. The names of Sophocles and Shakespeare, if there were no others, are enough to justify the claim. The fact, however, that the theater has been able to offer such prizes as would stimulate genius to its best efforts is no argument upon its moral character or its fitness as a place of resort for Christian people. High-

way robbery, assassination, and duelling have done much to improve the manufacture of pistols, knives, and all kinds of arms used for personal defense, and yet they are everywhere condemned and execrated. Whatever may be said of the past services of the stage to good literature, its mission seems to have ended, for there is not a single living writer for the stage who produces any thing but low, worthless trash. The art critics, who have no special concern for the moral influence of the theater, bewail in loudest terms the sad decline of the drama, its low intellectual, artistic, and moral character. They are the weeping Jeremiahs of the age, and have cause enough for their tears, for their "holy city" also "has become a harlot."

CHAPTER X.

THE MORAL INFLUENCES OF THE THEATER.

THERE is about every person and institution an indefinable something called moral influence. Like the odor from a flower-garden or a mass of putrefaction, it penetrates the surrounding atmosphere, and though invisible and intangible, it is distinctly recognized and felt. It may not be traced to any single act or element of character, it may be the mystic aroma of hidden unseen qualities, but like a deadly malaria, floating about in invisible particles in the air, it may carry death to the most healthy, robust natures. The oldest and wisest teachers of the race—fathers, mothers, and philosophers—have all warned the young against the danger of evil associations that would bring them into contact with vice, real or represented. If God had not spoken upon the subject, we would need but to look about at the wide spreading, desolate ruins, where the fires of passion, kindled by a

spark from a neighboring conflagration, have eaten up every thing that was beautiful or of value, leaving only ashes and blackened walls, for the most eloquent proclamation of the truth on this subject.

We are by nature strongly inclined to the imitation of others; and if passion or impulse aid this inclination, its strength is doubled; and if the fiery impetuosity and indiscretion of youth add vehemence to the passion, it will be well-nigh uncontrollable.

We are strongly affected by what we see, the image of a thing painted on the *retina* of the eye, thence transferred to the mind and to the heart. The image of a thing is next to the reality, and hence it is that the image of vice, acted or real, carried through the eye to the mind and heart makes such a powerful impression, and so often, like a living seed lodged in the warm soil of the heart, springs up into reality after the kind of that from which it sprang. To look upon vice must have one of two effects, either to corrupt the mind, securing its toleration, at least so far that it will silently look upon it; or it will strengthen the soul in virtue by

arousing its indignation, and protest against it. How is it possible to sit by the hour watching the development of an intrigue of unholy love, of robbery, or murder, seasoned with profanity and coarse vulgarity, to seek it by choice, knowing beforehand the character of the play, and not be corrupted by it? To sit by silently of choice, while scenes of vice are being enacted, with no protest against them, is to aid them with our assent and sanction. The attendant upon Church services is understood to sanction and approve them by his presence, and to contribute his influence toward making effectual the principles there taught; and the same is true of attendance upon the theater. What mind can look upon the half-dress, the indecent attitudes and postures, the lascivious looks and embraces, and the unfolding of a plot for the corruption and overthrow of the pure and innocent, uttering not a word of protest nor withdrawing from it as from a fatal contagion, and remain untainted? The old lines of Pope are so true to human nature and history as to be worthy of being inscribed over the door-way of every theater as a warning to all who enter:

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen ;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

To consent to look upon vice without a protest against it, is the first step to moral degeneracy.

The young may be pure as angels, as their parents and friends claim for them, but they have passions and propensities quietly slumbering, innocent and inoffensive as gunpowder when let alone, but one spark of fire from a like passion in another may produce an explosion rending into fragments all that was beautiful and lovely. A gentleman of distinction testifies to what has been the experience of vast numbers of young men. When a boy he spent some time in the city with a friend, giving some fifteen minutes one night to looking upon vile scenes. He says: "The poison took effect, the sin left its mark. I can not erase the effects of the impure thoughts which in that quarter of an hour were lodged in my heart, and which (may God forgive me) I harbored there. I can and do pray against the sin, and for God's grace to conquer it ;

but it is a thorn in my flesh and still causes me great bitterness and anguish. Young men, as a lover of your souls, I tell you in all sincerity that there is nothing which I would not willingly give to have the veil of oblivion cast over those corrupt scenes and sentiments which still haunt me like foul specters." A few minutes in a pest house may be enough to blight the whole life, and one touch of impurity may poison the soul for time and eternity.

It is no credit to a man's head or to his heart for him to say he can look upon such scenes unmoved. Human nature is the same everywhere, and my complaint is not that men allow themselves to be moved by such scenes, so much as that they allow them to come into their presence. Unless one is naturally deficient, made of putty rather than of tingling nerves and delicate sensibilities, what moves the common mass of men will move him; for the most gifted and highly endowed are often the most sensitive and capable of impressions. It is the design of the play to excite the emotions and raise the passions, and if in any case it fails, it must be because the actors have over-

estimated the intelligence and capacities of the audience. A good listener, like a good actor, must enter into the spirit of the piece, follow the actor in his feelings, passions, and sentiments, and for the time by the power of his imagination transform fiction into reality. He is a dull, stupid, soulless fellow, who looks upon the scenes of the stage with no kindling feelings or rising passions. One has forcibly said of the stage: "Wickedness is made to give amusement. Lying, drunkenness, and adultery are made a cause of sport and the occasion of hilarity, and crimes that would call down the wrath of God on their perpetrators are systematically made to provoke laughter." Laughing at crime is a mild way of taking in its infection, and a sure approach to a reconciliation and lasting friendship with it. If two people who have long been bitter enemies can be brought to indulge in a hearty laugh together, what remains necessary to a reconciliation will be easily disposed of. An uncorrupted mind has only scorn for vice, and is already fallen in feeling when it consents to laugh at it.

This silent, insensible, indirect influence is

one of the most deadly and dangerous forces of evil. Vice will rarely succeed in a bold, open attack upon virtuous minds; it will be rejected with scorn. It may, however, by soft, gentle, insensible approaches, accustom the mind to its presence, soften resentment, insinuate its charms, blind the eyes to its character and consequences, and at last win marvelous victories over natures supposed to be proof against it. The continual dropping of water will change the face of solid granite. These positions are sustained by the testimony of theater goers, that what at first greatly shocked them, they come directly to view unmoved and with perfect indifference, showing the deterioration of the finer feelings.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THEATER AND CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THE present dangers to Christian life are very different in character from those which confronted the apostles and early followers of our Lord. Persecution then sought to drive them from the field, but it soon appeared that instead of hindering this only helped the growing cause. Satan is shrewd enough when one scheme will not succeed to try another; being unable to subdue the Church by open assault he adopted the more dangerous method of endeavoring to beguile it from its fidelity. The world laid aside its hostile armor, dressed itself in the most pleasing attire, bribed the fine arts as handmaids to aid its performance, and now invites the Church with many professions and pretensions of good will and laudable purposes to a suspension of hostilities and to a fraternal compromise.

The theater is one of the most powerful

elements of this new policy, presenting the combined products of many minds in such combinations as to dazzle, charm, and captivate the soul. It is not strange that Christians feel strongly drawn toward the theater; it has a great advantage over the pulpit or platform, where the speaker must both originate and render the thought. The most gifted intellect is employed to write the play; the actor studies and practices attitude, posture, and elocution; the master of costumes carefully designs and arranges them to add force to the expression; the artist designs and puts on canvas or in statuary such scenery as will best help the impression to be made; the musician, combining the results of many minds in his department, prepares such moving strains as are at his command; and all these amid a blaze of lights and a flutter of expectation rush upon the stage to overpower and captivate the audience, or to intoxicate them by the excessive draughts of excitement and passion presented to their lips. It is the devil's attempt to play the part of the "spider with the fly" toward the Church.

If we look at a few facts lying on the sur-

face of things we can be left in no doubt as to the relation of the Church and the theater. One of these facts is, that the attendants upon the theater from within the Church are of the less spiritual and earnest portion of its membership. They are of those who have little to say about Christian experience, "whose delight is" not "in the law of the Lord," even in reading it, who are not specially fond of the social meetings of the Church for prayer and religious conference, who are not very earnest in the work of saving souls or in visiting and praying with the sick and dying. They may be efficient in conducting sociables, managing fairs, attending to the financial interests of the Church, and doing many good things, but in those elements of Christian life which give best proof of genuine devotion, reflect most honor on the Gospel and bring most glory to Christ, they are deficient.

Another fact is, that the earnest, faithful, truly devout Christian has no desire to go to the theater; indeed, loathes and abhors it for its moral impurities, much as he may appreciate its artistic excellence. It is a simple fact of history, of human experience, that a

high state of Christian life excludes the theater. To every true Christian religious duties are first, and when these are discharged in the home, in society, in the Church, and at the bedside of the sick and dying, there is but little time and certainly no desire left for theater-going.

Another fact is that the world regards theater-going inconsistent with the Christian's professions. He professes to live, "not to please himself, but Him who died for him;" not to secure the pleasures of this world, but the glories of heaven; not to seek pleasure and the favor of the world, but a likeness to Christ and a fitness for his society; not to corrupt his associates by a bad example, but to lead them to Christ and to those safeguards of good character found only in his religion. Theater-going does not harmonize with such a profession. Read the covenant under which we are admitted to holy baptism: "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?" "I renounce

them all." Who can lay his hand on his heart before God, take this solemn covenant, and go away to the play-house?

Attendance upon the theater destroys the Christian's influence for good. The unconverted do not apply to the theater-going Christian for council and prayer when awakened to a sense of their need of salvation. A young lady very sick, fearing she would die unsaved, asked for a minister. She was asked if the Presbyterian elder just across the way would not do as well. "No," she said, "he goes to the theater. I am afraid his prayers would do me no good." All classes feel that such persons are not the best guides to the kingdom of God. The world ridicules and scorns them, and the Church distrusts and mourns over them.

One may say, "It does me no harm to go to the theater." But, if a true Christian, you are bound to go further and ask, "Does it do others harm? Does it destroy my power over them for good? Does it influence them to go to places safe enough to me, but sure to prove their destruction?" Paul's doctrine of Christian expediency, and the command not

“to let our good be evil spoken of,” certainly apply to those Christians who think they may safely go to the theater. Paul would “eat no meat” and “drink no wine so long as the world standeth” if either made another to stumble or fall. While this doctrine may be abused and carried to an extreme, every Christian conscience must acknowledge its claims. The words of Hannah More have great force and truth upon this subject. She says: “I do not hesitate for a moment to pronounce the theater to be one of the broadest avenues that lead to destruction ; fascinating no doubt it is, but on that account the more delusive and the more dangerous. Let a young man once acquire a taste for this species of entertainment, and yield himself up to its gratification, and he is in great danger of becoming a lost character, rushing upon his ruin. All the evils that can waste his property, corrupt his morals, blast his reputation, impair his health, embitter his life, and destroy his soul, lurk in the purlieus of the theater. Vice in every form lives and moves and has its being there. Myriads have cursed the hour when they first exposed themselves to

the contamination of the stage. Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than the Bible and the play-book. If the one be good the other must be evil. If the Scriptures are to be obeyed, the theater must be avoided. The only way to justify the stage, as it is, as it has ever been and is ever likely to be, is to condemn the Bible; the same individual can not defend both."

CHAPTER XII.

"CAN THE THEATER BE REFORMED?"

IN the preceding pages I have been dealing with the actual facts of an existing institution, and not with an abstraction, as an ideal possibility. Men say, "Yes, the theater as it is merits censure, but we must reform it and make it what it should be." To this I only have to say, present your reformed theater and I will rejoice with you, or propose a plausible method of securing it, and I will join you. It would be a great blessing to society if a pure theater could be maintained, where the people might be amused without being corrupted, and where knowledge might be imparted in a form that would give pleasure and afford recreation. That such a great and beneficent institution might be brought into the field to re-enforce the agencies at work for the elevation of society has long been a favorite dream with me, as it has been with many others. As we look carefully

at it, however, the problem becomes involved and difficult, and up to this time, at least, a practical solution has proved impossible. "Time proves all things," and it has given some light upon this question. Practical experiment settles all questions; theories melt away before it, as mist before the rising sun.

The reformation of the theater has been tried by the most gifted sons of genius, under the most favorable circumstances, with large sums of money to sustain the undertaking, at various periods during the last two thousand years, and every effort has proved a disastrous failure. If in the ordinary affairs of life a certain achievement should seem desirable and possible, and capable men with adequate means at their command should undertake it and fail, and if the effort should be renewed again and again by the most gifted men for a period of two thousand years with uniform failure, it would be accepted as a conclusive practical argument that the thing itself is impossible. Socrates attempted to reform the theater and failed. The Church in the middle ages made the attempt, but instead of reforming the theater,

the theater corrupted the Church. Hannah More tried it; wrote several plays herself to aid the good design, but lived long enough to abandon all hope and effort for the impossible reform. Sir Wm. Windham, the friend and co laborer of Wilberforce, the philanthropist, threw all his strength into a similar effort, but with no better success. The great and gifted Channing was equally unsuccessful in Boston. It is said that all the leading theaters of Philadelphia were started in an effort at reform, which lasted no longer than was necessary to get an expression from the patrons of the theater as to the character of the plays they were willing to patronize. In New York the splendid genius of Booth was employed in this Utopian scheme, and the magnificent structure that bears his name stands as a monument over the grave of his buried hopes and defeated plans. The great actor, Henry Irving, is at this time making a vigorous effort to sustain the ideal theater in London, but let the frosts of time touch him and it, and the decay and death that have overtaken all similar efforts will fall upon this.

Under all these efforts, instead of improv-

ing, the theater has steadily grown worse. Addison declares that the theater of his day was not "half so virtuous as that of poor pagan Greece and Rome," while the critics of to-day testify to its continued demoralization. The *New York Evening Post*, in a recent editorial on "Our Stage as it is," says: "There has probably been a greater mass of meretricious rubbish set on the New York stage during the last ten years than during the whole of its existence. We do not, of course, refer solely to pieces that appeal to the baser instincts, but to the whole body of sensational or emotional products, to the feverish slop of a French melodrama." Another leading journal says: "Twenty-five years ago such an exhibition as is nowadays nightly made in this class of amusements (comic opera) in the most matter of fact way, would have gone nigh to landing the whole party in the police station."

But why should all efforts at reform fail? Is the theater necessarily evil? Must it of necessity grow worse as it grows older? Experience teaches that if it exists at all, it must be by descending to play upon the vile and low passions. Where it does this there is

sufficient patronage to sustain it, where it does not it is driven into bankruptcy for the want of patronage. The people will support a vile theater, while they will let a pure one perish. Philosophize about it as we may, this is the well attested fact of history, worth more to true thinkers than any amount of theorizing and speculation.

The very office of the institution makes its reformation difficult, if not impossible. Its office is to reproduce scenes from actual life, so as to excite and raise the passions; it must excite or it can not hold its audiences. Nothing proves so exciting to the masses as an intrigue of unholy love, a scheme of fraud or cool villainy carried out with a strong hand; the disclosure of concealed vice in the lives of professing Christians, or the wild orgies of dissipation and folly. The masses will not pay the price of a ticket to see the beauties of virtue, the rewards of honest toil, the respect due to manly integrity, the quiet happiness of a pure home, or the peaceful decline of virtuous old age put upon the stage; these may be seen every day without cost, are expected as a matter of course, and have no

power to excite the passions. There must be violence, irregularities, enormities, surprising combinations and disclosures, vile suggestions, and powerful appeals to the passions and emotions. The nature of things seems thus to determine the course of the theater if it is to live by public patronage.

If, as is claimed, the theater "holds up the glass to nature," and reflects only what actually occurs in life, it is not thereby vindicated. The reproduction of the vices and follies of society before the eyes of the young is the most successful way of propagating them, as I have shown in former pages. There are also many things, innocent and right in themselves, which are by nature and common custom remanded to privacy, the representation of which in public must be highly demoralizing. Many things pure and right in themselves, are punishable by law, if brought out of that privacy to which they belong. It is corrupting to "hold up the glass to nature," and make public what belongs to privacy, and the excitement of the play is largely the result of this perversion of nature.

That the theater is not, and can not, be

true to nature, though true to fact, appears from another view. Events can not be represented as they occurred, giving proper recognition to the important element, time. The transactions of years must be crowded into a few minutes; transitions, which in nature are gradual and smooth, must be made suddenly and with a shock to the feelings! Occurrences for which nature slowly prepares the way, burst upon us with a suddenness that startles and overwhelms; and the exciting events of a life, separated by long intervals in natural experience, are crowded into a single evening, and the mind intoxicated with these unnatural draughts till rational thinking becomes impossible. In these whirlwinds of excitement and passion, the birth, courtship, marriage, divorce, remarriage, bankruptcy, old age, and death of one or more parties are all portrayed to the excited feelings, producing an actual intoxication of excitement in the highest degree perilous to good morals and intellectual equilibrium.

It is further claimed that the fictitious excitement of even good and pure emotions and sympathies reacts unfavorably upon the

character. To be moved to tears of sympathy, where there is no real suffering, and where aid can not be given and is not needed, has a hardening effect upon the heart. To raise emotions and passions with no suitable opportunity to express them in words or conduct, and by fictitious means, simply to please and entertain, is contrary to the order, of nature, and must be corrupting. There are many practical difficulties in the way of reforming the theater that need not be mentioned, as what I have already presented seems sufficient to close the argument.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DANCE IN HISTORY.

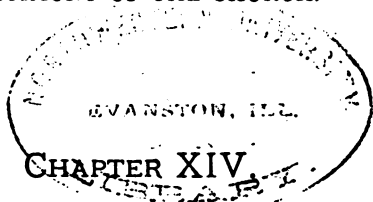
THE dance has woven itself into human history with a great variety of figures and colors, changing always to suit the spirit of the age in which it appeared. In the early ages it was devout, appearing in the garb of religion as the minister of God. The Hebrews in their heroic age were accustomed to express the storms of religious joy and emotion which sometimes swept their souls in its rhythmic movements. On their solemn anniversaries and at the commemoration of some special token of divine goodness or favor, it was thought proper for a company of women, volunteering their services for the purpose, to express and stimulate the common joy by dancing. When "the horse and the rider were cast into the sea," and Israel had escaped the pursuing Egyptians to see them no more forever, "Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all

the women went out after her with timbrels and dances. And Miriam answered them, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." It was not limited to the women, but in cases of great religious enthusiasm men also were caught up and whirled along by the gusts of religious joy and fervor in the regular movements of the dance. Thus it was that King David "danced with all his might before the Lord" on the occasion of the ark being brought up to Jerusalem. In many places in the Scriptures the dance is recognized as a proper religious ceremony, but it is nowhere approved as a social amusement, apart from its religious uses. I would cheerfully give the largest liberty to all to "dance with all their might before the Lord" as a religious ceremony, if their zeal and fervor of love to God prompts them to it. Form the "sets" in every parlor, collect the dancers in every public hall, let the theaters be taken for the purpose; and if there is not room enough, give up the churches, and let all the people "dance before the Lord" with joyful thanksgiving and shouts of praise, the

men and women appearing in separate companies as among the Hebrews. Such a dance would indicate the dawn of the millennium, and would soon be as unpopular as an ordinary prayer-meeting. The modern social dance is as little like that of the Hebrews as the theater is like the temple that stood on Mount Moriah; the glory of God fills the one, and the lusts of the flesh the other.

Among pagans, as well as among the servants of the true God, the dance was at first used only in religious worship. It was so used among the Greeks; and Plato states that, among the Egyptians, dancing was never an amusement, and gives it as his opinion that it never should be employed except in divine worship. In early times those who perverted it from a sacred and religious use were considered "profane and infamous." Among the Greeks it began, as did the theater, in the feasts of Bacchus, the wine-god, and these three playmates in childhood—the dance, the theater, and strong drink—have never parted company, but arm in arm have come down through the centuries the allied enemies of "the three graces."

In the days of Roman greatness and luxury the dance degenerated, as it had already done in other countries, into a social amusement. It was even then considered beneath the dignity of a reputable person to dance, as the well known words of Cicero indicate, where he says: "No one dances unless he is either drunk or mad." Disreputable persons hired themselves as dancers for the amusement of those who were willing to pay the price, while the haughty Roman nobility held themselves aloof from participation in such an exercise. Finding thus an open door into "society" through the corruptions of pagan Rome, which had unbolted every door of safety and welcomed the destroyers of the "eternal city" to their work, "society" has ever since welcomed and harbored, as a distinguished guest, its deadly foe. Long since divorced by religion for its infidelities, it has sought and obtained a second alliance with "society," which has condoned its offenses and allows it such liberties as it desires.



*THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH AGAINST THE
DANCE.*

SO completely has the dance apostatized from its ancient religious character that the Church now recognizes it as one of its most dangerous foes. All branches of the Church unite in warning the young and all who wish to maintain a godly life against its insidious charms. The Roman Catholic Church, lax as it may seem to be on many moral questions, has been driven, by the observed evil influences of the dance, to forbid it in many of its most popular forms. The Episcopal Church, whatever may be allowed in administration, in the declarations of its representative bodies, condemns it. The Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Baptist, and, indeed, all evangelical Churches, have borne their testimony to the perils to vital Godliness lurking in the purlicus of the social dance.

It is not implied in this condemnation that the thing in itself is an evil. The physical exercise of dancing is no more a sin than that of walking; and accompanying an instrument of music with harmonious movements of the body in the dance is no more iniquitous than accompanying it with harmonious movements of the voice in song. If any one wishes to go into a large room, or upon the green, to dance for physical exercise by himself, or in company with those of his own sex, no one certainly could object. It is against such questionable additions, combinations, and excitements as are proved by experience to be dangerous that the Church lifts its warning voice.

Neither does the Church commit the error of condemning all dances as equally dangerous to good morals and religious life. In a public hall some dances may be less impure and objectionable than others. Then, again, the dance in the home, under the eye of parents and friends, may be considered less dangerous than the public hall. And yet the Church feels it a duty to condemn *the dance*, without exception, as it does "the use of intoxicating

drinks." An occasional glass of wine in the home is not so bad as drinking at a public bar to in-oxication; and yet because it has been found by experience that the one is likely to lead to the other both are forbidden. Dancing under the most careful restrictions has been known to fascinate and lead astray to lives of shame those who had been carefully reared. The drift and tendency is downward and not upward; therefore, the signals of danger are set up. If as many boats drifted toward Lake Erie as toward the falls on Niagara River, there would be little danger; but since all drift is toward the falls, the river is considered unsafe for careless boatmen. If it shall ever appear that the dance leads as many people toward a godly life as it now leads from it, the Church will no doubt withdraw its protest; but while the "drift" is all away from God toward the world and sin that protest must stand.

Neither is it claimed that no one who dances is a Christian. I freely confess that many who seem to be sincere followers of Christ do dance, but I must believe that it is

with great loss of personal influence, that it endangers their own souls, is a reproach to the cause of Christ, and that if saved at all it will be "so as by fire."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DANCE UNFAVORABLE TO HEALTH.

THIS may seem to be a consideration of little value, and yet it is one of great importance, involving every interest of time and eternity. Our "bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost," and we have no right to dishonor or weaken them. "A sound mind in a sound body" is the natural formula for a happy, successful life. Our power for good in the world depends largely upon good health and physical capacity for the duties of life. The dance of amusement, as conducted by modern society, brings its hundreds annually to premature graves. For the fashionable dancing party a style of dress is adopted by the ladies especially that exposes them to great physical dangers; colds are contracted, the nervous system is shattered, and consumption, heart disease, or some other malady finishes what the dance commenced. The

long protracted, unusual exercise of dancing, in a heated atmosphere, through the hours usually given and demanded by nature for sleep; the feeble strength sustained for the unusual effort by unnatural excitement to be followed by a depression and reaction as unnatural; the late suppers and the excessive eating and drinking out of the order prescribed by nature and common usage; and the exposure of going into the chilling air in a heated, exhausted condition, with clothing designed for the dance and not for protection from the cold, has brought many to a sudden death, others to a slow decline, and still others to a feeble, disabled condition for life. Every community where the dance is practiced can furnish abundant illustrations of the truth of these statements. Whatever destroys health and life, whether poison, gun-shot, or unnatural bodily exercises, is at war with God's law and with human welfare.

It may be said, in reply, that these remarks apply only to the abuses of the dance; to which I have to say that this is precisely the point of complaint against the dance, that it has grown into a monstrous system of abuses

that have become essential to its maintenance, without which society would allow it to die unwept.

I am not dealing with an ideal dance, but with the facts of the reality as it exists in society. There is no doubt that the dance might be so conducted as to be beneficial to health. If it were in the open air or well-ventilated apartments, at proper hours of the day, for a reasonable length of time, in suitable attire for the free exercise of the lungs, heart, and other vital organs, and with no unnatural excitements, it might be a great conservator of good health. The dance of amusement, as now conducted, violates all these conditions, and by its work of death has merited condemnation.

CHAPTER XVI.

*THE DANCE UNFAVORABLE TO INTELLECTUAL AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.*

THE practice of this fascinating amusement rarely fails to develop, in the young especially, a passionate fondness for it, which supplants and roots out the love of solid study, good reading, intelligent conversation, and the higher and better forms of social intercourse. Such things are "dull and stale" to the lover of the dance. When a party is in prospect, the mind is excited and occupied with it for days in advance, and when past, the excitement lingers and the mind lives over its scenes till another arises to call away the attention. Studies in school are neglected, solid reading is abandoned, the growth of intelligence and the development of the nobler powers are stopped, and life becomes a succession of frothy, unsubstantial sensations and excitements. There is neither time nor taste

left for the noblest and best work of life. In every sense, this "bodily exercise profiteth little:" it adds no new resources to the mind and develops no new powers in the body.

It has been claimed for the dance that it promotes sociability. Does it? It brings people together, cultivates freedom, familiarity, and ease, but does it develop the higher forms of sociability? Does it improve the powers of conversation? Does it enlarge our view of human nature? Does it reveal the many-sidedness and the vast powers of the human mind, heart, and soul? Does it enlarge our sympathies, and beget a more generous, helpful spirit? Bring together a company of people accustomed to spend their time in dancing, and attempt to engage them in intelligent conversation, and the answers will appear. An intelligent lady said to me in New York City, "But what can I do with my company? The people of fashionable society do not read, they are not capable of sustaining an interesting conversation, and there is no way of entertaining them but by letting them dance." This difficulty no doubt exists, but to continue giving fuel to the flame only in-

creases the power of the conflagration. People usually find their highest joy in the exercise of their strongest faculty, and if a novel-reading, theater-going, dancing, idle, godless company is brought together, they would doubtless be pleased with an invitation to use their heels rather than their heads.

CHAPTER XVII.

*THE DANCE REQUIRES A WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE
OF MONEY.*

MONEY is a gift of God, a sacred trust committed to man for his good and for the glory of the giver, and it can not be abused with impunity. Its misuse in luxurious living, in the indulgence of the animal appetites, and in maintaining shows, theatrical exhibitions, dances, and enervating diversions has been in all history one of the most prolific sources of the evils which undermine private virtue, corrupt public morals, and destroy individual and national life. The Roman empire, the most colossal and powerful national structure ever reared by human hands, was in this way "honey-combed," its substance eaten out, till there was not strength enough left to hold the vast fabric together, and it fell apart into many fragments from internal moral decay. The dance has a large place in history, in the work of individual, family, and national

degeneracy and bankruptcy. It is in close alliance with the goddess of fashion, and worships at her shrine. It must have costumes, equipages, splendid apartments, and feastings on an elaborate and expensive scale, as a necessary condition to securing its consent to serve the public. It is imperious, and demands unquestioning, instant obedience as the condition of averting the anger of its patron deity, the goddess of fashion. The grocer must hold his bill a little longer, the landlord must wait for his rent or look in vain for the bird that has flown, the tailor may collect his accounts as best he may, and the Church must look elsewhere for some one more able to give, while "*society*" wrings its demands from its helpless victims.

Take the reports of one of our fashionable balls, as they may be found in the daily papers, and study this question of expense. There are described the elegant dresses, the material, color, buttons, laces, and length of train; the flashing diamonds and jewels, splendid apartments decorated with all the beauties of nature and art; the magnificent tables laden with costly viands from land and sea—alto-

gether presenting a scene that discredits straight-forward living upon and within a regular income, paying for what is bought and keeping good faith with the plain shop-keepers and trades-people of the town. It stimulates the thirst for fashionable life, for display, luxury, and fast living, which wrecks more families morally and financially than any other one thing.

It may be said, "Such dancing parties are few, and are given only by the rich." That is true, but the constant struggle of life is for the many to imitate the few, for the poor to live as the rich. Every dancing community, to the extent of its ability, strives toward this highest ideal, and the dance of the country village is as great a drain to its financial and moral resources as is the splendid ball to the metropolis, where diamonds flash and silks rustle in the kaleidoscope movements in the magnificent parlors.

This matter of expense may seem to be a minor consideration to bring forward against an institution so popular and hoary as the dance, but when we turn the clear light of indisputable facts upon the ruins of bankrupt

homes, dishonored reputations, the long list of unsettled accounts held by hard working, honest people, and the discredit cast upon common honesty in the every-day affairs of life, it assumes a magnitude and importance justifying any emphasis we can give it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DANCE CONDEMNED FOR ITS EVIL ASSOCIATIONS.

IT was nursed in the lap of the wine-god, Bacchus; has kept company with the theater since they were children together, two thousand years ago, and is a favorite in houses of shame; while it is never seen in Church, objects to sacred music, and leaves the house if prayer is proposed. You may almost always find it in the loitering places of the novel-reading, the wine and beer drinking, the profane, and the licentious classes, but rarely may it be seen in the assemblies of earnest students, great thinkers, or devout Christians. If we judge it by the company it keeps, we shall hardly feel like introducing our sons and daughters to its acquaintance. It is not asserted that no good people dance, but I may say that those who, by common consent, are considered the best people in society, do not dance, and for the reason that they think it

unworthy of them. This is a matter of fact about which there is little room for difference of opinion. In the lowest and vilest grades of society the dance is most popular and most common; as you rise in the grade of intelligence and moral excellence its popularity and use decline, till you reach a point where it disappears altogether, and above which it is not found. These facts of moral affinity and association lie on the surface of things, may be observed by any one, and seem to justify the condemnation which I have pronounced upon the dance.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DANCE UNFAVORABLE TO THE RIGHT RELATION OF THE SEXES.

A DIGNIFIED freedom and familiarity of social intercourse between men and women is unquestionably for the highest good of both. Whatever tends to lower the character of their association, to undignified familiarity, attitude, touch, or posture, however garnished and concealed by art, music, and public ceremonials must be regarded as nothing less than the "old serpent," reappearing in our earthly Eden to poison, blight, and destroy. The proper relation of the sexes in society is one of the greatest sources of earthly happiness, just as their improper relation is one of the most prolific sources of crime and misery. The dance of modern society is based upon, and finds its attraction in, the fact that the sexes unite in it, and are brought into such relations and positions as they would not assume but for the required formula—positions

that awaken and excite emotions aroused only by the opposite sex.

I freely admit that there are many exceptions to this general statement, that the regularity of the movement accompanying the music, the elegant costumes, the delightful society, and the physical exhilaration hold many to the dance with a strange fascination; but to the great majority, the excitement of unusual forms of contact with the opposite sex is the chief attraction. Many excellent people participate in the dance with no conception of the storms of wild and base passion which it excites in others, and often in those of whom they would least expect it.

A live, sensitive nature must naturally be moved and stimulated by such associations as the dance secures; only a dull, lethargic, or stupid soul would be unmoved by it. The circumstances are all powerfully suggestive. Men and women are brought into great freedom of personal contact; the exercises are such as to beget a high flow and exhilaration of animal spirits; it is night, and darkness shuts off the outer world; the delicious intoxication of harmony in music and motion fires

the blood; the heaving breasts and beating hearts are brought into close contact; the warm breath upon the flushed cheek, and the electric currents flowing from hand to hand or flashing from eye to eye do the work nature intended for them under lawful conditions, and no one but the superhumanly good or the naturally deficient can pass unmoved through such scenes. It is this power of exciting the sexual feelings and emotions that gives the dance its great charm to so many. I beg your pardon, gentle reader, and I tremble myself to have written so plainly, but the truth has compelled my reluctant pen to the unpleasant task. That it is the truth appears in the fact that it is impossible to sustain the dance without this association of the sexes.

You may say that all social gatherings are better enjoyed where the sexes mingle, but the dance, unlike other social gatherings, can not be maintained at all without this element; men would turn from it with loathing if women were not to participate. The life principle of a thing, that which is essential to it, and by which it exists, is the element which still

maintains it when every other is removed, and without which it perishes though every other remain. Applying this principle, we will find the unusual, exciting contact of the sexes, the life principle of the dance, without which it would perish.*

More innocent young girls have fallen by the opportunities afforded for approaching them improperly in the dance than from any other one cause. The skillful rake considers his work half done when he has accustomed his intended victim to the touch and pressure of his hand; he may then advance by insensible degrees till his purposes are accomplished.

* The Rev. Dr. W. C. Wilkinson bears this testimony: "With the sincerest reluctance, I bring myself to subjoin a remark bearing on this point, once overheard on car-board by a friend of mine, in a conversation that was passing between two young men about their lady acquaintances. The horrible concreteness of the fellow's expression may give a wholesome recoil from their danger to some minds that would be little affected by a speculative statement of the same idea. Said one: 'I would not give a straw to dance with Miss ——. You can't excite any more passion in her than you can in a stick of wood!' Pure young women of a warmer temperament, that innocently abandon themselves to enthusiastic proclamations of their delight in the dance in the presence of gentlemen, should but barely once have a male intuition of the meaning of the involuntary

It is one of the unsolved social enigmas, how our pure wives, mothers, and daughters can submit to such contact, attitudes, and movements as the dance requires, with men of whose characters they know nothing, and often with men of known bad character. It is no answer to say that only the vile think of evil. God so constituted human nature, with such batteries and telegraph lines of nerves, that the contact secured in the common dance is sure to send flashing along the lines to the office of passion and appetite just such messages of doubtful character as I have been speaking of. It is a question of human na-

glance that will often shoot across from eye to eye among their auditors. Or they should overhear the comments exchanged among them afterwards. For when young men meet after an evening of the dance to talk it over together, it is not points of dress they discuss. Their only demand, and it is generally conceded, is that ladies' dress shall not needlessly embarrass suggestion. Believe me, however women escape without the smell of fire upon their garments, men often do not get out of the furnace, save with a flame devouring them, that they seek strange fountains, and willingly damn their souls, to quench."

It tasks a resolutely firm nerve to speak thus of things that braze it out before the world and the Church, only for want of being thus spoken of.

ture, and I must hold that a fair share of knowledge on this important subject will lead any one to the approval of what I have here said. The rude "kissing plays," and such like freedom between men and women often found in the rural districts, are condemned on the same principle. I take it as unlawful to do any thing to awaken passions or emotions that are themselves unlawful.

It is freely conceded that these natural excitements may be restrained and governed, and are so restrained by great numbers; but there are many in whom they become a consuming fire, and these often are the most sensitive and gifted natures. No one has a right to subject himself and others to the strain of unnecessary temptation, nor because he is able to govern himself under temptation, to imperil others by his example who may not have the same ability to stand.

Here is what a purely secular paper, the *New York Journal of Education*, says about dancing: "A great deal can be said about dancing: for instance, the chief of police of New York City says that three-fourths of the abandoned girls in this city were ruined by

dancing. Young ladies allow gentlemen privileges in dancing which, taken under any other circumstances, would be considered as improper. It requires neither brains nor good morals to be a good dancer. As the love of dancing increases the love of religion decreases. How many of the best men and women are skillful dancers? In ancient times the sexes danced separately. Alcohol is the spirit of beverages. So sex is the spirit of the dance. Take it away, and let the sexes dance separately, and dancing would go out of fashion very soon. Parlor dancing is dangerous. Tippling leads to drunkenness, and parlor dancing leads to ungodly balls. Tippling and parlor dancing sow to the wind, and both reap the whirlwind. Put dancing in the crucible, apply the acids, weigh it, and the verdict of reason, morality, and religion is, 'Weighed in the balance and found wanting.' "

CHAPTER XX.

THE DANCE DESTRUCTIVE TO CHRISTIAN LIFE.

IF you wish to know whether a drug is injurious or not, you ask a physician who has observed its effects and studied its history. His observation of facts will be worth more than the speculations of a thousand theorists who have given no attention to the facts of practical experiment and demonstration. The careful students and observers of moral and social influences declare that the dance has a bad record for its destructive influence upon religious life; in short, that it is a deadly poison to it. In its least objectionable form, in our Christian homes, under proper safeguards, it has been found that it quickly roots out an earnest religious spirit, and that where it prevails to any considerable extent among Christian people, a blight falls upon the religious life of the Church. This fact is arrived at by the scientific method of observing phenomena

by taking the results of practical experiments, of which, alas, the Church has had too many, and as a scientific argument is unanswerable. Fifty men standing up and declaring that a drug so innocent in appearance as belladonna can not be injurious to the human system, even if taken in large quantities, has no force at all against the observed facts, that wherever so taken it acts as a quick poison. Men may say, "The dance is an innocent-looking affair," and I grant it is. But observation shows that it acts as a deadly poison to spiritual life, and therefore the voice of warning is lifted against it. To point out just why and how it is so to the curious inquirer might be as difficult as for the physician to tell just how malaria does its work; our chief concern is about the facts, and by them we must govern our conduct.

The spirit of the dance is not the spirit of true religion; if the one be harbored the other will depart. Many excellent people who are examples of the common virtues may be found in the dance, but the earnest, prayerful Christian soon finds that he must choose between the dance and his religious life;—he can not maintain both.

But let us hear the testimony of those whose business it is to observe and study religious life and the evils in society that war against it, and I submit that the testimony of such men, like that of the physician as to the effects of a drug, must be accepted as conclusive, especially if their number and standing are such as to preclude the possibility of mistake. The first testimony is from the "Pastoral Letter of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States." It says: "In this conviction 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 the 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 morals." The next testimony is by Bishop Hopkins, of Vermont, at the time of his death the senior bishop of the Episcopal Church. He says: "In the period of youthful education I have shown that dancing is chargeable with waste of time, the interruption to useful study, the indulgence of personal vanity and

display, *and the premature incitement of the passions.* At the age of maturity it adds to these no small danger to health, by late hours, flimsy dresses, heated rooms, and exposed persons; while its incongruity with strict Christian sobriety and principle, and its tendency to the love of dissipation are so manifest that *no ingenuity can make it consistent with the covenant of baptism.* It would give me sincere pleasure to have expressed a very different opinion, because I am well aware that few of my readers will relish my unaccommodating sentiments on such a theme. But candor and honesty forbid, and I may not sacrifice what I believe to be the truth in the service of worldly expediency."

Bishop McIlvaine, of Ohio, thus writes: "Let me now turn to two subjects in which there is no difficulty of discrimination—*the theater and the dance.* The only line I would draw in regard to these is, that of *entire exclusion.* And yet, my brethren, I am well aware how easy it is for the imagination to array both 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. . . . The question is not what we can imagine them to 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. . . .

"If the writer be asked whether, in his view, in the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, which are renounced in baptism, are included *theatrical amusements and dances*, he answers, without hesitation, in the affirmative. If he be asked whether, under the apostle's exhortation, 'Be not conformed to this world,' they are included as matters of worldly conformity to be forsaken, he answers, 'Certainly.' If he be asked whether these things are consistent with the cultivation of a spiritual mind and the maintaining of a rightful Christian influence, by example, for the good of men and the glory of God, he must answer, they are, in his view, *very inconsistent* with such duties. He thinks they are renounced in baptism, that their renunciation is ratified in con-

firmation, and professed in every participation of the Lord's supper. He prays that the time may come when all communicants will unite in rejecting these things."

Rev. Stuart Robinson, D.D., late pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Louisville, Kentucky, whose vigorous intellect and fearless advocacy of what he believed to be truth made him well known throughout the land, said, in a recent article in the "*Free Christian Commonwealth*:" "To intelligent Christian men and women, with the Word of God in their hands and in their hearts, as the infallible rule of faith, it is simply impossible that this question of indulgence in such worldly pleasures as the theater, the masquerade, the card-table, and the dance, can be a doubtful or debatable question. . . . And the ground on which the Christian pastor warns and rebukes is chiefly neither because of any inherent sin in the amusements themselves, nor even the ethical precepts of the Gospel against worldly conformity, but as evidences of a decay of spiritual life and danger of making shipwreck of faith. Whether able metaphysically to prove the sin or not,

or to demonstrate the points of casuistry arising under the application of the Gospel rule, or to confirm by testimony of the Church or not, the signs of spiritual decay are manifest, and therefore he warns and enforces the Gospel precepts upon the declining believer."

Similar testimonies might be given almost without number from the leading pastors and thinkers of the Methodist, Baptist, and other evangelical Churches were they needed, but these are sufficient to show the opinion of the most capable and reliable observers of the effects of this amusement upon religious life. The opinion of ten thousand worldly men, who understand neither the spirit nor the laws of religious life, would weigh nothing against the testimony of one such witness as those I have presented. There can be no reason why these eminent scholars and thinkers should pronounce against the dance, except that they have observed its baleful influences upon religious life. Upon this question of fact the testimony of these competent witnesses must be accepted as conclusive.

Any one who prayerfully considers the claims of Christ upon his professed followers,

and the teachings of the Word of God in regard to the spirit and practices of this world, can not fail to see that the dance is inconsistent with true religion. Consider such passages as these, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

"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."

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not

the unclean thing; and I will receive you." In the presence of these words of truth, with the full light of the "Sun of righteousness" turned upon it, the dance reveals its satanic features, and the truly consecrated soul must withdraw from it with horror.

CHAPTER XXI.

CARDS, BILLIARDS, AND GAMES.

THE love and practice of gaming seem, by the records of history, to have been almost universal in human society. Games call into pleasing exercise many natural faculties and emotions; the love of them is therefore natural and in itself innocent. There is the pleasing excitement of a contest for the mastery; the stimulus of a rivalry for the honor of highest skill; the love of applause, always sweet to the victor, and oftentimes the hope of a prize or reward; and mingling with all these a degree of social pleasure arising from the contact of mind with minds, giving to games a marvelous power to fascinate and charm the mind. They often partake of the nature of amusement and recreation, and are then specially interesting in their contrast with hard work, and their sanitary value quiets the conscience on the question of wasting time.

The tendency in all systems of gaming is toward a contest for the mastery, with a prize as a reward of superior skill. The human mind instinctively craves an object in every pursuit, a result for every effort, and a reward for acquired skill. The excitement of the race may sustain interest in it, but a prize at the goal lends to it an additional charm; it nerves the racer to greater effort, and fires the spectator with more enthusiasm. It may be simply the championship and the applause that attends it; to some minds that is the richest of all prizes. It may be a badge of honor, a political or social distinction, or a sum of money—whatever it is, the game is more interesting when played for a stake, and therefore the tendency in gaming is toward the setting up of a real or fictitious prize for the winner.

The early Greek games were so conducted as to avoid most of the evils of common gambling, while the victor was properly recognized and rewarded. They were undoubtedly powerful agencies in developing that physical vigor, national spirit, and intellectual power, which have given the Greeks a place

of such honor in history. None were permitted to engage in the games in whose person or character there was any defect or stain, and all were required to take an oath, with their hands on the sacred bleeding victim, that they would "use no fraud or guile" in the sacred contest. There was a high religious character, and a noble spirit of manly honor in these games. This exalted religious character in the games of Greece soon degenerated; was lost altogether in those of Rome, and has never appeared in the games of modern times. The games of the present make no higher claim than that of being entertaining, amusing, healthful, and, in skillful hands, profitable for money-making. The games that unite all these elements of interest are the most popular and fascinating.

The observed evil effects of gaming for a prize have been so great, that a strong opposition to it has always existed in the most conscientious minds. It becomes unduly exciting, and thus involves the greatest perils. Under a high state of excitement men will yield to temptations, give way to passions, resort to means to secure their object, and

commit acts of fraud or violence to which they would be in no danger in their natural moods. The man who gambles is led on step by step to stake more and more, in the hope of winning in one effort what he has lost in many; money, business, reputation, home, and all he has or loves is now involved, his face is flushed, his manner is nervous, his temples throb, his heart beats quickly, he *must* win or all is lost. It does not require a philosopher to see that this situation is one of the greatest peril, and that the first step in gambling implies this at no distant period.

It entices the affections, absorbs the time, disorders business, and disqualifies for the regular duties of life. Regular, virtuous, honest living seems intolerably slow and monotonous to the man whose blood has been fired with the gambler's excitement; regular duties and orderly movements cease, and the life falls into chaos, swept by tempest without and rent by convulsions of internal fire.

It puts in peril and hangs upon the caprice of chance the inheritance of our ancestors, and the just rewards of our own toil, thus obliterating a sense of the sacredness of values

and of the rights of property. A man who can wager the sweat and blood of his father and mother, the fruit of his own honest industry, and the inheritance of his children, to go without compensation to some villain upon the throwing of a dice or the turning of a card, is recreant, not only to all moral obligations, but to common human instincts as well. The terrible consuming fire of this passion for gambling, if it once be allowed to kindle upon the affections and the will, leaves not a single green or beautiful thing in the life, but burns on till nothing is left but blackened walls to proclaim the ruin it has wrought.

Contravening the laws of good morals and right living, gambling must find its support among those who disregard moral obligations, and thus its associations become corrupt and corrupting. The gaming house is on intimate terms with the drinking saloon and the brothel, and is filled with an atmosphere of obscenity and profanity. To enter such society is to invite contagion, grasps hands with the tempter, and welcome destruction.

The successful player is naturally tempted to use his easily gotten gain in fast living and

sensual indulgences; while the unsuccessful player, under the powerful reaction that follows high excitement and disappointed hopes, is strongly tempted to drown his mortification and chagrin in the same excesses, or in a wild rush out of life by his own hand. Either success or failure is dangerous, as affording strong temptation to drinking, licentiousness, forgery, or suicide.

I have given this partial outline of the evils of gambling to give emphasis to what I have to say about gaming in general. These evils have had the effect upon society of dividing games of all kinds into two general classes, those used in gambling and those not so used; and further, of awakening a very strong opposition among many wise and good people against the use of games employed by gamblers, as an amusement suitable for the social gathering or the home. Some go to the absurd extreme of forbidding all games, and others to the dangerous extreme of allowing all, if the element of gambling is excluded. The truth will, as in most cases, be found somewhere between the extreme opinions.

That children and young people especially

should spend their unoccupied hours in games and plays, seems to be the clear design of Providence and the dictate of reason. It seems equally clear that playing with gamblers' games incurs a needless danger. Playing at cards or billiards is at least handling the tools and acquiring a knowledge of the gambler's art; it is the preparatory education that makes possible the gambler's career. In itself it must be harmless and innocent enough, but if it begets a fondness for and skill in playing these games which, under temptation, render the soul weak, then it is a great evil. If one plays at all, he will naturally seek to excel; this will develop skill, and where skill exists there will be a natural temptation to match it against the skill of another, and if possible to turn it to a good account in a pressing financial emergency. It is very easy to say that one ought to be strong enough to resist these temptations, and the majority will be; but the few who year after year fall by it justify the demand that such games shall not be used as a social amusement. The prospect of sudden riches acquired as by a wave of the magician's wand; the necessity of money in

order to recognition by fashionable society; and the respect paid to the successful speculator or schemer, who seems to conjure up fabulous fortunes from the depths of his own fertile brain; and the belief that the use of a laboriously acquired skill one evening in the week, will soon secure results to be obtained only by many years of hard toil in regular business, presents a temptation before which thousands fall annually to rise no more. If there is but little skill or love for regular business, if wine-drinking adds its excitement and indifference to moral qualities; and if the gaming may be carried on at hours and in places that do not interfere with the business of the day, in perfect secrecy, and with companions of respectable position in society, the temptation is specially dangerous. Society is full of illustrations of the truth of the position here assumed, that these games are dangerous. In a previous chapter I have given two striking examples in the use of billiards under the most careful supervision, in connection with Christian institutions, with the most painful results.* The number might here be

* See page 24.

indefinitely increased were they not already written in characters of flame on the very surface of things before the eyes of all men.

There is also the objection to these gambling games that they become too exciting and seriously interfere with important duties, even when there is no prize at stake. In many communities social gaming-clubs are formed, the evenings and spare hours are spent at cards, the home-life is neglected, reading is abandoned, refining, social intercourse is surrendered, every thing is swallowed up by the all-consuming mania for gaming. There is no intellectual or social improvement, and no possible gain to justify setting aside agreeable and profitable exercises for these games. While the father is with his club playing "whist" or "backgammon," his boys are upon the street playing something worse. It is his duty and should be his pleasure to make his own home joyous and attractive with such games, readings, or other exercises as would interest the children and bind them to the home-life. He would thus find the purest and best recreation for himself, and would solve the problem that so disturbs the

minds of many parents to-day, how to hold their influence over their children.

The observed effects upon religious life of this devotion to games justifies the assertion that spiritual life declines under its influence. Bible-reading, private devotion, social worship and effort for the salvation of souls do not grow rapidly where cards and billiards are in high favor and frequent use. The excitement even of less fascinating games than those used for gambling, often interferes with the most solemn and important duties, and that with persons in whom it would be least expected I have known ministers so excited over the innocent game of croquet as to neglect the duties of their sacred office for it, spending the whole day, from morning to night, in a recreation that became dissipation. One of the most careful pastors I ever knew was approached in the midst of a game with an earnest request to baptize a sick child. He promised to comply as soon as the game was finished. He became excited as the game went on and continued playing till the sun went down. Then remembering the sick child he hastened away to administer to it the

sacred ordinance of baptism, but to his horror he found that the child had died while he was at his games. I speak of this not to cast reflection upon this game, nor upon ministers who engage in what seems a very proper recreation for them, but to show that under the circumstances where it would be least likely to occur games have power to excite and absorb attention from the most important duties.

A passion for gaming has always been regarded as inconsistent with a sincere, earnest life. How is it possible for a Christian, who is awake and alive to the great truths and the sublime mission of the Gospel, who feels the worth of his own soul and of the souls around him, to give himself up to this fascination? An earnest business man even must find little time or disposition for these exciting games.

Upon the introduction of cards into Western Europe, on the continent and in England, severe laws were enacted against them, in some cases, because of their bad moral influence, in other cases, and especially in England, because the excitement and love of gaming

they produced interfered with business and with the duties the citizen owed to the State. The law in England against cards and other games held the following language: "Crafty persons have invented many and sundry new and crafty games and plays, by reason whereof archery is sore decayed, and daily is like to be more and more minished, and divers bowyers and fletchers for lack of work gone and inhabited themselves in Scotland and other places out of this realm, there working and teaching their science, to the persuance of the same, to the great comfort of strangers and detriment of this realm." It is further provided that a severe fine shall be assessed upon any one playing "at cards" and other prohibited games. Experience has proved that these games are of a nature to demand more time and thought, by the excitement they generate, than can be safely spared from the common duties of life; and, further, that where they are maintained vital godliness declines and common virtue itself is put in peril.

The plea that they are useful for amusement and recreation has but little force, since there are innumerable other games and recre-

ations free from the dangers that attend these. If this were not the case then it would be in order to inquire whether the value of the amusement is sufficient to justify incurring the risk; but since there are other amusements free from these dangers, the question is not worthy of consideration. It is the part of wisdom to keep as far from danger as possible. A gentleman advertised for a coachman; four men applied for the position. The road from the house led by the brink of a dangerous precipice. The gentleman took one of the applicants to the precipice and asked how near he could drive to it without going over. He said within six inches. He tried another; he said within four inches; the third said he could drive with the outside of the tire even with the precipice. The fourth was called, a whole-souled Irishman, full of common sense, and he said, "Sure, sir, and I would keep as far from it as ever I could." The gentleman clapped him on the shoulder at once and said: "You are my man." Only the fool-hardy adventurer will see how near he can go to the brink of moral ruin without going over. The wise man will keep as far away as possible.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CLOSING WORD WITH PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

IN this treatise I have defended amusements, exalted the home, convicted the theater, unmasked the dance, and pointed out the dangers of gaming. I come now to ask the children of our common Lord prayerfully to consider their duty with regard to these things.

You have possibly felt at liberty to indulge in them because they are not specifically forbidden in the Word of God. The objector often triumphantly asks for the passage of Scripture in which these condemned amusements are prohibited. It must be clear, however, to the most superficial reader that the Bible does not pretend to be a "guide-book," giving all the details of practical life, but that it simply announces with great variety of historical illustrations, certain great principles covering all possible demands, leaving to our consciences and judgments the work of mak-

ing the application to the various practical questions that arise in life. It must be clear to you, dear reader, that the spirit of the amusements condemned in the preceding pages is that worldly spirit against which the New Testament so constantly warns us; that their associations are such as the Word of God condemns; that the influences which gather about and go out from them are such as the Bible and good men of every age pronounce dangerous; and that their practical results have always been such as to make demons rejoice and good men mourn. The whole spirit and tenor of the Bible, re-enforced by the testimony of the best people of all ages, condemn these amusements. It is, therefore, impossible to engage in them and still walk in the full favor of God and in the light of his Word. If you would be a "Bible Christian," walking in "fellowship with God and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost," you will be compelled to "come out from among them, be separate, and touch not the unclean thing."

You have possibly quieted your conscience by saying, "It is but a little thing." It is

"the little foxes that spoil the grapes" in the Lord's vineyard. Sin always begins by littles, asks only for room to plant a little seed, and trusts the rest to time, favoring circumstances, and the strong impulses of human nature. The smaller the sin the more dangerous it is, if only it has in it the living germ of evil to grow and bring forth a harvest after its kind in the character. You are in no danger from a great sin; you would reject it at once; but if a little one can in some way be introduced into your life to grow there Satan's designs are accomplished. Pestilence does its deadly work by the very little particles it sends out into the air unseen and unheard, so delicate are they that the system feels no shock or wound when they attack it, but being taken up into the warm life-blood they grow and assert themselves till at last the lifeless form, cold and pale, proclaims the power of these "little things," the presence of which was not even recognized in the beginning. Every act and word is a seed-planting that will grow in the character, the harvest of which must be gathered, and here appears the solemnity and importance of every act of life. These "little

sins" weaken the character, deaden conscience, and relax moral discipline, so that in the day of fierce trial there is not strength to stand.

It must be true, also, that sin is sin whether small or great, entailing upon its author the wrath of God. He who commits a "little sin," if any such distinction in sins as little and great may exist, shows his disposition of disobedience as fully as though it were a great sin. The least stain of sin upon the soul destroys that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." When Canova was about to begin his great statue of Napoleon, his keen eye detected a tiny red line running through the upper portion of the splendid block, that, at great cost had been brought from Paros, and he rejected it as worthless. When God comes to fill the palace of his glory with souls that shall shine on to the praise of his grace, when the works of Canova have crumbled to dust, do you suppose he will be less jealous of his glory or less exacting than the great artist? A little sin in the character will be as fatal as the red line in the marble.

“‘Little by little,’ the tempter said,
As a dark and cunning snare he spread,
For the young, unwary feet.
‘Little by little, and day by day,’
I will tempt the careless soul astray
Into the broad and flowery way,
Until the ruin is made complete.

‘Little by little,’ sure and slow,
We fashion our future of bliss or woe,
As the present passes away.
Our feet are climbing the stairway bright,
Up to the regions of endless light,
Or gliding downward into the night,
‘Little by little and day by day.’”

Many Christians think it safe to go “just once.” The argument that is good for going once will generally be good for a second time, and will be re-enforced by a stimulated appetite, while the conscience will have grown weaker by being denied its claims. In society, as in morals and religion, the only safety is in not touching the forbidden thing; one violation of law is fatal. If a man commits murder or theft but once, he must suffer the penalty, and we may not expect God to be less exact in his government than we are in society. One sin is fatal. The night the Brooklyn theater burned, a number of Christians went, “for once only,” their first night,

and their bodies were found in the ruins; a true type of what may occur to the souls of others who may be so fortunate as to escape with their bodies. Your example also, though as you suppose among entire strangers, may prove fatal to some soul. "A man who bore the reputation of a Christian at home, being in the city, went to the theater for once, thinking the act would never be known. Some years after, he was sent for to visit a dying man. This man charged him with the ruin of his soul. While young, he had seen this professed Christian enter the theater, and followed his example; saying to himself, that, if a Church member and Sunday-school superintendent could do this, he could. He became hardened in sin, and now lay hopeless in death, but felt that the crisis of his life was that fatal example." Total abstinence is the path of safety here as with strong drinks;—he who never takes the first glass will not fall.

You may not have sufficiently considered the great unwritten law of "Christian expediency." Many things, as St. Paul says, are "lawful" that are not "expedient." This is not a Gospel rule only, it is a law of nature

and of society as well. A man may, without violating any law, make a clown of himself, but there are few who consider it expedient to do so; to every one of any spirit or dignity it would seem like throwing life away, and yet it is "lawful." There is a large class of things not unlawful, that prove destructive of all the higher and better forms of life. A man at table may find many dishes not tainted in the least with poison, of which it will not be expedient for him to eat. In Christian life we must of necessity conform to this great law of expediency in dealing with such questions as the theater, the opera, the dance, and gaming. Eighteen hundred years of Christian history have worked over and over again many of these perplexing problems with but one result. By experience and observation in many fields, under varying circumstances, and at different times, Christians have arrived at a pretty definite knowledge of what hinders or helps spiritual life. Only blind stupidity or gross indifference to the whole subject of practical godliness can lead any one to reject this treasure of sacred learning gathered from the harvest fields of the Christian centuries. Only

a fool will insist upon demonstrating in his own system, the qualities and effects of all poisons and drugs. Wise men govern themselves largely by the experience and observation of others, where they do not contradict reason or the plain teachings of the Word of God.

It is your business in life, not only to do no harm by word, deed, or general example, but to do and to get all the good you can; to be an example, an instructor of the souls of men, and a guide to the young. You are commissioned to live among men as Christ lived; faithfully to witness for him, to illustrate, emphasize, and make honorable his Gospel among men, and in order to this you will have great need prayerfully to consider this law of Christian expediency.

Allow me to remind you of the importance of maintaining healthy amusements and recreations in your own home and social circles. Christians are sadly failing at this point. All our cities swarm with young men from the country, who come as strangers into the midst of these seething masses of humanity to seek their fortunes. They have left their venerable

parents, the altar of prayer, and the sweet influences of home behind. The saloon, the theater, and all vile places are open to them, extend a cordial welcome, offer relief from their loneliness, and an open door to society with all that it affords. Christians pass them by, or look on them coldly and doubtfully, do nothing to entertain and help them, and wonder that the young people are so indifferent to religion and the Church. Throw open your doors, turn on all the gas, bring out your best music, invite in the young and the old, not forgetting the strange young man, make life joyous and bright, and much as your guests will be blessed a tenfold greater blessing will come to you and your house. Study the young life about you, keep yourself in sympathy with it, draw it to you by ministering to it, show it lovingly the better way, and you will not have much trouble in protecting it from these corrupting amusements of which I have been speaking.

We are now to part, dear reader, you to your way, I to mine, but before you go, one word. What you and the whole Church of Christ need as a sure and sufficient protection

against these evils is to "*be filled with the Spirit.*" Then other joys and aspirations will satisfy the heart, a "peace that passeth understanding" will remove disquietude, "perfect love" will afford a perpetual feast, light "above the brightness of the sun will make beautiful the pathway of life, the "graces of the Spirit," like jewels, will adorn your person, the company of the saints will be sweeter than the society of the world, your trials will be transformed into blessings, and the work of gathering stars for your crown will be the most delightful employment for your willing hands.



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