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MICHAEL,
OR
FASHIONABLE DANCING,
AN

Undignified Amusement for a Christian,

THE SIXTH OF A

Series of Evening Lectures,

ON THE

LIFE OF DAVID,

AT THE

Chapel of the House of Hope,

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA, FEBRUARY 6, 1859.

Duffield
BY EDWARD D. NEILL.

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FOR SALE BY COMBS & BRO., JAS. DAVENPORT & GEO. LITTLE.

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EVENING LECTURE.

2 Sam. : 6, 16. "And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord ; and she despised him in her heart."

Michal was Saul's youngest daughter and David's wife. As she saw the youthful hero in the halls of her father years before the occurrence of the transaction mentioned in the text, she had conceived for him a deep and tender affection. For a long time she was devoted as every true wife is to her husband's interest, and in one case was instrumental through her ingenious devices in saving his life. Her father when displeased with her husband, took her away and gave her in marriage to another. After a time, however, she was returned to her first love.

A king's daughter, she was proud and sensitive. When David brought back the sacred chest containing the precious archives of the nation, which had been taken away by the Philistines, his heart beat with joy. As the multitude escorting the ark entered Jerusalem, the people were greatly elated at witnessing that from which Jehovah had so often spoken, and which to them was so inexpressibly holy. Their bodies sympathized with their hearts, and as an expression of gratitude to their Creator they began to dance. David at the head of the procession was

dancing before God with all his might. His wife, it appears, was at the window when the procession passed, and having no religious feeling she could not discern spiritual things, and could not sympathize with the King. Her pride was touched at seeing him act thus in the streets, and hence the text says *she despised him in her heart*.

When David returned home she indulged in much keen sarcasm, and told him that his conduct reminded her of some low, half-dressed fellow, lost to shame. Says she, "How glorious was the King of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself in the eyes of the hand-maids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows, *shamelessly uncovereth himself*."

It is clear that David danced, and we employ the text to introduce to your attention some *remarks on dancing, particularly on the species of dancing practised at fashionable and promiscuous assemblies*.

Dancing in some of its varieties is ancient and universal. It appears to have been with early nations *chiefly* a religious institution. The Heathen at all their festivals in honor of the Gods, danced. The Hebrews in commemorating the goodness of the Creator, were also accustomed to indulge in this act. Miriam, the sister of Moses in company with other maidens, after they had crossed the Red Sea in safety, began to dance to the music of timbrels. So in modern times with a barbarous, semi barbarous, or fanatical people dancing is a religious ceremony. The Dervishes a sect of Mohammedans dance violently while they worship. The Shakers, a fanatical sect in the United States, do likewise, and the Dakotas at

their villages in our State, dance when they wish their spirits to give them a change of weather, or grant some other request. The African cannot adore his imaginary deities without engaging in the exercise.

As the Hebrews advanced in prosperity they began to give way to indulgence and to seek after amusements to gratify their idleness. But those who practised dancing as a mere pastime were never considered reputable persons.

The Bible it may be remarked in this connection records *no case* in which the two sexes ever united in the dance. At the time of Herod, the dance was of the most licentious description, and generally performed by hired dancers. Amateur dancing was exceedingly rare. When at the birth-day feast of Herod, the nobles and captains became half intoxicated, the daughter of Herodias was sent for, not to dance *with them*, but to dance *before them*. The display of her form and her voluptuousness made the master of the feast as foolish in his admiration, and as free in his protestations as a giddy votary of pleasure, in the presence of some Ellsler or Montez, of the nineteenth century.

It should be also stated in this brief sketch of dancing, that the national and religious dances of the Hebrews were performed in the day time.

What leads to the prevalence of dancing, in modern days, is a query that now arises? In the first place we remark, *that emotions of the mind are frequently manifested by muscular actions*. The soul and body are closely united. They are in sympathy with each other. The child in the intensity

of his grief distorts his body and wrings his hands, while he who is happy at the thought of release from the illy ventilated school room, cannot refrain from shouting, and skipping about. The man of business when dejected moves slowly, with face bent to the earth ; when animated by business, he maintains an erect position and moves with a quick and lively step. As the passer-by listens to the martial strains of a military band, there is a tendency upon the part of his muscles to assume certain positions. So excitable temperaments when they are assembled in the house of worship or the mansion of pleasure, and feel their hearts full, are disposed to leap for joy. It was the sympathy of the muscles of Miriam and her minstrels, with their minds, that made them dance. It was the same connection that made David dance before the ark. It is the same thing, that at camp meetings causes people to spring up and down and to sing in loud tones. Nor is there any harm in these *natural movements of the body*.

Every enlightened christian would be sorry to see the tender lambs cease from skipping upon the green play grounds, that God has provided for them. It would be a sad thing to have the natures of children repressed, so that they would move to and fro with all the sobriety of their grandfathers. The dancing uncurbed by the dancing master, and unfettered by any French or Italian rules, is *not objectionable*, for it is *spontaneous*, and the off-spring of a *cheerful heart*. There is no pleasanter sight than a group of children upon a summer's day gracefully hopping about and rivalling the grasshopper in their alacrity and in the ceaseless din that they create.

Modern dancing is *sometimes* practised, no doubt, to express the joyful feelings of the dancers, *but a second cause* of its prevalence is *because those who practise it hope thereby to create pleasant sensations*. It is possible to create emotions by making the muscles assume the expression peculiar to this or that state of mind. Let a man whose feelings are gloomy or morose, assume a smiling countenance, and after a time sunshine will be sure to break through the dark cloud that hangs over his heart. Let a man frown and he will discover that his mind grows stern. Burke in his treatise on the sublime and beautiful, says: "I have often observed that in mimicking the looks and gestures of angry, or placid, or frightened, or daring men, I have involuntarily found my mind turned to that passion whose appearance I endeavored to imitate."

Now a fashionable assembly is frequently one of the most cramped and unsocial places in the world. Every body and every thing appear to be endeavoring to look as fine as possible. No one is perfectly natural, as in the home circle. Most of the company are comparatively strangers, and generally not the best informed part of the community, consequently conversation is not easy. There are no topics that can be brought forward to interest all the individuals of the party for the evening. In the hope of killing time, or as the expression is, making the evening pass off pleasantly, music and dancing are introduced, and under these combined influences, a sort of vivacity is generated.

Where men and women are highly cultivated, they are not forced to such shifts to make an evening pass away.

The new inventions, the last book, the sentiments of some poem, the affairs of nations, the works of some painter, the merry laugh, and repartee cause the hours of the night to fly.

In many of our Atlantic cities, to be a constant attendant upon balls, is quite a stigma even upon a worldly man. It is supposed that he is one who can take no engagement in the higher and more rational pleasures of the community in which he resides. The most popular dances were not originated in refined circles. The Scotch Reel was not the offspring of the more refined and worthy class of the Scotch peasantry. Its *locale* is nearer to the Scotch Ale house. The Mazourka and Cracovienne are the dances practised to perfection by Polish serfs.

Another reason that leads to the prevalence of dancing, *is the field it opens for the gratification of vanity*. The dance allows her or him to whom God has given a beautiful form to make a vain display. Here, too, robes and jewels can be shown to advantage.

If *vanity* was not gratified by the exercise, if it did not permit a pretty foot, or hand, or dress to be exposed, numbers of those who now advocate the custom, would consider it *tame* and *unprofitable*.

Those who do not attract any attention in the discharge of the appropriate and holy duties of home, are the persons of whom it may most frequently be said—

“Now pursuing, now retreating,
Now in circling troops they meet ;
To brisk notes, in cadence meeting,
Glance their many twinkling feet.”

The last reason for the prevalence of dancing, is the desire of recreation. The race is so constituted, *that they must have amusement of some kind.*

If we work we must *play*. No good work is ever performed without recreation. A shoemaker will not last long who is at the "*last*" night and day. The professional man who never changes the current of his thoughts, but incessantly wields his pen becomes sad, pensive, and misanthropic. It is a *working out of nature* then, for men to relax, and it is *not surprising, inasmuch as the religious world have not done what they ought, to promote the introduction of innocent and healthful amusements, that those which, by excess, are injurious to the body, mind and soul,* should prevail.

It is not my intention to find fault with those of the world, who choose to practise the amusement of dancing. They profess to be of the world, wordly. It is useless to look for a bitter fountain to pour forth sweet water. It is not customary to gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles. All that we now propose to do is to show *why the Church is opposed to dancing as practised in modern days.*

It is not that the Church does not love to see persons happy. The only object of this institution is to produce happiness. It loves to see the cheerful countenance, to hear pleasant words, to know that men have consciences void of offence toward God and man. The Church considers, that a false religion, which will lead a man or woman to break off every tie and retreat to a monastery, and endure a living death.

Nor is the Church opposed to dancing because it does not love grace of manner. No one ever doubted that

Christ or Paul were gentlemen, we speak with the highest reverence. If there is boorishness in the Church, it is because the man is not fully under the influence of the principles held by the Church. A true Christian is always the highest style of man.

Nor is the Church opposed to the practice merely *because it is the custom of the world*. All customs founded upon reason and calculated to promote the permanent welfare of society, it has not the slightest hesitation in adopting.

But the Church does not approve of her members engaging in the fashionable dance, because in the *first place* : The Scriptures do not sanction any such custom. Every passage in Scripture that speaks of dancing can be shown to be of a religious or national nature. The Jews were an agricultural people, and natural in the expression of their feelings during the early ages of the nation. Dancing *unpremeditated* as it was, and *unattended by no evil consequences, was tolerated* though not sanctioned by the Mosaic dispensation. After Christ came upon earth and his principles were believed, we find no record of his followers indulging in the wild motions of David before the ark. The whole tendency of the Gospel is to *subdue*, and check all *undue expressions of religious or any other sort of feeling*.

The scenes that took place at the religious meetings in the woods of Kentucky a half century ago, if not irreligious, had nothing to do with pure and undefiled religion.

Another reason that the Church opposes dancing is, that they find nothing to show that Jesus Christ would have danced at a gay social festival.

It is true that as a man, Jesus participated to a certain extent in social intercourse. We find him with his mother and relatives, at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, making and probably drinking the best of wine ; and at the house of Martha and Mary, in unrestrained friendly intercourse. Certain Pharisees besought him to dine with them, and he went in and sat down with them to meat, yet at none of these places does he indulge in any amusement, to which any exception could be made. Had the Savior conformed to dancing, comparatively innocent as it then was in its consequences, he would not have been looked upon with the same reverence. Tell me, ye votaries of the dance ! would you respect the Redeemer, as the greatest and purest moralist that ever trod upon this earth, were you to read of him apparently enjoying the mad sports of that age, and at times uniting with men and women of all shades of character in trifles ? Could he have maintained his dignity, had he been ready to adopt all the customs of the worldly and mere followers of fashion ? Now Christ is the exemplar after which every true Christian models. He is to inquire not what will the world think of the positions I take in relation to certain amusements, but what will the Redeemer think ? If Christ would not be justified in dancing at modern social parties, neither can the professed followers of Christ be justified.

Another reason that Christians should not patronize dancing as now practised, is, that it does not strengthen the mind. It is proper that there should be hours of recreation, as we have already remarked, but it is improper

that *any recreation should* be sought for, that does not *strengthen* the *mental powers*. The word recreation when analysed is re creation, and implies a creating anew. The amusement referred to, wholly fails in this respect. The practice of drawing is elevating. The youth who is jaded by close confinement to his books, or business, if he takes his pencil and drawing paper and wanders forth alone, and at last sits beneath the shade of some overhanging rock, and sketches a water fall or a babbling brook, or a field of grain, or a farm house, is not only amused, but refreshed in mind. He returns to his wonted duties a new man.

The cultivation of music is refining. The daughter who studies the composition of a Handel or Mozart, or Beethoven, is enabled when fatigued by household duties, or oppressed with sorrow, to take up an instrument, and bring forth melody which will lift her above the trials of earth, and pacify the troubled mind.

Not so with dancing at modern entertainments. It makes the mind giddy, but it never expands it. When the exercise is over, there is no increase of mental vigor. The body is fatigued after an evening dancing party, and the brain sympathizes.

Christians do not approve of dancing, we remark again, because it so often leads to excess. Religion enjoins *moderation in all things*. It expects one who professes to be under its influence to be temperate in his meats, temperate in his drinks, and also temperate in his amusements. It does not approve of exposure to health by spending many hours far into the night, *even in a crowded house of worship*, for the consequences are seen to be evil.

Much less can it approve of the turning of night into day, and the exposure of health every one undergoes who is an habitual attendant of a crowded dancing assembly. Seldom does any one witness dancing, prevalent at social entertainments, but he also finds the decanter and wine glass not far distant. Many a soul has been hastened to another world by disease contracted by a slavishness to parties. Dancing was so associated with excess in the days of Cicero, the Roman orator, that he said, "No one dances unless he is either drunk or mad."

And who in modern times ever saw a community infatuated with the desire of dancing parties, but they witnessed an expensiveness of dress and entertainment far beyond their income, and ruin and intemperance of all description, following in train?

Another reason why members of the Church should not engage in dancing parties, is, that in so doing they do not promote the moral purity of a community. A professor of religion is bound to cultivate whatsoever things are pure.

An ungodly press are horror stricken when they see males and females at a camp meeting under intense religious excitement, dancing to and fro, and laying hold of each other's hands. They cry out, and say, such scenes are demoralizing, and offensive to the delicate mind. *Admitting the fact as they state it*, we ask, is it not *more offensive* to an individual of *true refinement*, to attend a fashionable dancing party, and behold his or her young daughter taken by the hand or waist, by one who until that night, may have never been seen, and whirled through the mo-

tions of a waltz or polka. If there was to be a choice, let me see the female shouting under religious feeling, and moaning wildly in consequence of the agony from sin, or leaping with the joy from forgiveness, in preference to her being seen in the ball room, extravagantly dressed, ready to dance with any one, and searing her own conscience by indulging in all the vanities of life.

Again we remark, that the Church is opposed to dancing parties, because they unfit one for the duties of religion. He who frequents the brilliant saloon, where flattery, envy, and vanity are busily at work, does not often emerge therefrom braced for fighting the good fight of faith. An Edwards, or Wesley, or Whitefield by attendance upon a dance and participation therein on Saturday eve, would not have felt on Sunday morning, that they had been preparing themselves for efficiency in declaring the unsearchable riches of Christ. The experience of centuries has shown that the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is not obtained at the ball room. Those who frequent the prayer meeting, who are ready to contribute of their income to the support of Bible Societies, missions, and other institutions of benevolence, are seldom found shining at the gay party ; their sphere is in the Sunday School, or in the comfortless cabin of the poor, or in visiting the widow and the fatherless, or in some other active effort for the promotion of Christianity.

Religion does not intend that a man should *indulge all of his natural inclinations*, but says to every one *deny thyself, take up thy cross*. When there is no disposition to separate from the world, there is no disposition to enter into the

closet to pray. Let a Christian conform to worldly customs, and in a very short time he will be a missing disciple in the prayer meeting, and if he has a family, the altar around which he and his wife and little ones were wont to kneel in the morning and in the evening, will be broken down.

The young maiden who returns to her chamber near dawn of day after hours of excitement, caused by engaging in the giddy dance, is seldom seen to kneel with clasped hands, and in fervent tones commend her soul and body to the keeping of her Father in Heaven; and the young man after returning from such a place will not open his Bible with pleasure, and read those passages, "Be not conformed to the world." "The friendship of the world is enmity against God." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

Another reason why a Christian does not patronize dancing, is that it has always been offensive to a majority of the Church. In connecting himself with the Church he promised to study the peace and purity of that body. Even if *he* can engage in the dance without personal injury, *others cannot*, and then again those who may *perhaps* be *weaker brethren*, are aggrieved by such conduct, and he remembers that the Scripture is very plain in relation to his duty in such cases. The noble minded, and inspired Paul declared that he would not eat meats even, if it offended a brother, and every whole-souled Christian will be actu-

ated by the same principle. He will avoid the appearance of evil. He will not do any thing calculated to distress the mind of a fellow Christian. He will not indulge in any amusement whatever of *questionable* propriety. He will not so mingle with the world as to lose his identity as a Christian and thus dishonor those who are fellow members of the Church of Christ.

There is still another reason why a Christian will not dance. Thereby he injures the reputation of his minister. There are always a class of men in every community who are jealous of the ministry, and who hate the reputation they enjoy, because they defend what they suppose is the truth, rather than advocate those things which are popular. Whenever they behold an inconsistency in a church member they are delighted, and instantly charge the minister of the Church with which the person is connected, as *winking* at or allowing the inconsistency. If a youth who professes religion games, if a maiden dances, or if an individual who belongs to the Church imbibes intoxicating drink, he injures the minister of the Gospel. Because the person offending has not been rebuked openly, because it has not been paraded in the streets, how often a minister may have prayed or wept over, or expostulated with a delinquent member, the lovers of scandal, and those who dread the power of the pulpit, whisper about that this or that minister is in favor of a game of whist, or a glass of good wine, or a social dance. Little do inconsistent members know of the many unkind things that are said about their ministers in consequence of their indulgence in worldly amusements.

After giving one more reason we shall conclude the discourse. Men of the world, do not respect the Christian principles of those who dance.

The dance is claimed by the world. It is one of their amusements. Impenitent men know that it did not grow out of, but on the contrary is unfavorable to the nurture of spiritual religion. When, then, they see those whom occasionally they have witnessed partaking of the bread and wine, emblematic of a Savior's body and blood, standing on the floor a partner in the fashionable dance, they feel that they are *out of place*, that they have forsaken their principles, and as Michal is said to have felt in relation to David "despise them in their heart," and laugh at them in their absence, and cite them as examples of inconsistency, when talking with other Christians.

In bringing this discourse to a conclusion, it is proper to add—

First—That it is very improbable that the Church and the world will ever be able to agree in relation to amusements.

From the earliest period there has been a controversy. The Fathers of the third and fourth centuries abound in passages, concerning theatrical, and gladiatorial and other gay amusements. Under due restraint the Church might patronize the drama, the opera, and the dance, but the world will never compromise, and has always surrounded what might be recreations, with such associations that they have fostered the "earthly, sensual and devilish."

Secondly—In rejecting the systematic use of undigni-

fied amusements, the Christian must be on his guard and avoid asceticism. True piety is not censorious. It is unnecessary to wear a sad countenance, simply because we disapprove of the follies of life. Religion is the golden mean beyond which we cannot proceed. It is impossible to add or subtract from the teachings of the lowly Jesus. He who exceeds the limit of piety, injures as well as he who falls short of the divine requirements. It is somewhere recorded, that on one of the ancient Roman monuments in Lyons, there was an inscription, prepared by a heathen husband, to commemorate his wife, which read like this, "*Nimis pia, adeo ut impia,*" so pious, that she was impious.

This type of religion our Savior pointedly condemns, in his address to the Pharisees.

Let us then, while refusing to conform to the world in all their follies, show plainly that we "cultivate whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report."

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