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# THOUGHTS

ON

# DANCING:

OCCASIONED BY SOME LATE

# TRANSACTIONS

AMONG THE

PEOPLE called *METHODISTS*.

By M. DAVIS.

LONDON:

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T H E

P R E F A C E.



**I**N the Minutes of the Conference of the Preachers, late in connexion with the Rev. Mr. J. Wesley, held at Manchester the last week in July, 1791, the following questions and answers are found.

“ Quest. 32. Have we not made too great advances towards conformity to the world?”

“ Answ. We fear we have.”

“ Q. 33. How shall we prevent this?”

“ A. Those school-masters and school-mistresses who receive dancing-masters into their schools, and those parents who employ dancing-masters for their children, shall be no longer members of our society.”

When I read this last answer I was both surprized and grieved; because I considered it rather calculated to give offence, and stir up strife, than to correct a fault. For many years back I have viewed dancing as represented in the following Thoughts. Parents, school-masters, and school-mistresses, in connexion with the people called Methodists, are as far from wishing their children and scholars to abuse this part of their youthful education, by frequenting balls, assemblies, &c. when they grow up, as they are careful to prevent an abuse of the first and most necessary part of their youthful education, <sup>namely, study,</sup> by recommending to their perusal and study moral and religious writings, instead of putting into their hands lewd or profane books. However, I hoped that this rule or law, like some others concerning dress, tobacco, &c. made by Mr. Wesley many years ago, would sleep respecting execution; and consequently, might be considered as merely expressive of the private opinion of the framers. This thought so satisfied my mind, that I really forgot the subject for about three weeks; till at a meeting of Preachers the 26th of August last, it was, unexpected by me, brought upon the carpet, and cursorily debated. This event caused me, a few days after, to commit to paper the following Thoughts on Dancing: which method I took for the purpose of reconsidering the subject with care, and also,

that

that I might be better prepared to deliver my sentiments thereon, at the next quarterly meeting of Preachers. Nov. 2d, I called on Mr. James Rogers, at the Chapel-house, and asked him, Whether it was meant to drop the subject of dancing, or to bring it on next quarterly meeting :—told him jocosely, that I intended to speak to the point ; and added, Our law ought not to condemn any man before he is heard, and we consider what he saith. To which he replied, “ The preachers in London cannot alter a rule of Conference : consequently, saying any thing amongst them will answer no end. I have consulted with the travelling preachers that are, and have been in town lately ; and our opinion is, that you cannot any longer preach in our connexion unless you immediately promise to dismiss your dancing-master.” This opinion is now manifest by the printing of what is termed their quarterly plan ; and this has determined me to publish the present pamphlet,

I am very sorry thus to be dragged into a public controversy by men, with whom I hoped to live in the most cordial <sup>christian</sup> friendship, my few remaining days on earth. I requested, that I might have an opportunity of delivering my sentiments at the next quarterly meeting of preachers ; but I was told, this would avail

nothing, as they had not power to make alterations, nor even to suspend the execution of laws. I requested, that the affair might be laid aside till next conference: because I wished to prevent the causeless offence that an attempt to execute such a rule or law must necessarily give to many respectable and worthy families in our connexion: and I also devoutly wished, not to stumble weak brethren by disputes; and least of all, by such a dispute as this. But the invariable answer to every thing I said was, "The rule of Conference must be enforced." I will not impute *this imprudent obstinacy* to the whole body of men called Methodist preachers; but to a very small number, who, being in particular situations at present, think that they have gotten the reins of government in their hands: but, I imagine, they will soon be convinced, that the driving of Jehu is neither the most christian, nor the most prudent conduct.

The late Mr. J. Wesley well knew the situations, and opinion ~~and conduct~~ of schools, and many families, some of his best friends, on this subject:—he had more influence and power in the connexion than any individual, or than all who may now think that they tread in his shoes;—and he wanted not courage to follow his conscience; yet he never made any rule, or law of exclusion concerning dancing. Although I never had occasion

occasion to converse with him on the subject, I will venture to assert, from his well-known discernment and consummate prudence, that he ranked dancing among the *res indifferentiæ*, respecting religion; innocent or sinful, according to the mind and circumstances of the person practising.

We neither are more holy, nor in the eyes of discerning men do we appear to be so, by manifesting vehement zeal concerning the tythe of mint, anise and cummin; but by a constant regard to, and earnest recommendation of, the weightier matters of God's law, judgement, mercy and faith. Superstition is sometimes called tenderness of conscience, and false zeal stands in the room of devotion and brotherly love. It is a humbling truth for mankind, as it betrays both our ignorance and our evil propensities, that as well in religion as in politics, many who seem in earnest to reach the summit of human perfection, are often gratifying the vanity of their mind, by attempting to shoot beyond the mark, and thereby they miss taking right aim. When this is the case either with a religious, or a civil sect, the leaders of the party are certainly more blameable than the bulk of the people; because they *do know*, or they *ought to know* better; and yet they make advantage of the ignorance of *the many*, to obtain or maintain a point, in

which they think that the honour of their character, or their interest is concerned. This observation has been exemplified by the indiscriminate exclamations and denunciations of divine vengeance against dancing, with which the New-Chapel, in the City-Road, has lately refounded: and, probably, so soon as this pamphlet is read, all the thunder of that place will be hurled against it. But there are hearers under that roof who have judgement as well as ears, and whose zeal is regulated by sound understanding.

I know that there are very many in the religious connexion to which I particularly address this pamphlet, whose circumstances and situations in life prevent them having any concern in the debate; and I also know that the religious prejudices of almost all run in a line diametrically opposite to my representations. But I request such to believe, that it is possible they may have conceived wrongly concerning an exercise so much abused; and also that it is with much reluctance I lay such a debate as this before the public: which, indeed, they may conclude from the endeavours that I used to settle the point privately, as well as from the nature of the subject itself. It must be in the view of all, but those immediately concerned, too immaterial to be made a subject of controversy.

Sed

Sed "hæ nugæ feria ducent."

None, I hope, will set themselves up for judges, until they have with candour made themselves acquainted with the nature of the dispute. And as I wish that every one who has curiosity to read this pamphlet, may, without prejudice and without partiality, weigh what is offered to his consideration: so I sincerely pray, that none may indulge a resentful or censorious spirit, whatever the result of his enquiry may be.

I give my thoughts to the public just as I penned them, with a design to communicate them to, what is termed among the Methodists, the quarterly meeting of preachers. If that expedient had been allowed me, perhaps they never had seen the light. I have only consulted my Bible, human nature, and my situation in life, in revolving the subject in my mind. An ingenious friend to whom I mentioned my design of publishing something on dancing, recommended to my perusal what Mr. Lock and Mr. Addison have said thereon; to whom I could only reply, It is more than thirty years since I read *The Spectator*, or *Lock on Education*; but I will certainly avail myself of the lights of such good authors, if I am obliged farther to consider the matter.

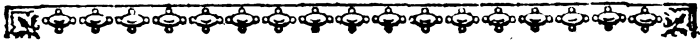
I thank

I thank the bountiful provider for man, I have hitherto lived decently and comfortably without either receiving, or seeking for any thing from the people called Methodists, as a preacher; and I hope to enjoy this cause of boasting all my days: I therefore can lose nothing of a temporal nature by ten thousand internal regulations introduced by *new men*. But I have old friends in that connexion from whom I cannot be separated; and who, I flatter myself, will not abandon me, either as a private christian, or as a preacher of the gospel. I wish to improve in heart religion and practical godliness, by the excellencies, by the weaknesses, and even by the faults of fellow-christians. Our Lord has many ways of bringing us to trust *intirely* in him, and to follow him *only*. May we all carefully learn the important lessons that his various providences teach us! And both bear with each other, and forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us!

LAYTONSTONE, ESSEX,

Dec. 12, 1791.

THOUGHTS



# T H O U G H T S

ON

## D A N C I N G, &c.



**D**ANCING, so far, as we mean to take it under consideration, may be viewed,

I. As a natural manner of expressing our joy.

II. As an art whereby we are taught a good carriage, a graceful and easy way of moving our limbs, and a genteel manner of address.

1. Dancing considered as gestures of nature excited by pleasure, especially in youth, who are always greatly disposed for action if in health, is as natural, and as innocent, abstractedly considered, as smiling, laughing, talking, or any other natural manner of expressing our joy. This kind of dancing always has, and always

will be practised by human beings on certain occasions. Our first exertions in this way are generally as unpremeditated, and as involuntary as laughing, crying, suddenly removing from apparent danger, or approaching to, what we imagine to be, lawful or innocent pleasure. As our fixed temper, or habit of mind, always, more or less, gives a cast to our countenance, and general manner of behaviour; so every sudden passion has its external expression in one way or another. Art, indeed, teaches us to conceal or disguise, on many occasions, and in various ways, the external expressions of our passions and tempers; but, however much we may be on our guard, we sometimes involuntarily throw off our disguise, and discover our mental feelings by our features, our tongues, or by some sudden motions of our body or limbs. Children when greatly pleased, or greatly angered, as naturally dance as they laugh or cry: and grown persons would do the same, were they not under the influence of what are called rules of decorum. If our joy be innocent, our outward expression of it by dancing can have no more guilt in it than there is in a joyful countenance, or a joyful tongue. "David, we are told in 2 Sam. vi. 14, 16, leaped and *danced* before the Lord with all his might, in bringing up the ark of God from the house of Obed Edom to Zion." Michal, his wife, upbraided him, for having, in her opinion, behaved indecorously, considering his exalted station in life; to whom he replied, "It was before the Lord I played, and I will be yet more vile." Certainly, David's joy was on this occasion religious joy: but it was the joy of a man, not of an angel;

angel; and being violent joy, it discovered itself in the natural and artless way of dancing before the Lord.

Bishop Patrick tells us, in his comment on this text, from Ludolphi Historia Æthiopica, "That the Abyssinians, both men and women, meet together in their churches on the eve of our Lord's resurrection, and employ the whole night in singing, *dancing*, and clapping their hands, accompanied by several instruments of music, till morning light. Which practice, he adds, in all likelihood came from the Jews, who still dance in some of their festivals." He likewise observes from Plato, Lib. 7, de legibus, "That some dances are *εμμελῶς*, with modest and decent motions, and others *πλημμελῶς*, immodest and wanton." And a late author says, "Though dancing would now be looked upon as the highest degree of profanation in a religious assembly, yet it is certain, that dancing, considered as an expression of joy, is no more a profanation than singing, or than simply speaking; nor can it be thought in the least more absurd, that a christian should dance for joy that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, than that David danced before the ark when it was returned to him after a long absence." Encyclopædia Britannica, p. 661.

It is indeed strange, that any persons, who profess to regard the authority of holy writ, should venture to condemn dancing altogether; seeing that it is frequently mentioned in scripture as a natural and innocent man-

ner

ner of expressing our joy, and not feldom as an act of religious worship.

In Judges xi. 34, we are told, that Jephthah, returning from the slaughter of the Ammonites, was met by his daughter and her companions "with timbrels and with *dances*."

1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7, informs us, that "the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and *dancing*, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music: and they answered one another as they played and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." It seems from this account, that they formed themselves into separate choirs, or companies, and that their motions in dancing were regulated by the harmony of their music.

In 1 Kings i. 40, it is said, at the coronation of Solomon "all the people came up after him tripudiantes ad tibias, i. e. *dancing* to flutes, as Robertson, in his *Theaurus Linguæ Sanctæ*, renders the word מְהַלְלִים, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them."

Exod. xv. 20, 21, relates, that "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with *dances*: and Miriam answered them, Sing ye to Jehovah, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and the rider hath he thrown into the sea." This  
story

story also favours the foregoing conjecture. May we not suppose, that Miriam and her company of women formed themselves into a separate choir, and that their joyous motions were regulated by their music vocal, and instrumental, while they repeated the triumphant words of the 21st verse?

David in Psal. xxx. 11, says, addressing himself to Jehovah, "Thou hast turned my mourning into *dancing*." In Psal. cxlix. 3, it is said, "Let them praise his name in the *dance*." In Psal. cl. 4, "Praise him with the timbrel and *dance*." And Psal. lxxxvii. 7, is rendered by Buxtorf in his Hebrew Lexicon, "Et cantantes æque ac tripudiantes; i. e. As well the singers as the *dancers shall be there*."

From these passages we may certainly conclude, 1. That dancing was practised in the religious worship of the Jewish Church: and 2dly. That it was connected with, and consequently regulated by, music both vocal and instrumental.

And here I hope that I shall be excused in observing; There are three verbs in the Hebrew language, each of which is translated *to dance* in our English Bible.

First, רָקַד, *rakad*, which Buxtorf renders *salire*, *subsilire*, *to leap*, *to jump*, *to skip*. This verb is used in Psal. cxiv. 4, 6, where it is said, "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." And in

in Psal. xxix. 6, describing the awful effects of lightning and thunder; under the majestic idea of "the voice of Jehovah which maketh the cedars of Lebanon to skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn." And in its participial form in 1 Chron. xv. 29, "Michal, the daughter of Saul, looking out at a window, saw king David *dancing* and playing." And also in Lev. ii. 21. Job xxi. 11. Eccles. iii. 4. Isa. xiii. 21. Joel ii. 5. Nahum iii. 2.

2dly. כָּרַר, charar: Robertson, in his Thesaurus Linguæ Sanctæ, tells us, that this verb expresses, *pastus saltavit, fatur exiliit*; i. e. the joy and activity of animals well fed. It is found but in two places of sacred scripture. 2 Sam. vi. 14, "David *danced* before the Lord with all his might; and Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and *dancing* before the Lord." And in Isa. lxvi. 20, "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, in *equis desultoriis*, on *dancing* or prancing horses."

3dly. חָלַל, chalal. Buxtorf tells us, that this verb signifies, *perforari, perfodi*, to have a hole made through, to be dug through; from which comes the substantive, חָלִיל, chalil, tibia, fistula, a pipe, a flute; because these musical instruments were at first made of reeds bored; and also the substantive מַחֲלֵל, machul, chorus, a choir, i. e. *cætus tripudiantium seu ad numeros incedentium*; a company of flute-players dancing to their music.

Concerning

Concerning this word we may first observe, It is never used, as the two former verbs are, to express the joyous motions of brute animals ; but it is confined to man. And 2dly. It expresses the joyous motions rather of a company than of an individual, accompanied with, and regulated by music : So that in fact, it signifies dancing practised as an art. See Psal. cxlix. 3. Psal. cl. 4. Jer. xxxi. 4, 13. Psal. xxx. 11. Lam. v. 15. Exod. xxxii. 19. 1 Sam. xviii. 6. 1 Sam. xxx. 16. 1 Sam. xxi. 11. 1 Sam. xxix. v. Judges xxi. 21. Exod. xv. 20. Judges xi. 34.

In the New Testament dancing is mentioned but in three or four places, and as it were by the by; yet without any brand of censure.

In Matt. xi. 17, and in its parallel place, Luke vii. 32, our Lord says, " We have piped unto you, καὶ οὐκ ὀρχήσασθε and ye have not danced." Matt. xiv. 6. and its parallel place, Mark vi. 22, informs us, " that the daughter of Herodias ὀρχήσατο danced and pleased Herod." And Luke xv. 25, mentions the return of the prodigal son celebrated in his father's house with music καὶ χορῶν and dancing." It is worth observing, the Greek substantive χορὸς comes from the Hebrew verb צרצר charar, salio, I leap, and has the very same meaning as the Hebrew substantive, מַחֲלוֹ machul, cætus canentium et saltantium, a company of fingers and dancers.

But there is a passage in Acts iii. 8, which I wish to be particularly noticed ; because I really think, it mi-

litates in favour of all that I have said concerning dancing as an innocent expression of joy, and even allowable, in some circumstances, in religious worship.

*The impotent man, who had never walked, being miraculously endued with strength in his limbs by Peter, in the name of Jesus Christ, leaped up from the ground whereon he had lain, stood, and walked; and his loving grateful heart urging him publicly to acknowledge the inestimable favour received, he entered into the temple with Peter and John not only walking, but leaping and praising God.*" See also, Acts xiv. 10.

The Greek verb *αλλομαι* salio, I leap or jump, from which the participles *αλλόμενος* leaping, and *εξαλλόμενος* leaping up, are formed, comes from the Hebrew verb *חָלַל*, *chalal*, saltare, tripudiare, to leap, to dance, to skip along; and *αλλόμενος* leaping, coincides in meaning with the Hebrew participle *סָרַר*, *saliens*, in 2 Sam. vi. 14, which is translated *dancing*. It is the gesture of nature, that sudden and great joy will always in some measure excite; especially in youth, who feel it both easy and pleasant to use violent exercise.\*

Secondly :

\* Doctor Coke, I am told, has been confined to his chamber for some weeks, by an accident which greatly injured one of his legs. Although he has so vehemently condemned dancing; yet, I presume, the gravest person of his congregation would, on reading this story of the lame man miraculously healed, at least

SECONDLY: Dancing may be considered as an art, whereby we are taught a good carriage, a graceful and easy way of moving our limbs, and a genteel manner of address.

Children are taught to dance for the purpose of giving to them a good carriage. What is called a bad carriage is not only very awkward, and consequently very injurious to the external appearance of a young person; but it is also, generally, very hurtful to health. Many children, particularly females, grow up deformed, through our inattention to their carriage in very early infancy. They contract ungraceful, awkward habits of sitting, standing, and walking. Female children, in general, are more delicate, use less exercise, and grow faster than male children; and consequently, are more in danger of growing deformed. We may add hereunto, tyrant fashion confines them more in their dress: And yet it is of greater consequence to them as individuals, and to mankind universally, that they should enjoy good health, and possess all the graces of person that their make and countenance will admit of. It cannot be an indifferent matter to parents, whether their children, especially daughters, are crooked or straight in body and limbs; whether they are stiff and awkward, or graceful and easy in carriage and behaviour. We think it lawful and right, if our circum-

least excuse the zealous Doctor, if, when he is perfectly restored to the use of his limbs, he should enter into the New Chapel, walking, and *leaping*, and praising God.

stances can afford the expence, to have our children taught languages, arts and sciences; music, perhaps, vocal or instrumental; and I know not that any precept can be justly drawn from the christian religion prohibiting us to have them taught to sit, stand, walk and behave in a graceful and easy manner. The man called a dancing-master can teach these things sooner and better than any other person: and the accompaniments of music both assist and please in giving and receiving his instructions. But it may be objected, "This is teaching them to dance; and when they grow up they will frequent balls and assemblies, and in these places gratify all the vanity and lust of their hearts, throw away their money and time, form bad connections, and ruin themselves probably both in this world and in another." To this objection I beg leave to reply; It is not true in fact, that all young people, who have learned to dance, thus abuse this part of their education. Perhaps not one in ten is very fond of the amusement, even of those whose parents think it neither criminal nor dangerous that their children should occasionally attend balls, assemblies, &c. But when a child knows, that his parent puts him into the hands of a dancing-master *only* that he may be taught carriage and address, the child, as well as the parent, has this *alone* in view. If, when your son grows up to manhood, he unhappily becomes extravagantly fond of dancing, he will pursue the amusement for some time, whether or no he was taught in his childhood; and probably with greater eagerness if he was not taught; for novelty has a powerful effect on the human mind, especially

especially in our youth. But such imprudent conduct is neither a natural nor a necessary consequence of the education that you have given him: It is an abuse of it. And what part of education may not be abused? You have had your child taught to read, and you wish him or her to contract a fondness for reading. You are at last gratified in your wish. But the only books that your son will read are the loosest novels and plays which he can lay his hands on; or, those artful metaphysical treatises which have been published against christianity by men who were free thinkers, because they would be free livers. You have had your child taught music; and he is now so vain of his skill in playing on the violin, running over the keys of the harpsichord, or blowing the flute, that he spends a great deal more time and money in musical entertainments than either his fortune, or his business, can support and permit. Perhaps also, he has got connected with some artful musical lady, who charms him by her voice and skill in playing. Was it wrong to have had these young persons taught reading or music in their childhood, because they now make so bad a use of the education that they then received? Surely no. We must learn to distinguish between the right use, and the abuse of things, or we shall ever be guilty of ridiculous mistakes when we set up for casuists or lawgivers.

Mr. J. Wesley, many years back, made rules concerning tea, tobacco, drams, dress, &c. which he found, by experience, too minute and too frivolous to be executed with rigour: "*Bruta fulmina et vana.*" He

therefore rather recommended, than enforced his rules. But he never ventured to make any rule or law concerning dancing: That business remained for his wife and more zealous successors to accomplish. If I am not wrongly informed, he said more than once, not only in families, but also in meeting the married women in London, "I have no objection against your daughters being taught carriage, address, and even to dance a minuet; but you must be careful respecting the company into which they go." And I believe it is well-known, that when it was in contemplation what kind of a master should be employed to give the boys of Kingswood School an outward polish, Mr. Wesley declared, that he had no objection against a dancing-master, if such a character could be engaged under certain regulations, without giving offence to the serious people of the neighbourhood,

If any persons in connexion with the people called Methodists encourage and support the expence of their children in frequenting balls, assemblies, &c. of which I suppose none among us are guilty, I should conclude, that the preachers in conference did their duty in resolving to speak both in private, and in public if necessary, against such an evil; which is certainly a more prudent and christian way of reforming mankind, than thundering out rules, or laws of exclusion from the connexion. The natural tendency of such rules is, especially when they are concerning things of an indifferent or doubtful nature in morals, rather to give offence than to do good. While the religion of the heart

heart is preached and practised among us;—while our preachers are men of piety, christian zeal and prudence;—while the doctrines of Jesus our Saviour, and the life of Jesus our pattern, are inculcated upon us; we shall hardly be troubled with persons in our connexion who notoriously deviate from the christian character.

Almost every revival of religion has been distinguished by some absurd, narrow, superstitious laws or rules, by which mistaken zeal has attempted to explain and enforce the excellent general precepts of God's word. Human refinements on God's commands will always lead to superstition, and produce censoriousness; which are direct opposites to the enlightened charity of the christian religion. This observation has been ten thousand times verified by christian communities under different names, who, forgetting the rebuke that our Master gave in the days of his tabernacling among us, have taught for divine "doctrines the commandments of men." Let us avoid the rock that others have split upon. Let us confess by our conduct that the holy scriptures want not such comments. Its precepts are therefore general, because the situations and circumstances of individuals are so various, that in many cases no man can so well point out the path of duty for another, as that other may for himself; for no other man can be so perfectly acquainted with all the circumstances of his situation.

But it is certain, the present generation in this land is wiser and more moderate in these things than

some former were. Neither the present national church of England, nor the present national church of Scotland execute, or even attempt to defend, *all* their canons, or kirk-laws. The women among the people called Quakers have almost universally laid aside the green apron, and neither men nor women are so exact in the cut of their clothes, nor in the size or shape of their hats, as they were but half a century ago. And even among the people called Methodists snuff is taken, tobacco is smoked, tea is drank, ruffles more than an inch broad have been commonly worn, till within the last two years, happily for our young people, they are gone out of fashion: And yet we have wisely abstained from denouncing our anathemas,

But what is worst of all; some, I fear, of our oldest and best preachers are sometimes found with such a pinch of snuff in their fingers as would make me sneeze for half an hour; or, with a pipe of tobacco between their broken teeth, which would send me to bed sick and lightheaded; and, moreover, if I am not wrongly informed, some great men among us drink their brandy and water so strong as would make me, who am nearsighted, see double; and others can swallow down a whole pint of porter, which would really set me so fast asleep that I should not see at all. And yet these are suffered to preach useful sermons among us, although guilty of such peccadillos.\*

But

\* The author of these Thoughts does not take tobacco in any way, nor did he ever drink a glass of raw spirits: But he does not

But to conclude quite seriously: you will observe, brethren, I do not mean by any thing that I have said to encourage or defend the practice of frequenting balls, assemblies, &c. I know, from the experience of my youth, how dangerous such entertainments are for young minds. But I know also from experience, that boys and girls under thirteen or fourteen years of age, may be taught by a dancing-master carriage, address, &c. in their separate schools, and may practice apart for the sake of health and amusement, without being assailed or injured by those temptations, which perhaps attack young men and women in mixed dances. I will moreover observe, those young people who have not had this tuition in their childhood, being sensible as they grow up to manhood of their awkwardness in carriage, or address, if they are in what is called genteel life, they will generally procure for themselves instruction in one of those dancing schools for grown persons, where their morals are in the greatest danger from the mixed and low company with which they there blend. Many parents likewise, who are not only good friends to the Methodists, but also in our connexion, being neither convinced nor softened by the knockdown argument of a threatened exclusion, will persist in having their

not therefore presume to prescribe to, or condemn others: much less would he consider such abstinences as terms of christian communion. We may take the liberty of advising our christian brethren concerning many things which appear to us dangerous respecting health or morals; but we should beware of condemning: nor should we make any thing a term of christian communion, but what is plainly expressed as such in God's word.

children

children taught by a dancing-master carriage, address, &c.

With regard to schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in the Methodist connexion, they are indeed in a singular predicament. The few of whom I have any knowledge have not a third, perhaps not a fourth part of their scholars, from among the people called Methodists. Probably, if each was individually questioned, the sum of their answers would nearly correspond with mine. I have employed a dancing-master in my school almost from its commencement, which is now more than twenty-two years. On a serious, and as impartial a review of the affair as I can now take, I see nothing culpable in countenancing this branch of education, under proper restrictions. My experience among boys convinces me, that most of children, whose parents can introduce them into genteel life, want a polish with regard to carriage and address, which a dancing-master can give them sooner and better than any other person. Parents who can afford the expence, require their children to be taught. Young persons who have been taught carriage and address in their childhood, and who do not now frequent balls, assemblies, &c. are certainly benefitted, and not at all injured in their morals, by the education that they then received. Of the many who have been under the tuition of a dancing-master in my house, I do not know that even one has abused this part of his youthful education, by throwing away his money and time in frequenting places of public amusement for the purpose of dancing; although many, I fear,

feared, have greatly injured both their mind and their health, by reading lewd and profane books. And two or three, who were not taught dancing while children in my house, now acknowledge, that they procured that instruction for themselves, in their apprenticeship, at a considerable expence, and with no small injury to their mind and morals.

But to conclude, by representing the matter as faithfully, and in as few words as I possibly can,

1. Dancing viewed as gestures of nature, expressive of our passions, must be as innocent, abstractedly considered, as laughing, crying, talking, or walking. It is right or wrong, wise or foolish, according to the passion that excites it, and according to the age and character of the person who practises it. I should never reproach a child, or a young person, with either sin or folly, who jumped for joy, as we commonly express it, on receiving a favour, or hearing good news. Nor should I be more forward to condemn religious jumpers, several of whom I have heard or read concerning within these thirty years, than religious cryers-out, some of whom I have known. The fact is, nature will sometimes break through all the restraints of what we call human prudence and decorum, and yet no sin is committed. In some cases, perhaps the paroxysm is as justifiable as the dancing of the royal Psalmist before the ark.

2. Dancing

2. Dancing is frequently mentioned in scripture as an innocent expression of joy ;—is recorded there as an established mode of religious worship among the Jews ; —was practised even by some of the first converts to christianity ; Acts iii. 8. Acts xiv. 10. and has been practised, according to history, both by individuals, and christian congregations, on certain occasions. It seems, indeed, to be so nearly allied to music, both vocal and instrumental, that the arguments which are sufficient to justify the practice of the latter, will also justify the practice of the former. And, if the great and frequent abuse of music, is not an argument weighty enough to prohibit altogether the use of it, even in religious worship ; neither is the great and frequent abuse of dancing an argument sufficiently weighty, to condemn dancing of every kind.

3. There can be no sin in having children taught an erect carriage, a graceful and easy way of moving their limbs, and a genteel manner of address. If the man called a dancing-master can teach them these things sooner and better than any other person, he is the most proper man to be employed on the occasion ; and, if experience assures us, that music greatly assists both in giving and receiving his instructions, the use of music cannot be prohibited, unless it can be proved that the study and practice of music is in itself sinful. The expediency of having children thus taught appears in their carriage and behaviour, and often in the degree of health and vigour which they enjoy : And the possibility of distinguishing and separating, both in theory and  
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and practice, between the usefulness and the abuse of this part of education is, I think, as easy and as manifest, as in any other branch of necessary or ornamental education that can be mentioned.

I therefore sincerely wish, that our brethren in conference had not taken up the subject; or, at least, that they had not ventured to determine so decisively and so authoritatively concerning it. And I shall be extremely sorry, if any of them attempt to execute their rule with rigour: on my own account, as I neither wish to quarrel with them, nor to withdraw from them; \* and also on account of the credit of their character,

\* This was written when I supposed that I should have had an opportunity of expressing my thoughts on this subject in a certain meeting of preachers, which I find was held the 9th inst. But three or four gentlemen, in the plenitude of their power, thought fit, a month before, to preclude me from that assembly, unless I chose to be an intruder. If they act consistently, they will also drop the names of half a dozen schoolmasters and school-mistresses in London and its vicinities; and of two or three-score of the wealthiest families in the Methodist connexion, for the same *atrocious crime*; namely, having their children and scholars taught carriage and address by a dancing master. But I hope these will have patience and resolution to bear with such treatment, considering it as the fruit of superstitious zeal. And as a check for the impetuosity of these brethren, I wish them to remember, They have not *now* the influence and power of Mr. Wesley to screen their imprudencies, although they may think that they stand in his shoes:—they are not stationed here for life; and their acceptableness to, and usefulness among their hearers, will more than ever be commensurable with their piety and talents, their patience and prudence:—they will find it  
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character, the success of their labours, and the peace of the connexion. I wish them to keep at a distance as well from superstition as from sin;—to spend their zeal and their strength on the weightier matters of God's law;—and to evidence by the whole of their ministry and proceedings, that they have passed their novitiate state both in the school of Christ, and in the world.

much easier to scatter than to gather, to pronounce their fiat than to carry their point. M. D. by the help of God, will continue a friend to, and an occasional preacher in, that religious connexion, in which he was an itinerant labourer before the names of these gentlemen were known; because he prefers the cause of God and truth to every other consideration;—because his mind is particularly attached to christian friends, with some of whom he has joined in holy, happy worship for more than thirty-five years:—and because, he as sincerely desires to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” as he is determined to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.”



F I N I S.