

Balls and the Ball Room.

A

S E R M O N

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"TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN OF ME, FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY
IN HEART, AND YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS."—Jesus.

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PREFACE.

This sermon was *not* originally intended for publication. It was prepared in haste, and preached to my people to aid in repelling this form of worldliness, which, to my profound grief, I beheld, as a flood, settling in among them. God gave me strength in the hour of trial, and blessed be His name. The "Preachers' Association" of St. Albans district passed a unanimous vote, requesting its publication, and, also, assuming the pecuniary responsibility of the same. I think they will be disappointed both as to its merit, and power for good, and yet, I cannot refuse to comply, if it will be but as the "pebble in the streamlet" or the "dewdrop on the baby plant."

W. A. M.

BALLS AND THE BALL ROOM.

"AND YET SHOW I UNTO YOU A MORE EXCELLENT WAY."—1st Cor. XII, 31.

Human conduct may be viewed in a variety of aspects. It may be regarded as virtuous or sinful, wise or foolish, beneficial or injurious, and the like.

But while all this may be universally admitted, mankind are very far from being unanimous in their judgments upon the same course of conduct. What may seem foolish to one, may seem wise to another; and that which might appear right and useful to one, would only be considered as wicked or injurious to another.

And this must ever be, more or less, the case. This necessity arises from the differences of our mental constitution; from the diversity in our knowledge of the particular subject involved, and the great variety in human prejudices.

These causes must ever, more or less, exist, and operate; and hence, human beings must ever be deprived of absolute-ness and infallibility in their judgments, either of their own conduct, or that of others. But this does not warrant or justify indifference respecting the moral character of our acts. On the other hand, it suggests caution and anxiety. It should induce us to apply our utmost power, impartially, aided with all the helps within our reach, and possessed of the most reliable standards, in seeking to know ourselves, and our duty.

Guided by these principles, it is proposed to inquire briefly, yet candidly, into the moral character and tendency of one o

the most popular and in many respects one of the most fascinating public amusements of the times : namely, *dancing*.

And we do this, because not only of its great and increasing prevalence but because there are many well meaning persons, nay even members of the Church, who are found either as its apologists or patrons or both.

Let us first briefly refer to the aspect of it with the Bible as our stand-point.

The word *dance*, and its derivatives, are mentioned some *twenty-six* times in Scripture. The following are among the principal passages.

“ And 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.”—Ex. XV : 20.

“ And it came to pass as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing ; and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.”—Ex. XXXII : 19.

“ And see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance, in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.”—Judges, XXI : 21.

“ And David danced before the Lord with all his might, and David was girded with a linen ephod.”—2nd Sam. VI : 14.

“ They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance.”—Job. XXI : 11.

“ And when he had brought him down, behold they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating, and drinking, and dancing.”—1 Sam. XXX : 16.

“ But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.”—Matt. XIV : 6.

“ And Jephthah came to Mizpah, unto his house, and behold

his daughter came out to meet him, with timbrels, and with dances.”—Judges, XI : 34.

“ The women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing, to meet king Saul.”—1 Sam. XVIII : 6.

“ Our dancing is turned into mourning.”—Lam. V : 15.

“ Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing.”—Psalms, XXX : 11.

“ A time to dance.”—Eccl. III : 4.

Upon these passages there are several things to be observed. We perceive that dancing anciently, was sometimes, among the Jews, performed as a part of *religious worship*, which was probably the case also among pagans. Thus, as we have seen, danced *Miriam* the prophetess, in praising God for the deliverance of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh and the perils of the Red Sea. Thus danced *David*, when the Ark of the Lord returned from its captivity to Mount Zion.

Dancing was also employed as an expression of *joyful respect* and homage to superiors, as appears by the above instance, in the case of the reception of king Saul, and also at the return of Jephthah, when met by his daughter. But these purposes of dancing have never existed among us. It is neither the religious feeling, nor civil homage, nor domestic gladness, of which the ball is the general exponent. There are other instances, however, in Scripture, in which *dancing* seems to have been performed in much the same spirit and manner as of modern dancing assemblies, with this exception : there is no instance given, we believe, in which both sexes were engaged in the dance, at the same time, and place. From the fact that the Bible does mention dancing as a *social entertainment*, the question still recurs, does it thereby give its approval of the practice ?

This question is not answered by any direct declaration of Scripture, but we are left mainly to inference. True, it is said

in the Bible "a time to dance," but this cannot be interpreted as countenancing this practice as a public amusement, otherwise several kinds of extreme wickedness might be justified in a similar manner; for in the context of this very passage it is said, there is "a time to kill," and "a time to hate," "a time of war," and a "time" to "every purpose under heaven." The sacred writer simply enumerates, here, some of the transactions of men, without intending, evidently, to express any opinion respecting their moral character. In several places in scripture the word *dance* and its derivatives, are used symbolically, for joy, or gladness. Thus said Jeremiah, when in captivity with his countrymen, "Our dancing is turned into mourning." And the psalmist, in the day of his prosperity, exclaimed "Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing."

The instances in which dancing is referred to in Scripture, as a social amusement, are evidently against it. Look at the passage in first Samuel already quoted. The subjects of the dance were a company of Amalekite soldiers, the place a victorious camp, and the significant accompaniments were gluttony and drunkenness. Look at the instance also in Job. True it is not said there, that the persons themselves danced; but it may be legitimately inferred that they approved of the practice, for we are told that they sent their children to the dance. And in order that we may see the portrait of a patron of dancing, as drawn by a divine hand, we will quote more at length from Job, twenty-first chapter.

"Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea are mighty in power. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children *dance*. They take the timbrel and harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ.

They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, *depart from us*, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" Here we have the picture to the life; for we have yet to see the first patron of dancing who habitually fears God, or lives a life of penitence and prayer.

Another instance where dancing as a social entertainment is spoken of, and the only one we will now mention, is in the case of Herod, the Roman Procurator. And in this also everything corresponds. It was performed by the daughter of a criminal mother; it was done for the gratification of an abominable wretch, whose whole life was a scene of sensuality and incest; and among the immediate, and palpable fruits of which was the inhuman murder of a faithful and innocent servant of God.

Such is the argument from Scripture, relative to dancing as a social entertainment, and we leave you to judge on which side of the question it predominates. And we believe the practice is as *irrational* as it is unscriptural.

It has been claimed that dancing promotes health. But this is more than doubtful. Is it the *exercise* that is beneficial? It is true exercise is necessary, more or less, to health; but is that exercise healthful, that is imposed in nine cases out of ten after the fatigues of the day; that is continued all night; in a close and crowded room; that is generally carried to excess; and that is generally followed by sudden exposure to the cold? Let the languid and stupid victims of midnight revelry be examined, and, if they are honest, we will let their story settle this point. Or if they could speak, we might consult the occupants of many premature graves, who have gone there, thus early, by way of the ball-room. Does the healthfulness of dancing

consist in the *pleasure* it affords? It is true that cheerfulness is conducive to health; but is dancing or dancing-assemblies greatly productive of this? Is there, on such occasions, no uneasiness from inflamed passion? No envyings from social rivalry? No fears from excessive temptation? No disgusts from dissimilar tastes? No after-regrets for hard-earned money squandered? and no compunctions for a soul imperiled? Strange indeed, is it, if the declaration of Jehovah, and the testimony of the good of all ages, have all at once to be *reversed*, and that now, instead of wisdom, we must say of *dancing*, "her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are paths of peace."

It is claimed, also, in favor of dancing, that it *promotes good manners*.

It is admitted that there is need enough of improvement in the department of civility, among all classes, and especially among the young. But do dancing and dancing parties contribute toward this object? In answering this question, there are several things to be considered. We should ascertain what true civility is, and whether dancing and dancing assemblies tend to produce it. True civility is not bowing of the head, nor the shuffling of the feet. It is not to touch the rim of the hat with the tip of the finger; to utter, in more than one sense, *soft words*; to play the flirt or the fop, nor to greet with smiles the one whom we detest in our hearts. It is not the sending word to those who call at our door "not at home," when we are, nor inviting, with seeming cordiality, to our dwellings, those whom we secretly hope will never darken our doors. All this is *not* true civility; although it may pass for such to a great extent in society: and yet, it is just *such* civility, we will not deny, that the ball-room tends to cultivate. But genuine civility is nothing more nor less than *sincerity, and kindness, and honesty*

combined; manifested toward everybody under the guidance of common sense. But this is not the great idea of a dancing assembly. We submit it to any one acquainted with the philosophy of mind, if the presiding genius of the ball room is not a compound of *sensuality* and *vanity*; and good breeding, properly so called, can never, *never* spring from such a germ!

Beside this, the time and place are usually adverse to good taste. By what rules of propriety can whole nights be spent in amusement, in a miscellaneous company, some of whom, at least, must be more or less of doubtful moral character. And all this not usually under the supervision of the head of a family at a private residence, but under the surveillance of, it may be, an unscrupulous tavern keeper, and within the unsanctified walls of a *hotel*. For, it must be generally admitted, that, whatever other purposes public houses may serve, it is very *sel-dom* that they are any more suitable for *seminaries of manners* than they are for *sanctuaries of piety*.

Another plea offered in favor of dancing is, *it affords respite and recreation from care and labor.*

That our natures require recreation and rest, there is no doubt; hence our maker has given us the season of night for bodily repose, and the sabbath both for spiritual and physical rest. And if these are not sufficient, with the ordinary social intercourse with kindred and friends, there are innumerable ways in which suitable recreation could be secured, without resorting to those methods which hazard health and character, corrupt the young, and which tend to degrade the morals of community; ways in which those concerned might improve in knowledge and morality too, at the same time they are amused. Among such means, and one that obtains, of late, quite extensively, is *public lectures*, generally weekly, on interesting and useful subjects. In this way, ladies and gentlemen, married or unmar-

ried, old and young, could mingle together, under circumstances entirely unexceptionable. And what a vast amount of real enjoyment this "feast of reason and flow of soul" might afford, during each recurring term of our long winter evenings? It may be said that this would be too expensive, but we submit whether the money that is annually thrown away, even in our ordinary villages—squandered in oyster suppers, in cigar smoking, brandy drinking, horse racing, card playing, in gaming and *dancing*, would not go a great way, if not entirely, in meeting the cost of oral instruction upon useful and interesting subjects in almost every department of human enterprise. And the question of expensiveness is peculiarly applicable to balls. We have heard young men voluntarily declare, that they had to abandon the ball room, as a source of amusement, as their income was not sufficient to sustain them, in the pursuit of that form of pleasure. But this objection is only a minor one compared with others. Dancing is frequently the first step in a career of moral degradation. First dancing, then dram drinking, then gaming, and so on. And this career is not always confined to the sterner sex. We have heard of *females* who could shuffle the cards with considerable dexterity, as well as dance. We know not as we have ever seen any such, and we hope we never may, for to our mind there seems but one more step in the road to infamy, and that is, the surrender of their virtue.

But the most serious objection to the spirit and practice of the ball-room is, its *paralyzing influence upon the efforts of the church for the salvation of souls*, especially among the young. For what can they do toward rescuing the youth from the corruptions that are in the world, when there are a hundred to one employed in decoying them farther and farther from holiness and heaven. And sometimes this spirit of worldliness and

vanity settles down upon a whole region like a horrible nightmare. It enters even the sanctuary itself, and instead of the cloud of the divine presence filling the place, the house of God is literally deluged with the pestiferous atmosphere of Sodom. Frequently the transition is very brief, with many, from the ball-room to the pew and the choir. And in the name of all that is holy we would ask, what must be the moral character and effect of songs that come from *such* hearts, and vibrate upon *such* lips? And what must be the state of those moral susceptibilities, upon which the word of God is to fall, where still lingers in memory the sound of the violin and the din of unholy midnight mirth!

To the devout mind, there is no need of discussion on this subject. The will of God is his authority in all his *gratifications*, as well as in all his labors and sorrows. He has no inclination for pleasures that he cannot enjoy in the name of the Lord Jesus. He listens, not only with attention, but with *delight* also, to the Master, when he says, "Ye are not of the world." He embraces with joy the injunction "Love not the world nor the things of the world, for they are sin." It is his bliss to know that he is "crucified with Christ," and that his "conversation is in heaven, from whence also" he "looks for the Saviour." He learned, when impenitent, from bitter experience, that the "friendship of the world is enmity against God." His satisfaction is complete, though he may be "little and unknown," if he is only assured that he is "prized and loved" by his Father in heaven. Human life to him has a *deep significance*. He looks upon himself, and all his fellow men, as rapidly hastening to the land whence they will not return. He often thinks of the dying hour, the solemn judgment, and the endless awards of eternity, and in view of these he feels that there is

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

And are not these feelings appropriate? Are they not fitting our condition? You that are living merely for pleasure, think of these things. Can you allow no serious thoughts to disturb your life of worldly indulgence? Will you sport away the only life God can give you in this world? Can you trifle upon the very verge of eternity? What would you have thought of the man who could have danced with a senseless delirium upon the "table rock" at Niagara, as it was loosening for its fatal plunge? And is not the moral well-being of thousands, who frequent the ball-room, in similar peril?

"O God, our inmost souls convert,
And deeply on our thoughtful hearts
Eternal things impress,
Give us to feel their solemn weight,
And tremble on the brink of fate,
Wake us to righteousness."