

**THE NATURE AND TENDENCY OF BALLS, SERIOUSLY
AND CANDIDLY CONSIDERED,**

IN TWO

SERMONS,

PREACHED IN MEDWAY,

**THE FIRST, DECEMBER 21: THE SECOND,
DECEMBER 28, 1818.**

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SERMON I.

I THESSALONIANS, V. 21.

PROVE ALL THINGS.

THESE words stand intimately connected, with the preceding and following verses. In the preceding, the Apostle says, "Despise not prophesyings," and then adds, as in the text and sequel, "Prove all things; hold fast that, which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil." It is evidently the design of the Apostle, in these exhortations, to influence the Thessalonians, to attend impartially to the instruction of their religious teachers, carefully to compare what they were taught, with the word of God, cordially to receive what appeared to correspond with this unerring standard, and cheerfully to practice the duties, which a knowledge of the truth imposed upon them. Nor did the Apostle intend, that these important exhortations should be given to the Thessalonians only. The duty, which they enjoin, is binding upon all, who enjoy the privilege of hearing a preached gospel. They should bring every doctrine, and every duty, which their teachers inculcate, to the test of revelation. Whatever they find to accord with this standard, they should believe and practice. It is also *implied*, in the

text, that religious teachers should carefully examine the nature and tendency of prevailing opinions and practices, and faithfully approve or censure them, according as they agree, or disagree, with the known will of God. These observations, illustrative of the text, show the propriety of making that species of amusement, commonly known by the name of *Balls*, a subject of our serious and prayerful examination. As these have become prevalent in this place, the Apostle's exhortation, to "Prove all things," renders an examination of their nature and tendency, not only an important, but an imperious duty. My sentiments upon this kind of amusements are already known. But, as I mean not publicly to censure, or approve of any practice, without offering my reasons, and as I cherish the hope, that the people in this place, mean to be governed, by what appears to be rational, I shall, on this occasion, renewedly examine the subject before us, with all the moderation and candor, of which I am capable. And, while I endeavour to divest myself of all prejudice against the amusements in question, I beseech you, my hearers, to attend to what may now be said upon the subject, with that seriousness and impartiality, which are essential to the discovery of truth.

That the subject before us may be definitely presented, it is proper here to observe, that I have nothing to do with the question: whether there is any harm in dancing *in itself considered* or considered as a simple exercise, without reference to the object, for which it is practiced. Nor am I disposed here to dispute the propriety of an ancient religious ceremony, in which the people of God, occasionally expressed their pious gratitude and joy, by dancing before the Lord. Nor do I feel myself called upon, in this place, to attack the Shakers, who, professedly in imitation of the ancient saints, now make dancing a

part of their religious worship. My business is with *Balls as they are practiced, at the present day*. The question, now to be determined, is, whether rational, and accountable beings, capable of the exalted pleasure of serving and enjoying God, destined to a future and an eternal existence, in which they are to receive according to the deeds done here in the body, have a *right* to spend their precious time, in dancing for *mere amusement*; in circumstances too, where they are exposed to peculiar temptations; where the mind is necessarily dissipated; where health and property are often wantonly sacrificed; where hours, consecrated, by nature, to silence and repose, are devoted to hilarity and mirth; and where by common consent, and the laws of fashion, serious reflection and fervent piety have no place.

To commence an examination of the question, as it is now stated, let us consider,

1. That Balls, as they are practiced, at the present day, are either *right*, or *wrong*. Although there may be a difference of opinion, with respect to the moral nature of these amusements; yet, all must agree, that they are, either *right*, or *wrong*. Like every other moral action, the conduct of those, who are engaged in them, must arise, either from good, or bad motives—must tend either to increase, or diminish, their usefulness in life—must tend, either to promote, or to destroy their eternal happiness—must be, either beneficial, or detrimental to society—in short, must be, either pleasing, or displeasing to God. Now, look a moment, at the amusements, in question, and say, do you think, that those, who are engaged in them, or those, who countenance them, are actuated from right motives? Would love to God, or a regard to their own spiritual interest, or a desire to do good to their fellow-creatures, in the pro-

per sense of doing good, be likely to lead them to Balls? Do these amusements appear, on the whole, better calculated to increase, than to diminish, the usefulness of those, who are engaged in them? Are they more favorable, than unfavorable, to a timely preparation for eternity? Considering the *design* of these amusements, the *places*, where they are generally held, the *late hour*, to which they are usually continued, and the *irregularities*, which are not unfrequently their attendants, do you candidly think, that they are more beneficial, than injurious to society? Viewing God, as a Being of purer eyes, than to behold iniquity, do you seriously believe, that he beholds them with complacency and delight? or, that he numbers them with those things, in which he has no pleasure? These are plain questions, and your answers to them, cannot but lead you to a decision, whether the amusements under consideration, are *right* or *wrong*.

2. Balls are, either *very good* things, or they are *very bad* things. Some, who have but partially considered the subject, may suppose, that they are of but little consequence, one way, or the other. But this is a great mistake. Every person, who is acquainted with them, knows, that they most powerfully attract the *attention* of the young. If then, they are right, or in other words, if they are profitable subjects of meditation and reflection, they must be *very good* things; because, it is exceedingly desirable, that the attention of youth should be *strongly* attracted to that which is good. But, if they are not right, they must be *very bad* things; for it is a great evil to have the attention of youth *strongly* attracted to wrong objects.

Balls not only awaken great attention, but excite very ardent feelings. So adapted are they to the natural vivacity, and playfulness of youth, that they, at once, call

into action all the energies of the soul. Never can they be more truly said to act *with all their hearts*, than when they are engaged, in these amusements. If, therefore, we admit, that they are *good* things, it follows undeniably, that they are *very good* things. They have, on this supposition, the very rare excellence of engaging the *whole hearts* of youth, in that, which is good. But, on the other hand, if they are not right, the circumstance, that they excite feelings so ardent and powerful, gives them a peculiarly evil and dangerous character. Who does not feel, that it is a *great* evil for youth to be engaged, with *all their hearts*, in doing wrong?

Balls have a great and lasting effect upon the human character. This is a natural consequence of the strong and ardent feelings, which they excite, in youth. Feelings strongly excited, and often cherished, at this early period, necessarily originate tastes and habits, which form the most prominent features, in the future character. Is not the truth of these remarks confirmed by observation? You, my hearers, have doubtless had opportunity to notice the lives of some, who were, in youth, very much devoted to Balls, and similar amusements. I wish not yet to ask, whether these things have had a *good*, or a *bad* effect, upon their characters. But I do wish to ask, if they have not had a *great* effect. In many cases, at least, is it not evident, that with respect to knowledge, usefulness, respectability and happiness, they are very different characters, from what they would have been, if their early days had been differently spent? Now, if the effect, which balls are calculated to have in forming the character is *good*, they must certainly be *very good* things; because the formation of a good character is an object of the highest importance. But, if their influence upon the character is bad, they are *very bad* things; for

there is nothing, which can compensate for the loss of character. But,

3. They cannot be considered as *very good* things. Even those, who are the most frequently engaged in them, do not generally pretend, that they are *very good* things. The most, which they undertake to urge in their favour is ; “ *They are innocent amusements.*” This is the name, which is generally given them, by their warmest advocates. But it deserves to be noticed, that this name indicates a very different thing from a *useful employment*. Besides, many, who occasionally indulge themselves in them, will readily admit, that they are not *very good* things. They acknowledge, that they are influenced to engage in them, not from a conviction, that there is any *good* in them, but simply to gratify their inclinations, and to comply with the wishes of their associates. Parents, who countenance their children, in these amusements, do not generally pretend, that they are *very good* things. The most, they have a face to say in their favour is ; “ *There is no harm in them.*” Indeed, many, and if I am not mistaken, most of them, are ready to acknowledge that there is *no good* in them ; and to say, if their children would be satisfied to abstain entirely from such things, they should be the better pleased. The reason, why they consent to their engaging in them, is, perhaps, an unwillingness to cross their inclinations, a fear, that they will be esteemed singular, or an apprehension, that, if denied indulgence in these amusements, they will take to worse courses.

If Balls are *very good* things, we may, with propriety, expect, that they will produce *very good effects*. On this supposition, it is but fair, to look for effects, so obviously good, as not to be of a doubtful character, in the view of any one. Now, my hearers, you have had oppor-

tunity to observe the effects of these amusements for many years. What is the great good, which they have produced? Have they improved the state of morals among you, or greatly increased the wealth of the community? If you confine your attention particularly to those, who have, from time to time, been engaged in them, what peculiar advantages do they appear to have derived from them? Have they become more industrious, frugal, and temperate? Have they, by these means, greatly improved their intellectual faculties, or extended their knowledge of any of the useful arts and sciences. In short, is there evidence, that these things have greatly increased their usefulness, in this life, or essentially contributed to their future felicity? You will not pretend, that any of these good effects, much less all of them, have been produced. You will allow, then, that balls are not *very good* things. But,

4. If they are not *very good* things, they are *very bad* things. This is a natural, and, I think, an unavoidable conclusion from what has been said. But lest a doubt of its truth should remain in the minds of some, I shall here subjoin a number of arguments, by which it may appear more fully supported.

1. Balls consume much time, which ought to be devoted to more important objects. Where they are frequent, and continued, as they generally are, to a very unseasonable hour, much time is consumed in the amusement itself. To this is to be added, all, which is spent, by the party, in making their arrangements and preparations for it—all, which is spent, by those, who provide for them—all, which is spent, by a crowd of idle spectators—and all, which is subsequently lost, in consequence of a sleepless night, a wearied body, and a dissipated mind. The time consumed by these persons,

in the several ways above-mentioned, is no trifling loss. And were they required to spend it for the public, or in accomplishing any purpose of charity to the poor, many of them would deem it an intolerable hardship. The value of this time is to be estimated, by the property, which they might all have earned, had they been, the same time, usefully employed—by the improvement, which they might have made, in any useful art or science—by the good, which they might have done in the same time, to their fellow-creatures—and by that incorruptible and heavenly inheritance, to which a right improvement of this time, might have been the means of entitling them.

But there is one thing to be taken into view, respecting time, of more importance, than any consideration of its value to us: It is our obligation to spend it in the service of God. As our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, he is entitled to our cordial and unceasing service. But are youth in the service of God, while they are engaged in *Balls*? Is it their object to honour *him*, by these amusements? Alas! “they mean not so, neither do their hearts think so.” These amusements, then, by consuming that time, which ought to be devoted to God, rob him of his due; and by involving those, who are engaged in them, in the guilt, of misimproving one of his best gifts, expose them to his dreadful indignation.

2. Balls are attended with great expense. Among those, who are so intoxicated with the love of pleasure, as neither to consider the value of property, or their accountability to God, for their improvement of it, a smile may be excited, that the expense of these amusements should be mentioned, as an argument against them. But, with the sober, the manner in which the gifts of

heaven are improved, will not be considered as unimportant. If property can be so expended, as to promote the good of its possessor, it is certainly a dictate of wisdom to expend it in this way, rather than in a manner which will *injure* him. And if it can be so expended, as to promote his good, to a *great degree*; it is certainly a dictate of wisdom to expend it in this way, rather than in a manner, which will promote his good, but in a *small degree*. And if it can be expended, so as to promote the glory of God, and the good of society, at the same time, it contributes to the welfare of its possessor; it is a dictate, not only of wisdom, but of benevolence and duty, to spend it in this way, rather than in a manner, which neither honours God, nor benefits the world. Now, without admitting what the speaker sincerely believes to be true, that the money spent at Balls, is spent in a manner calculated to *injure* its possessor; will not every candid hearer allow, that this might be expended, in a manner, which would promote his good, to a much greater degree? If, for instance, this was expended in attempts to increase his knowledge of the useful arts and sciences, would it not contribute much more to his usefulness, respectability, and happiness in the world? It is a fact too well known, to need any particular statements to confirm it, that there are many young men, who, by spending that time and money, which is, by others, thoughtlessly squandered away in vain amusements, in attempts to acquire useful knowledge, have been set forward in a course, which has not only prepared them for distinguished usefulness, in the common walks of life, but has led them to some of the most important stations, and highest honours of their country. To say nothing here of *duty*, either to God, or our fellow-creatures, is it not absolutely inconsistent with *wisdom*—

indeed, is it not consummate folly, to spend property for the sake of enjoying the momentary pleasures of a Ball, while an object of so much more value might be obtained by it? Will it here be said, that the expense of a Ball is but trifling? Trifling as it is, this money might be so improved, as to obtain an object of infinitely more importance. Trifling as is the expense of a single Ball, it is often sufficient, and more than sufficient, to defray the whole expense of a common District-School a month. Indeed, individuals sometimes expend more at a single Ball, than would be sufficient to pay their tuition three months, at the best of our Academies. And what is not a little surprising in these amusements, are sometimes found those, who feel themselves too poor, and whose parents feel themselves too poor, to be at the expense of the best education, which even our common schools afford.

But the impropriety of spending property in these amusements, appears the most striking, when we consider, that it is the *Lord's*. The passages of scripture, which teach this truth, and remind us of our consequent obligation, are numerous and solemn. The Psalmist says, "The earth is the *Lord's*, and the fulness thereof." "The silver is *mine*, and the gold is *mine*, saith the Lord of hosts." Under a solemn sense, that creatures are but "stewards of the Lord's bounty," Solomon says, "Honour the *Lord*, with thy substance, and with the first fruits, of all thine increase." Now I ask, do those, who are spending property, in these amusements, mean to honour *God* by it? It cannot be pretended. Had they a disposition to honour *God*, these would be the very last means, they would think of using for such a purpose. Indeed, a disposition to honour *God*, would forever extinguish their thirst for

the vain pleasures, which these afford. If there is any way, in which property can be expended for mere *pleasure*, without regard to the glory of God, and the good of mankind, it is in these and similar amusements. How, then, can those "give an account of their stewardship," who spend their "Lord's money" in this way? Disguise the iniquity of the thing as you may, they will at last be found guilty of "having wasted his goods."

3. Balls often disqualify those, who are engaged in them, for a diligent and advantageous pursuit of their business. There are none of the means of useful learning, which have so surprising a tendency to dissipate the mind. From the perusal of any valuable book, from conversation upon any important subject, from the study of any useful art or science, a person may arise, with a mind, deliberate and serious, prepared to enter upon any other important duty, or useful employment. But how different is it with those, whose sleep has been driven away, and whose strength has been exhausted, by the dissipating scenes of a Ball-room. Those, who are compelled, by parental authority, and those, whom necessity urges, may, indeed, immediately employ their *hands*, in their usual business; but where, for weeks, are their *minds*? Alternately reflecting on the amusements, which they have passed, and anticipating pleasure from others to come. With minds, thus vibrating, from one vanity to another, they too often make, as might be expected, but faint and inefficient efforts in their business. In every thing, pertaining to the duties of their calling, which requires great care, and constant, and persevering exertion, they are apt to fail.

4. The tendency, which Balls have to prevent the acquisition of useful knowledge, is a serious and weighty objection against them. Knowledge, let it be remem-

bered, is acquired by attention to the subjects to be known. Where the abilities of men are equal, and the means of instruction the same, the progress, which they make, in the several branches of their pursuit, is in exact proportion to the degree of attention, which they pay to them. It follows, undeniably, that whatever diverts the attention of youth from subjects, important for them to know, has a tendency to hinder their progress in useful knowledge. But will not every person of common observation, admit, that Balls have a most powerful tendency to divert the attention of youth from their studies? If any doubt remain respecting the truth of this, let instructors, who have taught schools, where a number of their scholars have, at the same time, attended a Dancing-School, or frequented Balls, be asked respecting it. Let scholars themselves, who are frequently engaged in these amusements, be compared with others of equal abilities, and who have enjoyed equal advantages, for improvement, and see, if the difference between them, is not perceptible and striking. Extend your observations, if you please, to persons of maturer years, whose youth has been devoted to amusements of the kind now under consideration, and mark the difference between their attainments, and the attainments of others, who, with the same abilities, and same advantages for improvement, have given their attention to more important subjects. That there are those who occasionally attend Balls, that make respectable progress, in useful knowledge, will not be denied. But even these, if they refrained entirely from such amusements, might make much better progress, and prepare themselves for much more extensive usefulness in the world.

5. Balls have a tendency to excite an inordinate love of company. As we were created social beings, and

placed by Providence in circumstances, in which we are mutually dependant upon each other, to cherish an affection for our fellow-creatures, and an attachment to their society, is both becoming and necessary. But to do this, it is not necessary to be frequently in *large* parties. These have a tendency to excite a vague, indiscriminate love of company, rather than to cherish that good will to our fellow creatures, and regard to their personal worth, which are the essence of true friendship, and the real source of all social enjoyment. As there are no scenes more enchanting to youth, than those of the Ball-room, so there are no assemblies, which are more likely to excite in their minds an excessive love of company, than those, who meet for the amusement of dancing. Is it not an indubitable fact, that there are many youths, once contented at their homes, satisfied with domestic enjoyments, and occasional exchanges of visits with their friends, who have, by attending a Dancing School a short period, or a Ball a few times, become so intoxicated, with the love of company, as to render their ordinary society insipid, and retirement and meditation a burden? Need I state to you, my hearers, many of whom have had a longer time, to observe the ways of the world, than I, that this excessive love of company is an evil thing? Do you need to be told, that this has led many in youth from the Ball-room to the card-table—and in more advanced life, from the peaceable firesides of their houses, to the noise and contention of the tavern and the grog-shop? These are not, indeed, always its immediate effects; but where it prevails to a great degree, they seldom fail to follow in the rear of that host of evils, which are its usual attendants.

There are many, who, when they begin to attend Balls, are particular in the choice of their company. They

disdain to associate with the idle, profane, intemperate and worthless. But, after they have been for some time engaged in these amusements, their love of company frequently becomes so predominant, that they feel little concern, respecting their associates. *To be in company* is their *object*; and, if they can be gratified in this, they do not hesitate to associate with persons of the most corrupt principles, and vicious habits. And when their love of company has arisen to this degree, they are generally prepared to unite with their companions, in any practice, which is most agreeable to their inclinations. Accordingly we find, that many, who, at the commencement of their career in amusements, would have been shocked at an oath—would have been ashamed to be associated with a gamester—would have despised the drunkard—and shunned his society, as they would have fled from the pestilence, have, afterwards, themselves been seen at the gambling-table, with the intoxicating bowl at their lips, and horrid imprecations upon their tongues.

When youth begin to attend Balls and similar amusements, they are sometimes active in business, regular in their deportment, amiable in their manners, ambitious of improvement, and thoughtful of eternity. But, when an excessive love of company is excited, how does it change their characters? They become idle. Their business, on which, perhaps, depends their present support, and from which alone they expect their future subsistence, is neglected, or pursued in a very irregular and disadvantageous manner. Instead of being seen at their homes, engaged in their proper occupations, they are to be looked for at the tavern, or some other place of general resort. Their former ambition for improvement degenerates into an ungovernable propensity for self-indulgence. And, instead of using means for the improve-

ment of their minds, they are constantly seeking opportunities to excite and gratify their passions. Their dispositions, once amiable and pleasant, become selfish, morose and revengeful; and their deportment, formerly marked with gentleness and urbanity, is often now, a compound of meanness, provocation, and violence. Their thoughtfulness of eternity is succeeded by a blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, which renders them deaf to the voice of conscience, and regardless of every scriptural, and providential admonition.

These are some of the effects of an inordinate love of company. And you, my hearers, will bear me witness, that they are no *uncommon* effects of this propensity. Now, let it be remembered, that Balls have a direct, and powerful tendency, to excite and cherish this excessive love of company. This, I presume, is a truth, which few, if any, will deny. Indeed, more than this is true. There is, it is believed, no amusement, practiced among us at the present day, that has so powerful a tendency to excite an inordinate love of company, as Balls. Strange as it may appear to those, who merely reflect upon the subject, it is a fact, that they are *peculiarly* fascinating to the young. And when once they have become engaged in them, they are in peculiar danger of that love of company, which will lead them into every species of dissipation. Now, is not this a serious and weighty objection against these amusements? What if there are those, who occasionally attend Balls, that never experience all the evils, which have been described, is it not still evident, that they are *dangerous things*? If it is a fact, that they have greatly injured, if not completely ruined thousands, shall the circumstance, that some engage in them, with apparent impunity, be pleaded in their favour? But

6. What exhibits the nature of these amusements, in a more striking light, than any thing, that has yet been named, is their tendency to lead those, who are engaged in them, *to neglect the concerns of their souls*. That the concerns of the soul require *attention, great attention, constant attention*, will, I trust, be granted by all, in this assembly. That they require exertions, corresponding with an awakened, and persevering attention, will also be granted. There are no truths, in the bible, more obvious to every one, than that those, who would be prepared for death, must *think* on death—that those, who would be prepared for the judgment day, must *think* on this day—that those, who would obtain the forgiveness of sins, must *think on*, and *lament* their sins—that those, who would become interested in Christ, must *think* on Christ, and set their *affections* on him—that those, who would obtain the favour of God, must *think* on God, must *love his character*, and *obey his commands*. But will these amusements, which divert the attention of youth from the most important concerns of this life, leave them in a state of mind, favourable to the serious consideration of what is before them in eternity? It cannot be expected. Such is the depravity of the human heart, that the attention is much more easily diverted from eternal, than from temporal things. While, therefore, youth, engaged in Balls, are growing negligent of their business, and improvement, they will grow still more negligent, with respect to the concerns of their souls. The nature of these amusements is so contrary to every thing spiritual and divine, that a great degree of attention to the one is absolutely inconsistent with due attention to the other. If, my hearers, you would have any adequate conceptions of this inconsistency, present to your imagination, for a moment, a

youth, seriously meditating on death, judgment, and eternity, and, at the same time, preparing for a Ball: a youth, viewing himself as a sinner, contemplating the dreadful threatenings of God's violated law, the impossibility of his escaping deserved ruin, without repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; the shortness and uncertainty of this life, in which all his preparation for eternity is to be made; and yet, anticipating, with pleasure, the gaieties of an intended Ball. To vary your view of this subject a little, contemplate a youth, *actually engaged* in these amusements, with his affections set, "not on things on the earth," but "on things above," in the spirit of prayer, watching against the indulgence of evil thoughts, the allurements of the world, and the temptations of the Adversary; doing, agreeably to the command of the Apostle, "whatsoever he does, to the glory of God." Let this youth be supposed, when he leaves the place of his amusement, to retire to his closet, and there to "pour out his heart before God." Still engaged in his amusements, and disposed to pursue them, as far as his circumstances will permit, view him, a humble, devout, and zealous friend of God, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Now I ask, does not the union of these things, as here represented, appear like an inconsistency? *Do* they go together? *Did* they *ever* go together? *Can* they go together? These questions admit of but one answer. It is a fact, too well known, to need any confirmation, that these serious thoughts, and devout affections, are not the attendants of a Ball. Nor do they nearly precede, or quickly follow such amusements. These have a tendency to banish all serious thoughts from the mind. In support of this

assertion, I appeal, not only to those, who have attentively observed their effects, but to those, who have been engaged in them.

Their tendency to erase serious impressions, where they already exist, is not, however, more noticeable, than their tendency to prevent their existence. They are well calculated, and they were doubtless designed, by the great enemy of souls, to keep mankind in stupidity, with respect to their immortal interests. Accordingly we find, that those, who are the most frequently engaged in them, are generally persons, not only destitute of real godliness, but extremely thoughtless of eternity. It is worthy of particular observation, that wherever these amusements prevail, religion declines; and wherever religion revives, these amusements decline. If an individual becomes serious, and continues so, he is sure to leave these amusements, however strongly he may have been attached to them, or however much, he may have been engaged to promote them. And whenever an individual can so far dismiss his serious thoughts, as to engage in these amusements, and continue in them, the concerns of the soul soon cease to be an object of any great attention, or anxiety. Has not the truth of these observations, my hearers, been repeatedly illustrated, by what has taken place before your eyes? But, if it is true, that Balls have a tendency to influence youth to neglect the concerns of the soul, are they not evil things? The concerns of the soul cannot be neglected, without endangering its welfare. We have the same reason to expect, that the soul will perish, when the means of its salvation are neglected, as we have, that the body will decline, when the means of promoting its health are not used. Who,

then, that considers the value of the soul, can approve of these amusements? Will not every person, who regards his own eternal welfare—will not every parent, who has any solicitude for the salvation of his children—will not every christian, who desires to see the religion of Christ promoted, unite in condemning a practice, which, by preventing a serious reflection, tends to the ruin of the soul?

SERMON II.

1 THESSALONIANS, V. 21.

PROVE ALL THINGS.

To resume the subject of the preceding discourse, we observe,

7. The arguments used in justification of Balls, by their advocates, are obviously inconclusive. One of the most specious of these is, “*There is no harm in dancing.*” In reply, it may be said, with as much truth, and with equal propriety, there is no harm in sitting still, and doing nothing. But does not the man, who is able to labour, who is capable of doing much, in various ways, for the benefit of himself, his family, and the public, sin against God, if he spend his time in sitting still, and doing nothing? Supposing it be granted, that there is no more harm in dancing, than there is in doing nothing; Balls, on this supposition, would be chargeable with all the guilt of idleness: a sin, which has often brought individuals, and families to poverty and disgrace: a sin, which has buried the brightest talents in the earth, and left unimproved the most precious and exalted privileges: a sin, which is the prolific parent of almost every vice, that has injured man, or dishonoured God. To

say there is no harm in dancing, even if this assertion were true, with respect to the simple exercise of dancing, does nothing towards justifying Balls; where dancing is practiced as a mere amusement, attended with great expense, and the loss of much time; where the minds of youth, susceptible of every impression, are forcibly attracted to various objects of the most trifling and dissipating nature; and where without the restraints, which they feel in other circumstances, they are liable to meet with peculiar temptations. If dancing is unnecessary, however harmless it may be in itself, Balls are *wrong*; because, on this supposition, all the time and all the money, which is spent in them, is thrown away; because the dissipating effects, which they have upon the mind, and the temptations, to which those are exposed, who are engaged in them, are evils, which they have no calls to experience.

But it is contended, that Balls are necessary. It is said, that "youth must have amusements, and they may as well amuse themselves, in this way, as in any other." That youth must have amusements is true, and God, in the various and diversified duties, which he requires, has made an abundant provision for their amusement. There is much amusement in almost all kinds of business, in which mankind are engaged; especially, when it is skilfully, and advantageously conducted. There is much amusement in that friendly and social intercourse, which the various occupations of individuals naturally, and almost necessarily, lead them to hold with each other. There is much amusement in reading instructive books, in conversing upon important subjects, in viewing the beauty, variety, order, sublimity, and grandeur, which the works of creation present to the eye, and in meditating upon what is read, and heard, and seen. There is

much amusement, in the performance of the various duties, which our connexions and relations in life impose upon us. The relation, which heads of families sustain to each other, to their children, to their domestics, and to their friends: the relation, which children bear to their parents, to each other, and to all, with whom an attachment or other circumstances lead them to associate, each affords numerous opportunities, for the exercise and improvement of the social affections; and for the mutual performance of those kind offices, by which the choicest blessings are received and imparted. To a well cultivated mind, there is a satisfaction in a becoming discharge of these relative duties, far superiour to all the amusements, which Balls, or any other parties of mere pleasure, are capable of producing. And if youth were so educated, as to partake largely of the enjoyments of the former, they would seldom thirst after the insipid pleasures of the latter.

There is much amusement in the study of those arts and sciences, which come within the province of, and which are necessary to be known by, almost every youth. In reading and writing, in the study of Arithmetic, Grammar, and Geography, as well as in the higher branches of learning, such as Music, History, Philosophy and Astronomy, there is great satisfaction to every youth, who is not destitute of a taste for improvement. And the more extensively these branches of learning are pursued, the greater is the satisfaction, which the study of them affords. Youth, therefore, have an ample source of amusement in those pursuits, which tend immediately to promote their respectability, usefulness, and happiness in the world. It deserves to be particularly noticed here, that there is no time spent in vain amusements, which might not be spent in pursuing some

branch of useful knowledge. Each hour, each day, and each night, that is thrown away in seeking pleasure from mere amusements, might be spent in studies, peculiarly interesting and profitable, much more honourable to youth, than any mere amusement, and much less dangerous to their health and character. There is no *money* spent in the amusements under consideration, which might not be spent in acquiring useful knowledge. And, for the want of what he spends in this way, to be expended in his education, many a youth has passed through life, in a state of ignorance, degrading to his character, and injurious to his interest. Those *minds*, which, by these amusements, are dissipated, weakened, and corrupted, might, in the same time, and with the same expense and exertion, that it costs to ruin them, be greatly strengthened and improved.

Is it not a fact, my hearers, that there are many, who have never studied the Geography of their own state; who know not the Grammar of their own mother tongue; who have never read the history of that Revolution, which gave their country Independence; who are ignorant of that Constitution of government, under which they live; who have not sufficient knowledge of Music to unite in a song of praise to their Creator; who, in regard to religion, need to be taught the first principles of the Oracles of God; that are still spending their time and money, in Dancing Schools and at Balls? Now I ask, ought not these persons, if they must be amused, to be amused in acquiring that *useful* knowledge, of which they are destitute, rather than in these scenes of vain mirth and dissipation? And who will say, that there is not as much satisfaction in the former, as in the latter. If it becomes those, who are destitute of the knowledge above mentioned, to be engaged in acquir-

ing it, rather than in Balls, would it not be well for others, who are possessed of this, to be *extending* their acquirements, rather than engaged in such amusements?

Will it be said, that youth cannot be satisfied with the amusements, arising from the performance of their business, their social duties, and the various sources of improvement, which have been mentioned? I know they will not be satisfied with these, if no pains are taken, by their parents and guardians, to form in their minds a *taste* for them; or if they are indulged in vanity, until they have *lost* their taste for them; or if they are beguiled by the false and delusive pretences, that they cannot demean themselves with propriety in company—nor know the manners of the world—nor escape the reproach of singularity, unless they are taught at a Dancing-School, and know how to play their parts at a Ball. But, let them be well instructed, in the proper business of their calling; let them be taught their relative and social duties, and influenced by example and precept, to perform these in a friendly, respectful, and obliging manner; let them know the advantages of learning, and taste the pleasant streams that flow from the numerous sources of improvement, to which they may have access; let them be taught the worth of time, the importance of religion, the real nature, and the general consequence of these amusements, in which the world are revelling; and, instead of languishing for the vain pleasures of the Ball-room, they would generally view them, as too insipid and trifling to engage their attention.

But it is said, that “the *scriptures* authorize dancing.” We are often reminded, that Solomon says, there is “a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” This argument, however specious it may at first appear, loses all its force, the moment it is considered, that dancing, when

spoken of in scripture, is generally a *religious exercise*. There was, among the ancients, a custom of expressing religious joy, by dancing before the Lord. The first instance of dancing, which I recollect in the bible is evidently of this kind.

After the Israelites had passed through the Red Sea, and had seen the destruction of their enemies, "they sang a song of triumph unto the Lord." While this was performing, "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 the Lord; for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." When David removed the ark of the Lord from the house of Obed-Edom, to his own city, it is said, that "he danced before the Lord with all his might." This dancing, accompanied with other religious exercises, was expressive of his joy and gratitude, that the ark of the Lord, that sure pledge of his presence and blessing, was again restored to Israel. To shew that this dancing was purely of a religious kind, performed with special reference to God, it is said that David danced before the *Lord*. That this dancing was a religious ceremony is demonstrated by another circumstance: The Psalmist several times, in his spiritual songs, associates dancing with other exercises, purely religious and devotional. "Let Israel, he says, rejoice in him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their king. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and the harp." It is true, the scriptures occasionally speak of dancing, where not a religious exercise, but mere amusement is intended. Such, for instance, is the dancing of Herodias before Herod. But these instances

are related only as matters of fact, not as anything, with which God was pleased. Indeed, when it is considered, that the death of John the Baptist was the consequence of the dancing of Herodias, have we not a striking intimation of its evil effects, as a mere amusement? I know of no passage in scripture, in which dancing is spoken of with approbation, where it is not evident, that a religious exercise is intended.

But, is it not strange reasoning to plead an ancient religious ceremony, in which a tribute of praise and thanksgiving was rendered to God, in justification of Balls, where thoughtless youth are collected for the purpose of hilarity and mirth; where God is neither the object of their song, their affections, or their thoughts; where his name, instead of being mentioned with devout adoration and praise, is but too often the by-word of their profanity?

Should a butcher kill his beef for the market on the sabbath, and plead the practice of the Jewish priests, who slew and dressed their cattle on that day for sacrifices unto God, in justification of his conduct, we should have a specimen of reasoning exactly similar to that of those, who plead the religious dancing of the ancients, in defence of modern Balls.

We are sometimes told, that men of the greatest respectability, that many professors of religion, and even ministers of the gospel are known to countenance Balls. This is all true. But what does it prove? If Balls are right, because men of great respectability countenance them, then duelling is right; for this practice has not only been advocated in the writings, but sanctioned by the example of some, whose talents and services had raised them high in the estimation of their countrymen. The tragical scene between Hamilton and Burr; and the

more recent contest of Mason and M'Carty, solemnly proclaims the wickedness and folly of those principles, by which many of the great have chosen to be governed.

What argument in favour of these amusements, any one can derive from the fact, that they are countenanced by professors of religion, and even by some who bear the name of ministers of the gospel, it is difficult to conceive, since there is scarcely any opinion or practice too unscriptural to be advocated by *some* of this description. Besides, if the fact, that these amusements are countenanced by christian churches, and by ministers of the gospel, is an argument in favour of them; then the fact, that they are opposed by christian churches, and ministers of the gospel, is an argument against them. According to this mode of reasoning, the question must be ultimately decided, by a majority of professors of religion and ministers of the gospel. When those, who make use of this argument, will shew, that there is a majority of professors of religion, and ministers of the gospel, in favour of these things, we will allow that their argument has some plausibility. But do they not know, that a majority of christian churches, and of ministers of the gospel are decidedly against these things? And is it not a fact, that of those who are *eminent* for their piety, ten are to be found against, where there is one in favour of them? The argument, therefore, if it is good for any thing, is decidedly against those, who make use of it.

Besides the arguments already considered, I know of none, which are brought in defence of Balls, which appear even plausible. It is, indeed, sometimes said, that "Balls are no worse, than other things, in which youth are generally and freely indulged." But this can scarcely be considered, as an argument in favour of them, for

in the very statement of it, it seems to be admitted, that they are evil things; and the plea rests solely upon the circumstance, that they are no worse than some other things, in which youth are indulged. But, is the fact, that they are indulged in other evil practices, a good reason, why they should be indulged in this also? This is making one sin an excuse for another.

It is sometimes said, "if youth are restrained from these amusements, which are among the most innocent and civil, they will be the more likely to take to worse courses." But it needs to be proved, that these amusements are among the most innocent, and civil. What has already been said upon their nature and consequences, is sufficient, I trust, to shew the fallacy of this plea. As to the pretence, that, if youth are restrained from these amusements, they will take to worse courses, it may be sufficient to observe, that this is not true. Those, who are indulged in these amusements, are much more likely to take to worse courses, than those who are restrained from them. This is abundantly evident from fact. But, if in certain cases, those, who are restrained from these amusements, should take to worse courses, it does not follow, that they ought not to be restrained. Parents and guardians should do their duty, and leave the event with God. And it is their duty, so far as it is in their power, to restrain their children from all sin. Would it not be absurd for a parent to refuse to restrain his child from *gaming*, lest he should take to *stealing*; and another to refuse to restrain his from *stealing*, lest he should take to *robbery* and *murder*? There is the same kind of absurdity, in parents refusing to restrain a child from Balls, under the pretence, that he will take to worse courses. If they would train up a child in the way he *should* go, let them endeavour to keep him from every forbidden path.

Some of the preceding arguments in favour of Balls, are sometimes brought forward, in a little different attitude, from any, in which they have now been particularly considered. We are not unfrequently told, that “youth in order to cultivate the social affections, and to learn how to behave in company must often be together.” Very good. But, can they not be together, unless they are at a Ball, or at some place where dancing is made a part of their amusement? I should be glad to learn, what advantages there are for cultivating the social affections at a Ball, which might not be enjoyed at a friendly visit; or what advantages there are for learning the manners of the world, which cannot be enjoyed at another place, where the same persons are collected for a more important and useful purpose. For my part, I confess, that I know of no branch of politeness, or good manners, which might not with as much propriety be taught, and as easily learned, at an Academy, at a Common School, or even at a Singing-School, as at a Ball, or at a Dancing-School; and I have yet to learn that those, who have frequented these amusements the most, have any advantage, as it respects behaviour, over thousands of others, who have never been engaged in them.

8. Those, whose hearts are right with God, have no inclination to attend Balls, or to be engaged in any such amusements. By those, whose hearts are right with God, I mean those, who are in the exercise of such affections as he requires: those, who, through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts, *love God, submit to his will, delight in his law, repent of their sins, and receive by faith the Lord Jesus, as their Saviour from deserved ruin.* That persons of this description have no inclination to attend Balls, or engage in any such amusement, is evident from the

fact, that such an inclination is absolutely inconsistent with the nature of these holy affections. It is impossible for a person in the exercise of *love to God*, and in that enjoyment of his presence, which generally accompanies the lively exercise of the holy affections, to desire that kind of amusements, which Balls afford. It is as contrary to nature, as it is for a hungry man to wish to be deprived of his food; or for love to desire the absence of its object. There never was an instance of a person, whose heart was right with God, desiring this kind of amusements. Shew me a man, who gives indubitable evidence of being in the lively exercise of christian affection, or in other words, of feeling as the scriptures require us all to feel, and if he will say, that he delights in the amusements of a Ball, I will recall every sentence, which I have uttered in this discourse, and remain forever silent upon this subject. You may, perhaps, find a cold hearted, hypocritical *professor*, or even a luke-warm *christian*, that will say this, but shew me a real christian, in the lively exercise of grace, and I will consent, that his feelings with respect to these amusements, shall determine their moral character.

But can those amusements be right, which no man, that feels right, can desire or delight in? Is not every person under obligation to feel right, and if he cannot feel right, while he is inclined to indulge himself in these amusements, is not his inclination to attend them sin? And if they are of such a nature, that a desire to be engaged in them, must necessarily be sinful, are they not evil things?

9. The bible is plainly and decidedly against Balls, and amusements of this description. Every practice, which is inconsistent with the performance of those duties, which the scriptures require, is virtually forbidden

by the very passages which require those duties. There cannot be a more plain and obvious truth than this: *Whatever is contrary to what God requires is forbidden.* Now, it is easy to shew, that Balls are contrary to what God, in his word, has required; that the spirit, which leads to an attendance upon these amusements, is of an opposite nature from that, which is implied in an obedience to a number of his most plain and solemn commands. God, by the mouth of the Apostle, has said, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." But where are the affections of those, who are engaged in these amusements? It is not sufficient to say, that they are on the *world*, or that they are on the *vanities* of the world. It may be safely asserted, that the affections of youth *cannot* be on things above, while they are cordially engaged in these amusements. If, therefore, they can innocently indulge themselves in these things, they can innocently retain their affections upon the world, and thus innocently disobey the commands of God.

"*Be not conformed to this world,*" is another divine command, totally inconsistent with the nature of these amusements. Are not these amusements worldly things, and is not that spirit, which leads youth to delight in and practice them, emphatically the spirit of the world? If so, they are inconsistent with what is required in this command, and, therefore, directly contrary to scripture.

"*Whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,*" is a command, uttered by an Apostle of Christ, and universally binding upon mankind. But if they are under obligation to do all, that they do, to the glory of God, it is certainly wrong for them to do any thing, in which they cannot act, with a sincere desire and intention of promoting his glory. I

need not ask, whether youth, in their attendance upon Balls and amusements of this kind, intend to promote the glory of God in these things. They are conscious themselves, that they mean not so; neither do their hearts think so. They are, generally, willing to acknowledge, that their principal object, in these amusements, is their personal and present gratification. But we are authorized to say, that youth, engaged in these amusements, *cannot* act with a sincere desire and intention of promoting the glory of God. A desire to promote the glory of God, being a serious and holy affection, is, in its nature, totally inconsistent with an inclination to be engaged in these amusements. Oil and water might as easily coalesce, as these two propensities exist together. If, therefore, that affection, which is commanded, necessarily excludes an inclination to be engaged in these amusements, not only this inclination, but the amusements themselves must be wrong.

Besides, there is nothing to be seen in these amusements, *calculated to honour God*. As soon, therefore, as any person has a desire to promote his glory, he will be led, by this desire to spend his time and property in pursuits, which appear better calculated to obtain the object of his regard.

I shall quote but one more passage to shew, that Balls are contrary to scripture, and that is the exhortation of Paul, standing in connexion with our text. After exhorting them "to prove all things, and to hold fast that, which is good," he says, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*" This passage clearly teaches us, that, when any practice *appears* to be wrong, although many plausible things may be said in favour of it, we ought to abstain from it. Even, although we are not fully satisfied, that it is wrong; yet, if it has so many *appearances* of be-

ing wrong, that we cannot be fully satisfied, it is right, we are required to abstain from it. Now it must be acknowledged, even by the warmest advocates for Balls, that they have, notwithstanding all the plausible things, which are said in favour of them, the *appearance* of evil.

It does appear, that they needlessly spend time and money;—that they dissipate and corrupt the minds of youth;—that they often prevent the acquisition of useful knowledge;—that they are calculated to excite an excessive love of company;—that they expose those, who are engaged in them, to many temptations;—that they tend to render them thoughtless of eternity, and thus to destroy their souls. Whether, therefore, it is possible for any to be engaged in them, and still comply with the exhortation of the Apostle: “Abstain from all *appearance* of evil,” you, my hearers, will judge for yourselves. I might repeat quotations of this description, from the Bible, until your patience is exhausted. But I trust, that those already recited are sufficient to shew, that Balls and their kindred amusements are, by fair implication, forbidden in the scriptures.

10. Thousands, who once believed, that these amusements are harmless things, have been convinced of their evil nature, and pernicious consequences. Some have been convinced of these, by the *effects*, which they had upon *themselves*. After a long course of indulgence in them, some occurrence has led them to review their lives; when, to their confusion and regret, they are obliged to acknowledge these, as the primary means of their mispent-time, wasted-property, misimprovement of privileges, and gradual progress from one vice to another, until their health, their respectability, and their usefulness were destroyed. When, too late to retrace their steps, they have seen the folly of the course, which they have run.

Some, who were once advocates for these amusements, have been convinced, that they are evil things, from the effects, which they have perceived them to have upon *others*. Many a parent has seen, and with a bleeding heart too, that they have produced a lightness and dissipation of mind in his child, unfavourable to his improvement in useful knowledge, inconsistent with due attention to the business of his calling, inimical to serious reflection, and all attention to the concerns of the soul ; but, preparative to the influence of temptation, and to a steady and rapid progress from one destructive vice to another. These same persons, with many others, have seen with alarm the *effects*, which these amusements have had on society at large. The noise and confusion of one mid-night revel after another, with the excesses, practiced by thoughtless youth, unrestrained by authority, and led on by the influence of each other's example, has opened their eyes to see the real tendency of those amusements, which they once viewed as harmless things. But what has effectually taught the greatest number the vanity and wickedness of these things, is the Holy Spirit. While mankind remain in that darkness, which a depraved heart casts upon the mind, they are too frequently blind to their real nature and tendency. But, when under the influence of that Spirit, by which the world is convinced of sin, they view these in their proper light. They see them to be contrary to the will of God, inconsistent with the nature of true religion, and calculated to subserve the designs of the great adversary in the destruction of souls. There are *very few*, if any, instances of persons passing under the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, and coming to a saving knowledge of God, without perceiving, that these amusements are evil things. Thousands of their warmest advocates

have, in this way, been convinced of their sinfulness, and influenced entirely and forever to abandon them. Instances of this kind are to be found in almost every Town and Parish in this State. Are there not examples, in this place, exactly answering to this description. Indeed, are there not many now in these seats, who were once advocates for Balls, but who, having been convinced of their evil nature and pernicious consequences, have forsaken them.

But what does this fact teach us? Is there not much reason to suspect the propriety and lawfulness of a practice, when so many of its warmest advocates, are led, not as it appears, from any sinister motives, or evil spirit, but by the Spirit of the living God to forsake it? The person, that can lightly set aside this argument against the amusements in question, betrays a degree of hardness of heart, and of blindness of mind, that is truly *alarming*.

11. Balls are amusements, which cannot be reflected upon, with pleasure, in a dying hour. Death is an event, which closes the term of probation, and puts an end to the improvement of time, of talents, and privileges: an event, at the approach of which, every mind, unless stupified by sin, or bereft of its powers, must reflect, with peculiar sensibility, upon the scenes that are past; and anticipate, with emotions indescribable, those which are to come. It is an event, which disrobes the world of its charms, strips the mask from the monster sin, and lets its weakness and folly, its guilt and danger be seen. What then, must be the feelings of those, who are now engaged in Balls and amusements of this description, in a dying hour? In view of the importance of a preparation to meet their God, into whose presence, they are immediately to appear, will they think

the time, which they have spent in these amusements, well improved? Realizing then, that their property was given them, as a talent to improve in the service of God, will they look upon what has been expended in these amusements, as answering its proper design? Convicted then of the obligation, which has always laid upon them, to "*set their affections upon things above, and not on things on the earth,*" will they reflect, with pleasure, upon those amusements, which have diverted their attention from spiritual things, and produced in them a complete conformity to this world? In view of the solemn scenes then opening before them in eternity, will not a life spent in these appear like folly, presumption, and madness? Contemplate for a moment the situation of a youth, devoted to these amusements, when arrested by the king of terrors. If then unprepared for death, and in a state of mind to realize his condition, must he not be miserable beyond the power of language to describe? He sees his *body*, in the strength and vigour of which he once gloried, which he delighted to decorate for the Ball room and scenes of pleasure, about to be shrouded in the habiliments of death, and committed to the grave, as food for worms. He looks back upon the amusements, in which much of his time, now drawing to a close, has been trifled away; in which, as the steward of God, he has wasted his substance; in which his mind, now conscious of immortality, and fearful of deserved judgment, has been dissipated and corrupted; in which calls and warnings, promises and threatenings, privileges and blessings, have been disregarded; and sees them about to be succeeded by the solemnities of eternity, in which an omniscient God will bring all his sins to light, and punish him according to his guilt. **At death, my hearers, and under these reflections, many**

a thoughtless mind has been alarmed, and many a proud heart made to stoop. These amusements, however enchanting they may be in health, will lose every charm in a dying hour. And those, who resort to them for happiness in life, are in peculiar danger of finding them a source of wretchedness and despair, when they leave the world. The dying moments of thousands, who have freely indulged themselves in these, have been embittered, by reflection upon them, while in no case, have they been known to afford true consolation to a departing soul. But are not those things, which tend to destroy the peace of a dying hour, to be avoided? Are not the pains of dissolving nature, the thought of a final separation from every thing desirable on earth, the prospect of immediately entering upon the solemn scenes of eternity, sufficiently overwhelming to a dying man, without the melancholy reflection, that his past life has been spent in vanity? Who, that seriously considers the importance of consolation in this trying hour, does not feel that it is wisdom, as well as duty, to do every thing in his power to make death delightful; and folly, as well as sin, to do any thing, which shall justly disturb his peace, while he passes through its dark vale and shadow? Instead, then, of indulging themselves in these amusements, let youth devote themselves to the service of God, that, at the close of their probationary state, they may enjoy his "favour, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life."

What remains of this subject is the application.

1. If the amusements under consideration are of the nature and tendency here represented, it is the duty of Ministers of the gospel to bear public testimony against them. If it is the duty of ministers to watch for souls, as those, who must give account, it is certainly their du-

ty to warn their hearers against every practice, which tends to destroy their souls. This duty was inculcated upon the prophet Ezekiel, with a solemnity, which no minister, that values his own, or his people's safety, can disregard. "O, son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." As these amusements evidently tend to divert the minds of youth from serious things, and thus to destroy their souls, how can a spiritual watchman be free from their blood, if he neglect to give them warning? But it is said, "It does no good to preach against such things. Youth will have their amusements, and the more there is said against them, the greater lengths they will go."

But is this *true*? Will a faithful exhibition of the guilt and danger of a practice, influence them more frequently to adopt it? Will a mild and friendly admonition, dictated by no other feeling, than a sincere regard for their best interest, instead of reforming them, so excite their resentment, as to hasten their progress in the road to ruin? This is representing them in a more unfavourable light, than *I* am willing to represent them. If this is their character, my description of their danger is faint, compared with that of Solomon, who has expressly declared, "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul; but he, that heareth reproof, getteth understanding." Again, "He, that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Whether people will be benefitted or not, by a faithful exhibition of the truth, upon this subject, depends very much upon their characters. If they are wise, they will hear and receive instruction. Solomon says, "A reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool. The wise man feareth and departeth from evil; but the fool rageth and is confident. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. But he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser." Those, therefore, who allow, that these amusements are evil things, and yet, object to a minister's preaching against them, on the ground, that it will make people worse instead of better, plainly say, in other words, that those, who are reprov'd by it, are fools. But do they mean to say this? It is presumed, they do not. Why then, may it not be hoped, that a timely, and well-meant admonition, will do them good. But it would be the duty of ministers of the gospel to bear public testimony against these amusements, even, if they knew, that all, which they said upon the subject, would be rejected and despised, by those who advocate them. They might still hope to be useful to others, who have not taken part in them, and whose feelings, of course, are not so strongly enlisted in their defence. That some will be irritated, and hardened, and prompted to go greater lengths in their wickedness, by the friendly and faithful admonitions of ministers upon this subject, is not impossible. But, if these admonitions are the means of opening the eyes of others, and of preventing them from pursuing the same destructive course, they answer a most important purpose. Besides, ministers are to do their duty, and leave

the consequences with God. They are faithfully to warn the righteous, and to warn the wicked. Them, that sin, they are to "rebuke openly, before all," and when they have done what is in their power, they are to commit the case to God, who is able to render his word a "savour of life unto life," or "of death unto death," as it pleaseth him.

The argument, that preaching against Balls does more hurt than good, because it makes those, who are engaged in them, worse instead of better, applies, with much the same force, to preaching against any evil practice. It might, with the same plausibility, be said, it is in vain to preach against sabbath breaking; for the more that is said upon this subject, the more some persons will profane this holy day: that it is in vain to preach against profanity; for the more there is said upon this subject, the more some persons will curse and swear: that it is in vain to preach against intemperance; for the more there is said upon this subject, the more some persons will indulge themselves in strong drink. But every man of sense knows, and every man of candour will acknowledge, that the abuse of a thing is no objection to the thing itself. Bearing public testimony against these sins, notwithstanding the abuse of it by the wicked, is a good thing: it is a duty, the faithful performance of which, is calculated to honour God, and benefit the world, and he that is so wise to listen to it, "will be wise for himself, and he that scorneth, he alone must bear it."

2. In view of what has been said upon this subject, we see the wisdom of our Legislature, in prohibiting Balls, and similar amusements, at public houses. If they produce the evil effects, which have been ascribed to them, it must be wrong to have them at *any* place,

but especially at *public houses*. As these are designed as a rest for the weary traveller, nothing should be allowed in them, inconsistent with his accommodation and comfort. But what accommodations are there for travellers, in a public house, where, from sunset until midnight, or break of day, there is not only the noise of music and dancing, but the confusion of such a mixed multitude, as are usually drawn together on such occasions? Besides, these amusements, by being practiced at public houses, obtain a publicity, and a popularity, which greatly extend their influence, and multiply their evil effects. They become accessible to every youth and child, who is allowed to be at these places of resort, and, adapted as they are to the feelings of corrupt nature, they captivate multitudes, and, before they are aware, lead them into the vortex of dissipation. These effects of Balls and similar amusements, our Legislature had the wisdom to foresee, and the patriotism to provide against. A law has been enacted, forbidding all Inn-holders to admit Balls, or Dancing-Schools in their houses. How happy would it be for the community, and honourable to Inn-holders themselves, if this law was strictly regarded. It is peculiarly painful to consider, that with respect to these amusements, the laws of God and man are often deliberately violated, even by those, whose respectability in society gives extensive influence to their example.

3. The view, which we have taken of our subject, teaches us, that the prevalence of Balls in any particular place, is evidence of an alarming degree of stupidity there.

The minds of youth must be extremely stupid, with respect to their own improvement, before they can neglect the numerous means, which they enjoy of acquir-

ing useful knowledge, for the sake of gratifying themselves in these vanities. They must be extremely stupid, with respect to their obligation to God, before they can dare to waste that time and property in these amusements, which were given them to be spent in his service. They must be extremely thoughtless of death, insensible to their state as sinners, and regardless of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, before they can feel an inclination to indulge themselves, in these scenes of mirth and dissipation. Parents must be extremely stupid, both with respect to their own and their children's welfare, before they can be willing, that they should put themselves in so direct a way, to be hardened in sin and ripened for ruin. People in general must be extremely regardless of the public good, before they can willingly see a practice prevailing, of so corrupting and demoralizing a tendency. These amusements never prevail to any considerable extent, unless the people are stupid to an alarming degree. Look at those places, where religion, pure religion is the most flourishing, and see if these amusements prevail there. Reflect upon the time, those of you that can remember it, when God poured out his spirit in this place, and brought multitudes from darkness to light, and say, Did these amusements then prevail? You know they did not. And ever since that period, they have declined in proportion as religion has prevailed, and prevailed in proportion as religion has declined. Their present prevalence, therefore, marks an alarming degree of stupidity among us.

4. If what has been said upon these amusements is true, then those professors of religion, who countenance them, act inconsistently with their covenant engagements. Professors of religion may countenance these amusements in several ways. They may do it by personally

attending them, by advocating them in their conversation, by permitting their children to attend them, or by suffering them to be practiced at their houses. For professors of religion to countenance these amusements in the ways here described, or in any one of them, is to act inconsistently with their covenant engagements; for, they have publicly and solemnly given themselves up to God, and consecrated their time, their talents, and all that they possess, to his service. What time or property then, have they to spend in these things. If they profess to be devoted to God themselves, and consider this as their reasonable service, with what face can they countenance others in a practice, which is totally inconsistent with this reasonable service? If, as we have seen, these amusements are wrong, professors of religion, by countenancing them, set a bad, instead of a good example, and lend their influence to promote, rather than to suppress vice. Parents, who are professors of religion, have before God and man solemnly engaged "to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." But are they doing this, when they give them permission to attend Balls; where their minds are naturally diverted from God, and every thing of a serious nature; where their minds are naturally attracted to objects of the most trifling and dissipating nature; and where they are exposed to numerous and powerful temptations. If this is "bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," or if it is consistent with the duty here inculcated, the Apostle had much less meaning in his expression, than is generally supposed.

It becomes those, who have publicly taken the vows of God upon them, seriously to consider what their covenant implies. It is no light thing to act inconsistently

with a covenant made with God, and his church. In doing this, professors of religion bring upon their minds darkness, stupidity, and moral death; and wound Christ in the house of his friends.

5. It evidently appears from what has been said, that those, who are engaged in these amusements, and those, who countenance them, must sooner or later, lament their conduct. If they should, in time, be brought to repentance, and finally escape the punishment threatened to the ungodly, they will, when their eyes are opened to see the guilt and folly of their conduct, bitterly lament it. But should they be left to die in their sins, their conduct will be an eternal source of lamentation and wo. It has been shewn, that these amusements have a direct and powerful tendency to divert the minds of youth from the concerns of the soul, to influence them to neglect the means of religious instruction, and to lead them on from one vice to another, until their hearts are hardened, and "their consciences seared." There is reason to believe, that they have in this way, actually led thousands to ruin.

Now, follow, in your imagination, one of these unhappy souls to the bar of God. There his eyes are open to see the real nature and tendency of these things. There he is able to trace the influence, which they have had upon his mind, and there to his astonishment and everlasting confusion, he sees, that by keeping him secure in sin, and influencing him to neglect the means of grace, they have destroyed his soul. In despair, he sees, that for a momentary pleasure, he has trifled away his immortal interest. Will he not lament his conduct, when he comes to realize the value of that birthright, which for one morsel of bread he has sold, and now finds no place of repentance, although he seeks it carefully with tears.

But those, who countenance these amusements, as well as those who indulge themselves in them, must yet lament their conduct. To see the truth of this remark, look one moment at a pious parent, who has had the weakness to indulge a child in these scenes of mirth and dissipation, when he comes to see this child upon a dying-bed, without a hope, that he has an interest in Christ. The parent here must remember, that religious instruction, and serious meditation, are the means, by which God usually renews the heart, and prepares the soul for heaven. But while he remembers this, he is compelled to reflect, that he has encouraged his child in amusements, which render religious instruction tasteless and ineffectual, which dispel serious thoughts, and produce a lightness and dissipation of mind, inconsistent with any due regard to the solemnities of eternity. He sees, that by these means, he has probably contributed to the child's present stupidity and unpreparedness for death. And to the distress of parting with one, who is "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh," is added the heart rending anxiety, lest his soul shall be lost, and his blood required at his hand.

6. The subject before us demands the serious consideration of the youth in this place. From what has been said, you perceive that the amusements in question are neither innocent nor safe. They cannot be practiced without a waste of time and property—without a neglect of more important means of improvement—without a presumptuous disregard to the soul's concern—and without disobedience to some of the most plain and solemn commands of Heaven. They are not, therefore, the means, by which you can become respectable, useful, or happy in *this* world; and instead of laying a foundation for your future felicity, they are peculiarly calcula-

ted to answer the design of the Adversary, in the destruction of your souls. Had I not *seen* the evil effects of these things, and were I not convinced, that they are both criminal and dangerous, they would never have been the subject of my public censure. Most cheerfully would I approve of any amusement or recreation, which appears, on the whole, essential to your improvement, or ultimately conducive to your happiness. But, be assured, no amusement of this description, tends like Balls, to divert your attention from God, or lays you under a necessity of disobeying his commands. Listen not to the fallacious plea, that a knowledge of dancing is essential to a polite and accomplished character. It is an indubitable fact, that many of the most polite and accomplished characters of both sexes, and every age, consider this amusement, not only unessential to politeness and good manners, but in its ultimate results, unfavourable to both. Let it be your first object to gain the favour of God, and let all your amusements be such, as have a tendency to honour him, and to promote your *spiritual*, as well as *temporal* interest.

7. The prevalence of Balls and similar amusements should excite, in the minds of christians, great seriousness and fervent prayer. The state of mind, which these indicate, and the effects, which they are calculated to produce, are serious things. As none, who are in the exercise of grace, and none, who are to any great degree concerned for their souls, take pleasure in such amusements; their prevalence in any place demonstrates, that there is but little religion, and little, even of religious concern, among the people. Every christian, therefore, who is sufficiently watchful to discern the signs of the times, must at once conclude, when he sees these things prevailing, that the cause of Christ is languishing,

and that the dear youth, who are engaged in them, are not only destitute of the one thing needful, but in a course where they are peculiarly liable to *remain* destitute of it. But who, that regards the welfare of souls, and truly desires the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, can indulge these reflections, without great seriousness and fervent prayer. Will not a view of the snares, to which youth, engaged in these amusements, are exposed in this life; the anxiety, which they are liable to feel at the hour of death; and the loss of eternal life, which they are in danger of sustaining; fill the minds of christians with deep solemnity. And while they reflect, that no means in themselves are sufficient to turn the hearts of youth, from these things, will they not fervently pray, that God would visit them with the effusions of his spirit. With infinite facility, he can renew their hearts, and "turn off their eyes from beholding vanity." By one glimpse of that Divine beauty, which he is able to display, he can effectually change the object of their affections, desires and pursuits. O how desirable is it, to see those, who are in the morning and flower of their days, engaged in the service of God! How desirable that those, who are panting for happiness, with feelings too ardent to be controlled, should seek it where it may be found! Let all, then, who feel interested in the cause of Christ, and sincerely desire the spiritual welfare of the rising generation, be excited, by the prevalence of these vain amusements, to greater seriousness, and more fervent prayer.