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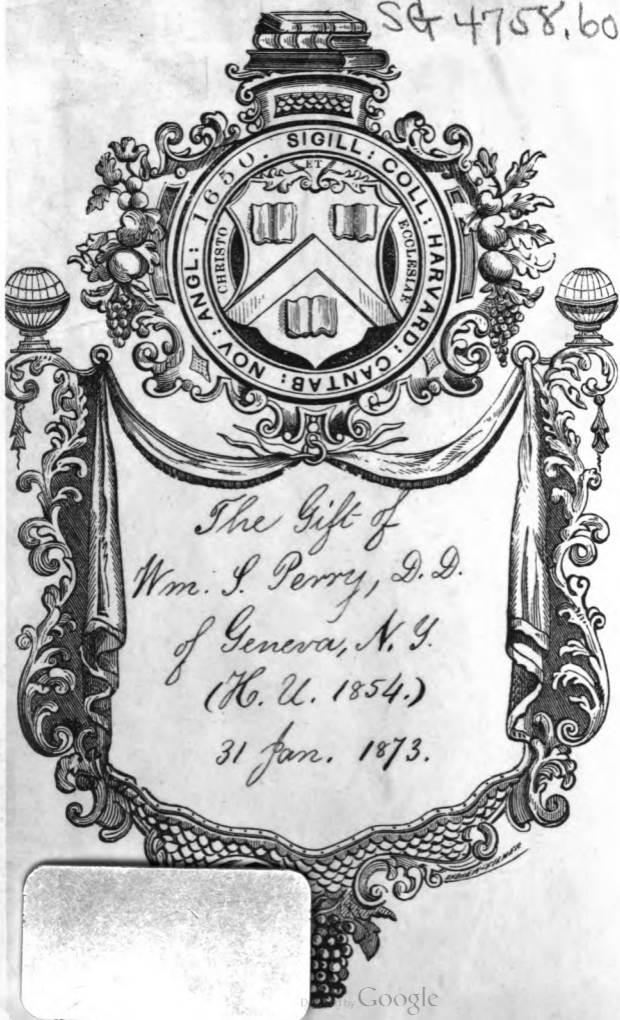
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A

# LITTLE THING GREAT;

OR,

## The Dance and the Dancing School.

TESTED, IN A FEW PLAIN SERMONS.

BY

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NEW YORK :

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE PRO-  
MOTION OF EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE.

11 BIBLE HOUSE, ASTOR PLACE.

1860.

SG 4758.60

1873, Jan. 31.

Gift of  
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## PREFACE.

THE following sermons were preached several winters ago, in Christ Church, Cincinnati. They were heard with apparent interest, not only by the congregation in stated attendance, but by members of other denominations. The author has been repeatedly solicited to publish them. Several of his clerical brethren, who heard them, or heard of them, have been especially urgent. The late Revival of Religion has added to the various branches of the church many youth of both sexes ; and he deems it an appropriate time for a word of warning against a temptation to worldliness, which is only the more dangerous to many on account of its seeming insignificance.

In preparing his manuscripts for the press, he has aimed to retain the free style of the pulpit. This will account not only for repetitions

and varied and extended illustrations, but for many loose sentences, allowable in compositions originally intended for hearers rather than readers. He begs to premise, that with those who recognize any other standard of moral duty but the Scriptures, he holds no controversy upon the subject. His arguments are addressed to those professing Christians who, not only in a general way adopt the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, but are presumed to have received and "spiritually discerned the things of the Spirit." To have addressed himself *directly* to any other class, would not have been strictly consistent. And yet he is not without the hope, that his arguments may extend their influence to others, who, while they make no public profession of religion, have some sense of its supreme importance. With this view he has taken some pains to answer every objection and counter argument which he could anticipate. And he begs any of his readers who may happen to think they have found an objection fatal to his views, not to lay aside the little book till they

have read it *through*: as it is quite possible that an attempt to meet that very objection may be found somewhere on its pages. His leading positions, although argued out chiefly from his own experience and observation, are by no means novel or peculiar. They are such as have always been essentially held by the great body of Evangelical clergymen, of every denomination. And hence he has taken care to endorse them by occasional quotations from eminent bishops of his own church, and other distinguished divines of different persuasions.

In justice to the author's many friends in Christ Church, Cincinnati, it is proper to say, that these sermons were not called for by any inconsistencies in the communion of that parish, which did not exist to as great, if not a greater degree, in other congregations of the same sphere. And while he is gratified to remember expressions of approbation from some of his friends, he does not forget that others, who did not concur in his conclusions, in their external practice complied with them, as a matter of respect to their rector. While preparing

the sermons for the press, he has preached them to his present charge, not on account of any special occasion for them in his little flock or in the surrounding Christian community, but from a belief that the light concentrated upon this point necessarily extends to kindred topics, and exhibits much of the spirit and general tendency of worldly conformity.

SPRINGFIELD, O., March 15th, 1859.

## SERMON I.

"Be not conformed to this world."—ROM. xii., 2.

OUR SAVIOUR, just before His ascension, promised His disciples to send the Holy Ghost to convince the world of sin. That promise belongs to the church in every age. And never do we feel more our need of the co-operating agency of the Spirit, than when we attempt to discuss the subject of worldly conformity. Many respectors, and even professors, of religion, who see with tolerable clearness on other points, appear to be at a fault here. They carry in their minds no well-described lines of division between the world and the church. Their boundaries are vague, and their landmarks exceedingly obscure. And they seem pleased to have it so. For they are apt to look with jealousy upon any attempt of the preacher to take up the map of Scripture, and

point out the territorial limits of the spiritual church. But surely if a pastor has essential duties to discharge, this must be one of them. And in attempting it, on the present occasion, we pray that the Holy Spirit may go before us,—to repress opposing inclinations—remove, sensitive prejudices—and poise your judgments, for candid consideration,—while we endeavor to show :—

*I. That a renunciation of the world is a vital Christian duty : and*

*II. Direct your attention to one species of worldly conformity, as a fair exemplification of what the text forbids.*

1. That a renunciation of the world is a vital Christian duty, no candid reader of the New Testament can deny. Many of its most solemn warnings are against a sin, or a habit of sinning, which we call worldliness—a sin inconsistent with a state of grace, and fatal to the best interests of the soul. Christ and the world—God and Mammon. Godliness and worldliness are placed in direct opposition to each other ; so that the presence and preva-

lence of the one, implies the absence of the other. Take for example the following passages: "Ye are not of the world even as I am not of the world." "If ye were of the world the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God." Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and our text,—“Be not conformed to this world.” These and other parallel passages certainly have a meaning,—and a meaning of unspeakable interest. They warn us against nothing less than a *vital* error. And to pass them by without a faithful construction and application, is to leave the spiritual traveller without guidance in dense mists, amid pitfalls and perilous precipices. Now we admit, that “the world,” in many passages of the New Testament, means the Gentile world,

which was sunken in idolatry and gross wickedness. But in other texts, and especially in those uttered by our Lord Himself, the reference is to the Jews, who were members to the then visible church, bearing the name and profession of the people of God. And although the Jewish and pagan world of that day differed in some respects from the present nominally Christian world, it was a difference not in essence or spirit, but in outward form, or at most in the *degree* of its wickedness. "For that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and, "the carnal mind is enmity against God, whether such a mind exist under the name of Jew, Mahometan, Pagan, or Christian. The two grand features of the world of primitive times were, *Apostacy* and *Idolatry*. And these are features of the modern nominally Christian world. For all unrenewed minds are apostate from God—"they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn out to themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water."—And they have their idols, not indeed in images of gold and silver, or of wood or stone, but in

such things as money, pleasure, pomp, power, and honor. These are the divinities which preside over their hearts and lives. And all who walk, according to the course of this world, as it *now* is, even in its most improved and elevated paths, are contravening those plain passages of Scripture which warn against its dangers.

What then is a renunciation of the world? Is it simply protesting against Judaism and Heathenism and other false systems, as distinguished from Christianity? or is it merely a renunciation of those gross vices and open immoralities, which the respectable and refined world itself repudiates and condemns? We fear there are many professors of religion, who would be perplexed to find definite answers to these questions, without including some of their own acknowledged practices and pleasures. Now we hold that there ought to be no such perplexity in the mind of any professed disciple of Christ. For, if non-conformity to the world be a *vital duty*, it must for that very reason be a *plain duty*. For on all essential

points of doctrine and practice, the Gospel is plain. The very fact, that is *the* Gospel, implies such plainness. And to suppose that a point, so vital to our eternal interests, has been left involved in dangerous obscurity, is to impeach the wisdom and goodness of the divine author of Revelation. If, therefore, we find difficulty upon this subject, we may feel assured that the obscurity is not in Revelation itself, but in our own defective and prejudiced moral vision.

The Apostle James presents the very solemn and vital point involved in the text, in a strong light, in a passage already quoted, "Whosoever, therefore, will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God." Of course we are not to understand from this, that a Christian must cherish any unfriendly feelings towards the people of the world. On the contrary, he is required to love every human being, not excepting his worst enemy. In one sense, indeed, the Christian is the truest and best friend of the world. If he were not, he would not be like his Divine Master. For Jesus was em-

phatically and preëminently *the* friend of the world. He so loved it, as to give Himself up to die for it ; and during His sojourn in it, “ He went about doing good.” Every disciple ought, as far as possible, to breathe the spirit and imitate the example of his Master, by doing “ good unto all men as he has opportunity.” He is, therefore, not at liberty to disesteem the favourable regards of worldly friends or decline their kindly offices. Nay, within proper limits, he is bound to seek the favor of his fellow man. It was in this sense that the Apostle became “ all things to all men.” No Christian has a right to withdraw entirely from intercourse with the people of the world, or to insulate himself from their sympathies. Such a spirit is alike inconsistent with the charity and the humility of the Gospel. It is akin to that Pharisaism which says, “ Stand by, I am holier than thou.”

The meaning, therefore, of such Scripture phrases as being “ conformed to the world,”—“ loving” it, or being “ a friend” of it,—we apprehend to be just this :—*Habitually preferring*

*it to God as an object of affection and a source of present happiness.* And every natural man so loves and prefers the world. God has not the first place in his affections, nor does he habitually look to God as the source of his present happiness. Such a man, we allow, may feel a sort of reverence for God, and try to offer prayers to Him, and appear to do many things in the name of Christ, and even publicly profess the religion of Christ,—while his supreme affections are fixed on the world. He may retain a fast hold of the world with one hand, while with the other he feebly grasps at the promises of the Gospel,—not as a source of present happiness, but rather as a desirable sort of security from future woe. And although he may eschew the lower and grosser vices of the world, he may still at heart cling habitually to its covetousness, its pride, its pomp and vain-glory. We say *habitually*—for we must distinguish between *acts* and *habits*, or between those *occasional* conformities into which true, but weaker or mistaken Christians may fall, and that settled devotion to the world which con-

stitutes a man ; in the language of St. James, "a friend of the world and the enemy of God." How many *acts* of conformity constitute a *habit*—or how much worldliness may consist with a hope of salvation, we cannot undertake to determine. We have no commission to settle such questions, or to determine how much sin of any sort may, in peculiar circumstances, be consistent with a state of grace. But let none hope to excuse their conformities to this world, on the ground that they are only *occasional* ; especially if they be *wilfully* committed against acknowledged light. For, even occasional external inconsistencies, if they be *wilful* and *presumptuous*, may invalidate our claim to Christian character. Christ has set up a spiritual kingdom in the midst of this world, which is a foreign land—yea, an enemy's country, and no true subject must give aid to surrounding enemies, by countenancing any worldly custom, or encouraging any practice or pleasure inconsistent with the prosperity of that kingdom. And this leads us in the second place :

2. *To direct your attention to one species of*

*worldly conformity, as a fair exemplification of what the text forbids.* Example is proverbially better than precept, and illustration is often more impressive than argument. Perhaps the best way to show the true nature and essential spirit of worldly conformity, is to select some practical example of it, and converge the light of truth upon its various forms. We propose, therefore, in a short series of discourses, to discuss *the fashionable amusement of dancing.* And we have selected this amusement, not because it is more palpably worldly, or obviously inconsistent with a Christian profession, than others, but rather for an opposite reason, or because there is none which, under some of its aspects, can be more speciously defended. Our leading views of this amusement, although drawn chiefly from our own experience and observation, are held in common by the great body of Evangelical Divines of every denomination. And, by way of forestalling charges of eccentricity or ultraism, we beg leave to quote the following extracts from published works of the venerable Bishop of Virginia. In regard to

the duty of preaching upon the subject, he says : “ Some excuse themselves from speaking or preaching about such things by saying, we must aim at the hearts of the people ; that if they be right, all else will be right, and then these things will be relinquished, of course.— Such was not St. Paul’s opinion and practice ; he preached to the heart as much as ever minister did, and yet he preached against ‘ revelings, banquetings,’ and such like things, warning against every inconsistency to which Christians are tempted.” \*

In another work, by the same author, speaking of dancing, he says :

“ †As an amusement, seeing that it is a perversion of an ancient religious exercise, and has ever been discouraged by the sober-minded and pious of all nations, on account of its evil tendencies and accompaniments, we ought conscientiously to inquire, whether its great liability to abuse, and its many acknowledged

\* Meade on the Pastoral Office. Pages 213 and 214.

† Baptismal Vows and Worldly Amusements. Published by Evangelical Society.

abuses, should not make us frown upon it in all its forms?"

To show the general agreement of Evangelical Divines on the subject, take the following brief extract from a work entitled "A Christian Father's Present to his Children," by John Angell James, an eminent dissenting minister of England :

"Have nothing to do with this fascinating, though injurious species of amusement. Besides, what an encroachment does it make upon time, which is demanded for other purposes. How does it dissipate the mind, and poison it with a vain and frivolous taste for dress and personal decoration! How completely does it unfit the soul for piety, and even for the necessary occupations of domestic life!"

The able and accomplished Bishop of Vermont, whose fine poetic and artistic tastes tend to give weight to his judgment in such matters,—thus concludes a discussion of the subject :

"Hence I am obliged to conclude, on the whole, that the hilarity of the ball-room cannot

be truly harmless, because it stands associated, of necessity, with all the evils which I have enumerated. In the period of youthful education, I have shown that dancing is chargeable with the waste of time, the interruption to useful study, the indulgence of personal vanity and display, and the premature incitement of the passions. At the age of maturity, it adds to these no small danger to health, by late hours, flimsy dresses, heated rooms, and exposed persons; while its incongruity with strict Christian sobriety and principle, and its tendency to the love of dissipation, are so manifest, that no ingenuity can make it consistent with the covenant of baptism. It would give me sincere pleasure to have expressed a very different opinion, because I am well aware that few of my readers will relish my unaccommodating sentiments on such a theme. But candor and honesty forbid, and I may not sacrifice what I believe to be the truth, in the service of worldly expediency."

In the prosecution of our subject we shall quote from other eminent Divines of different

denominations ; and especially from our own excellent Bishop, the Bishop of Ohio, who recommends nothing less than the “*entire exclusion*” of this and kindred amusements, as the only safe ground for a professing Christian. And finally, as a test of the current sentiment of our orthodox churches, we shall refer to the publications of the American Tract Society—an association restricted, by its constitution, to the publication of books and tracts on subjects upon which Evangelical Christians are agreed, and therefore, as fair an exponent as can be had, of the unity of evangelical teaching, on any given point of doctrine or practice.

In our next discourse we shall bring up the point of *parental duty* in relation to this subject. Meanwhile, may we all, in spirit, pray, “Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with Thy most gracious favor, and further us with Thy continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy name : and finally, by Thy mercy, obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

## SERMON II.

“For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him.”—GEN. xviii., v. 19.

GOD is an absolute sovereign, and revealed religion, as his published code, extends to all the relations of social and domestic life. Its practical requirements have been in every age substantially the same. The personal piety of the patriarch differed in form, but not in substance from that of the Apostle; and the family religion, which is here commended in the case of Abraham, is essential to the consistency of every Christian parent. Under the Mosaic dispensation, it was enforced by the command given to the Israelites to teach their children the ordinances of God: and in the New Testament we find it clearly recognized, in the apostolic injunction to parents,

to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Every serious thinker, and especially every respecter of sacred writ, must see that the parental relation involves the highest responsibilities. The example, the instruction and the influence of fathers and mothers, in their bearing upon immortal souls, are beyond all human estimate. And, of course, in the instructions of the pulpit, to omit any important note of warning to parents, is to shun to declare an essential part of the counsel of God. As a pastor and a preacher I feel bound, therefore, to notice and expose what I deem a serious error of many parents, in their system of family religion, viz: *schooling their children in the art of dancing, and otherwise encouraging them to indulge in it as a social amusement.*

We venture to suppose, that there may be professing Christian parents, in other respects judicious and consistent, who have yielded, without due consideration, to this specious, innocent-looking, and very fashionable practice. It is chiefly to such persons that we de-

sign to speak, in an affectionate and faithful appeal to principles and precepts of Scripture, which they know they cannot disregard without serious danger. And our effort to expose the error at which we aim, will be comprised in the support of two main propositions, viz :

*I. That dancing, in its ordinary forms as a social amusement, is inconsistent with that spirituality of mind and holiness of conduct which the Scriptures require ; and*

*II. That it is, therefore, wrong for Christian parents to produce and foster in their children a love for that amusement.*

These two propositions, it will be seen, have a necessary logical connection. For, assuming it to be the first desire of every pious parent to have his children believers indeed, living up to the precept, "Be not conformed to this world," what can be more inconsistent, than deliberately and systematically encouraging them to indulge in an amusement plainly at variance with the current requirements of the New Testament? Is it not virtually tying the hearts of their offspring to a worldly idol, and

then praying and hoping that divine grace may ultimately undo the work of their own hands?

But here we may be met, at the threshold, with the query—"Do you expect the world to be revolutionized? This amusement is fixed by custom in the framework of social life, and especially of high life—and do you expect the fabric of society to be reconstructed or remodelled?" We answer, YES—we expect the world to be *morally revolutionized*, just as certainly as we expect it to be *evangelized*, and we believe human society will be essentially changed, as surely as we believe that the whole human race will one day be regenerated. We firmly believe in a coming period, when the knowledge of the Lord shall extend from the rising to the setting sun. And although that day may not come in your time, nor in mine, we believe it will as certainly come as that the predictions of inspiration must prove true. We also believe that the glorious result will be achieved in the use of ordinary means and instrumentalities, and by none more effectual-

ly than that which we are now urging, to wit : the religious training of children, and the careful exclusion from such training of everything which tends to lead their souls from God.

But again, we may be met with a common objection, which, although of no real force, is just specious enough to turn away the truth from reluctant minds : "The children of religious parents, and especially of *rigidly* religious parents," it is said, "do not turn out better than others, but often much worse." We prefer to meet this objection in the forefront of our discussion, because painful occasional instances of defection, from pious families, do occur. Now and then, the perverse power of innate depravity overleaps the barriers of early associations, and breaks down all the influence of good example.

Even a pious parent, who is consistent in every other respect, may, like Eli of old, fail in the due restraint of his children. Improper indulgence of his offspring may be his prominent fault, his *weak* point. Sometimes the

efforts of one parent may be baulked by the opposition, or the careless or evil example, of the other ; and, in other instances, a parent may be thwarted by domestic influences and associations, which it may be difficult, if not impossible, to control. But whatever the causes may have been, it is certainly true that striking examples of divers forms of depravity may be cited from the families of eminently pious laymen as well as clergymen. Three of the sons of Wilberforce, that distinguished Christian statesman and eminent light of Evangelical religion, have apostatized to Romanism. And the most blasphemous, obscene and polluted young man that I can remember, in all my early associations, was the son of a pious and exemplary minister of the Presbyterian church. Other brothers and sisters of the family were pious, but the light and warmth of truth, in *his* case, seemed to wither and putrefy, rather than cultivate and improve, his moral sense. Aaron Burr, it will be recollected, was the son of a distinguished clergyman, and the grandson, on the maternal side, of Jonathan

Edwards, a theologian second in eminence to none since the days of the Apostles. Other and living examples, from both sexes, might be cited. And what do they prove? why, nothing to the purpose for which they are often quoted—nothing to a discerning Christian mind—but that superlative deceitfulness and desperate wickedness, which Scripture ascribes to the natural heart. And how “fully set in them to do evil” must be the hearts of those sons and daughters who utterly forget the instructions, warnings and prayers of pious fathers and mothers, and persevere for life in the open highways of worldliness, or vice. We say “*persevere for life.*” for candid observation will teach us that the children of pious parents, who grow up in carelessness, and even for a time pursue a vicious course, often turn from the error of their ways. And in such instances they generally ascribe their conversion, under God, to their early instruction.

Examples of final and fatal corruption nevertheless do occur, under apparently faithful training. And what are they but *exceptions*

to a general rule,—exceptions blazoned and conspicuous, just because they are exceptions? Suffer us to appeal to what we deem credible statistics upon the subject, in the following extract from a periodical work :\*

“ Another general impression has been, that the children of ministers and deacons were worse than all others. So much was once said about it, that explorations were actually made to test its truth by a former Secretary of the Massachusetts Sabbath School Board. In two hundred and sixty-eight families of ministers and deacons canvassed, twelve hundred and ninety children over fifteen years of age were found ; of these eight hundred and eighty-eight, or almost three-fourths, were hopefully pious ; seven hundred and ninety-four were members of churches, and sixty-one were ministers ; while only seventeen were dissipated. The impression is manifestly false ; such facts cannot be gathered from among irreligious families.”

About thirty years ago we made a like ex-

\* Kenyon Collegian.

periment. We were acquainted with twenty ministers, of different denominations, whose children had reached the age of maturity; and we found in their families more church-members, more ministers, and fewer immoral persons, than could have been found in the same number of families taken, in alphabetical or geographical order, from any given point in the community. Let us not then undervalue faithful training on account of a few failures. To do so were as unwise as to undervalue steam navigation, because an occasional explosion shocks our sensibilities; or to depreciate the blessings of the natural sun, because occasionally, in extreme hot weather, a poor day-laborer faints and perishes under his stroke. Yea, as well might we neglect plowing and sowing, because every twentieth or perhaps every fifth stalk proves a failure. And if pious parents must endure the affliction of following to a hopeless grave a child of much prayer and care, let them not add to their cup the bitter ingredient of having deliberately contributed to the unhappy result. The

Christian parent in such a case, in mourning over his failures and imperfections (and who is free from them?), will find enough in his occasional sins—of quick temper and rash words—of hasty indulgences—imprudent checks or inconsiderate neglects; yea, sins enough of this impulsive sort to bow his heart with a—“God be merciful to me a sinner!” without adding the bitter thought of having set the feet of his children in dangerous paths—of having by systematic training, in deference to fashion and custom, set their faces *worldward*, and then hoped that God, by a sort of miracle of grace, would turn them *heavenward*. Now, whether educating children in a dancing school be not *one mode* of setting their faces toward the ways of this world, is a question which we shall try to argue fairly and faithfully, and yet we trust charitably and affectionately.

But why, it may be asked, propose to spend so much time on this single amusement? Is it not after all a trivial matter?—is it not *a little thing*? We answer, No; and if it be in one sense little, it may, in a very fair paradox, be

called "*a little thing great.*" And *great* it certainly is, in the estimation of many of its votaries. It would be difficult to name a fashionable amusement more generally popular, or to many young people more intensely fascinating. So much so that those who have been schooled and indulged in it, are wont to consider an evening party without it, exceedingly dull and insipid. It is their favorite stimulant. The wine-bibber does not feel more disappointed and fretted at missing the decanter from the well-spread board, than they do in failing to meet the expected exhilarations of the dance.

And if it be indeed a thing so very little, why is it that professing Christians refuse to relinquish it?—why is it that young persons sometimes turn away from the solemn duty of communion, rather than agree to renounce it? Nay, this amusement is far from being insignificant in the eyes of many who indulge in it. It is a great idol! And hence when it is smitten by the Word preached, which is the sword of the Spirit, a strong sensation is often produced. And sometimes a loud note of dissatisfaction

is heard, not unlike that of the craftsmen of Ephesus, when, being in danger of losing their gains, they cried out,—“Great is Diana of the Ephesians !”

And among all the idols which the god of this world has set up, we know of none which is more ingeniously carved and clad, more carefully located, or sagaciously self-defended. It is not only specious in its aspect, but stationed in a territory so seemingly doubtful, that even good Christians are often a little perplexed to determine whether it stands within or without the boundaries of Christ's kingdom. And, withal, this idol is so merry in its visage, and so fantastic in its garb, and has levity! levity! so written all over it, that the preacher is afraid to condemn it lest he should provoke a smile, or be criticised for lowering the solemn dignity of the pulpit! And hence he goes on, only mentioning it perhaps in his generalizing about the pomps and vanities of the world. And if he does speak of it more specifically and pointedly, even members of the church, who are in other respects apparently

consistent, often ask "Why, what harm is there in dancing?" and especially "what harm can there be in sending little children to a dancing school?" Both of these questions, you will perceive, are involved in the two main propositions already stated; and in our next discourse we shall offer arguments in support of the first, viz.: "That dancing, under its ordinary forms, as a social amusement, is inconsistent with that spirituality of mind and holiness of conduct which the Scriptures require." And may that blessed Spirit, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, give effect to whatever truth we may be permitted to utter. Amen.

## SERMON III.

“Let us watch and be sober.”—I THESS., v., 6.

PERHAPS it may be asked, why have we chosen the amusement of dancing as a subject for comment? Might not our strength and time be more profitably employed on other amusements more exceptionable and vitiating in their character, such as the theatre, the race-field, the card-table, or the billiard saloon? We have already intimated that we have not chosen the dance because we consider it more palpably worldly or inconsistent than others; but rather because it is more specious and apparently harmless. And if by concentrating the light, we can show that this amusement has its dark spots and objectionable features, the greater obliquity and defectiveness of others will be seen as a matter of course. For no one

who sees the inconsistency of dancing, will venture to name the theatre, the circus, or the card-table, in connection with a sober profession of religion. You will perceive, then, that we are in hopes of shedding a light which will strike on all sides, much beyond the particular topic at which it is directly aimed.

Suffer us to repeat our two main propositions :

*I. That Dancing under its ordinary forms, as a social amusement, is inconsistent with that spirituality of mind and holiness of conduct, which Scripture requires. And,*

*II. That it is, therefore, wrong for Christian parents to produce and foster in their children a love for that amusement.*

In accordance with an intimation in the conclusion of our last sermon, we propose to offer arguments in support of the first of these propositions, and we shall first state them successively in summary form, and then proceed to amplify and enforce them.

I. We object to this amusement, as inconsistent with that habitual sobriety and

vigilance enjoined in our text, and in parallel passages :—" Let us watch and be sober !"— " Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."—" And what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch."—" Be sober, be vigilant ; for your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour."

II. We object to it, as incompatible with that habitual spirit of devotion which is enjoined in such texts as these :—" Continuing instant in prayer,"—" Praying always,"—" Pray without ceasing."

III. As adverse to that Heavenly mindedness which Christians should aspire to, agreeably to the following injunctions : " Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."—" While we look not on the things which are seen and temporal, but on the things which are not seen and eternal."—" Our conversation is in Heaven."

IV. Because by engaging in it, the professing Christian offends many of his brethren, (call them, if you please, weaker brethren,) contrary to the spirit of the following pre-

cepts : “ Avoid all appearance of evil.”—“ If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, then walkest thou not charitably.”—“ If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth.”

V. We object to indulging in this amusement, as inconsistent with the spirit of that petition of the Lord’s Prayer, which reads : “ Lead us not into temptation.” And,

VI. Because it is unfavorable to that habitual preparation for death, which it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to cultivate : “ Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.”—“ Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”—“ Having your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel.”—“ Behold, I die daily.”

Let us proceed to extend and enforce each of these arguments : and,

1st. We object to this amusement, as inconsistent with that habitual sobriety and vigilance required in our text and in parallel passages : “ Let us watch and be sober.”—

“ Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”—“ What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.”—“ Be sober, be vigilant ; for your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.” Now we maintain that dancing is an amusement too light and frivolous to be harmonized with such injunctions. Dr. Adam Clarke quotes Cicero as saying : “ *Nemo sobrius saltat* ”—“ No sober man dances.” And what does the modern world call this amusement ? “ Tripping it on the light fantastic toe !” This is the world’s own definition of one of her own favorite amusements ; and it is certainly vivid, poetic, and true to the life. And what right, we ask, in all conscience and common sense, has the Christian, who is required to be vigilant and sober-minded, to indulge in the fantastic trippings and giddy whirlings of the gay dancing assembly ?

It is sometimes said that dancing is a very pretty amusement for little children. So we think ; and if it could be *confined* to children, and only engaged in at proper hours, and in

suitable places and associations, we do not know that it would be objectionable. Indeed, we have sometimes been tempted to regret that an amusement so well adapted to little children should be spoiled by its unavoidable connections and dangerous tendencies. But that which makes it, in itself, considered fit for little children, is just what contributes to make it inconsistent in Christians, and even in youthful Christians. For every Christian whose vision is presumed to have been turned from things temporal to things eternal, ought to be able to say, in reference to all such wordly amusements: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." It may be said, we know, that young people are naturally lively and cheerful, and ought not to be too much restrained. We grant it. And there is certainly a subdued, sober cheerfulness, distinguishable from frivolity, which is becoming even in young Christians. But if it be true that youthful Christians are naturally lively,

or prone to levity, why insist on stimulating their native vivacity with this highly exhilarating amusement? Their propensity to levity is one of their chief temptations. It needs restraint rather than incitement—a sedative rather than a stimulant. Such, at least, appears to have been the opinion of St. Paul, for in writing to young women, he exhorts them to be “sober, chaste, keepers at home.” And of young men he says: “Exhort young men to be sober-minded.” Now we do not believe that St. Paul, if living at the present day, would discountenance a moderate degree of cheerfulness in young people; but we cannot think that he who counselled young men and young women to be sober-minded, would deem it expedient or consistent to excite and increase their natural vivacity with the artificial appliances of the dance. This is very like adding fuel to a dangerous fire, or blowing a flame which already threatens to blaze and flare, beyond those moderate limits which can be deemed entirely safe and desirable. But,

2d. We object to this amusement, as incon-

sistent with that habitual spirit of devotion which is enjoined in such texts as these:—"Pray without ceasing,"—"Continuing instant in prayer"—"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit"—that is, always preserve a spirit of prayer—realize at all times the presence of God—and let your habitual frame be such, as to enable you at any time to offer at least a silent ejaculation.

But we reserve the expansion of this argument for another occasion; and as a good preparation for it, let us endeavor to answer one of the many objections which are apt to arise in the discussion of the subject.

"After all," it may be said, "you cannot prove dancing to be *immoral*?—and is it any worse than other things which professing Christians, who themselves condemn it, often do?—such as indulging in ill-natured gossip, or petty scandal—uttering harsh judgments—taking advantage in bargainings—light reading—light music—singing silly songs—foolish jestings, &c." Now, we are not among those who believe that dancing, under its more ordi-

nary forms, is immoral in itself, or intrinsically impure; but we must be careful in making this admission, to say that we believe its tendencies to be dangerous. And we shall endeavor to show, under the proper head, that it often leads to dissipation, intemperance and lewdness.\* But let it be distinctly under-

\* In conceding that dancing as an ordinary social amusement is not *per se* impure, we by no means include in the concession such dances as the waltz, or the modern *polka*.—Even Roman Catholic Divines, who are not over rigid in proscribing this amusement, are not disposed to tolerate it under such forms.

The following is an extract from the Lenten Pastoral of the Romanist Archbishop Cullen, which was read at all the Chapels in Dublin :

“Never engage in those improper dances imported from other countries, and retaining foreign names, such as polkas and waltzes, which are so repugnant to the notions of strict Christian morality, are condemned by many of the highest and most respectable members of society, and are at direct variance with that purity and modesty of the female character for which Ireland has been ever distinguished.”

Nor can we allow that a proper degree of purity is not invaded by fashionable modes of dressing, in which females often appear in dancing assemblies. Such modes, both of dancing and dressing, are probably of foreign origin, and perhaps they may be referred to the same modern refinement which allows ladies and gentlemen to exchange criticisms, as *spectators* and admirers of *more than semi-nude* paintings and statuary.

stood that the question now is, not whether dancing is immoral in itself or according to the world's standard, or whether it be as bad, or worse, than petty scandal or ill-natured gossip, or harsh judging, or song-singing, or light music, or many like things. Nay, the question which we are now discussing is simply this:—“Whether dancing, under its ordinary forms as a social amusement, is not inconsistent with that spirituality of mind and holiness of conduct which the Scriptures require?” Most obviously this question can only be tried by the standard to which it refers—viz: Scripture—and Scripture only. We have never asserted, nor are we weak enough to attempt to prove, that this amusement is intrinsically immoral, according to the low and compromising standard of the fashionable world. And if it could be shown, to a demonstration, that there are a thousand things daily practiced in the gay world, which are far more exceptionable;—nay, that there are far greater inconsistencies occasionally in the conduct of those very professing Christians, who eschew the

dance ; it would be all nothing to the purpose. For if indulging in this amusement be indeed inconsistent with that spirituality and holiness which Scripture requires, then it is *wrong*—yea, *bad*—*bad* in the light of Scripture ; and it continues *bad* even if it could be shown that there are innumerable practices and pleasures which are far *worse*. Away, then, with all side issues, which only serve to divert attention from the real point in hand. For if this amusement be inconsistent with the standard of Scripture, any Christian who believes so, and yet perseveres in it, does it at his peril. His persistence is anything but safe.

If it should be argued, that the standard of spirituality which we hold up is rarely attained in these days,—we grant it. But the question immediately recurs, *is it the true standard of Scripture?* If yea, then we may not hold up any other. And is it not the plain duty of every Christian to aspire to the highest standard of holiness : and in so doing, to “lay aside every weight?”—and if this amusement be a hindrance in running the Christian race, it should be at once renounced.

We have sometimes compared true piety to a high mountain, with its summit illumined with that brighter than earthly light which shone on the mount of transfiguration. And although this mountain is ascended by pilgrims, walking on different grades and at various distances, the word of command to all alike is—onward! upward! And greatly do those deceive themselves who imagine that they can settle upon the least and lowest grade and there remain, holding communion with the inhabitants of the valley, breathing the same atmosphere and sharing in the same pleasures and pastimes. They may fancy that they are occupying some lower projection of the sacred mountain, while they are in reality only resting upon some contiguous hillock of the valley. And when the earthquake of Divine Judgment shall come and separate them, they will be engulfed in the frightful chasm. Take heed then, brethren, for there will be professing Christians in that day, expecting to be owned by the Lord of Glory, to whom he will

say, "Depart from me, I never knew you!"—  
"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord,  
Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but  
he that doeth the will of my Father which is  
in Heaven."

## SERMON IV.

“Praying always.”—**EPHES.** vi. 18.

“Set your affection on things above.”—**COLOS.** iii. 2.

WE are engaged in a course of sermons on the amusement of dancing. The subject is certainly in many respects peculiar. To discuss it at all essential points with becoming gravity is somewhat difficult. For dancing, if not literally levity itself, is certainly one of its plainest exemplifications. And there are few things more difficult than to discuss *levity* with *gravity*. The preacher is constantly in danger of imparting to his arguments the frivolous odors which are inherent in his subject.

Most sincerely do we deprecate the appearance of levity in the sacred desk. We appreciate, we hope, the admirable warning of a pious poet, “not to break a jest when we should woo a soul.” But in wooing souls it

may be necessary to expose and remove a jest which stands in the way. Such appears to be the truth here; for we know of no language by which we could better characterize this amusement of dancing than by calling it "*a jest*,"—an immense systematized "*jest*,"—yea a mighty colossal *levity*, with one foot in the world and the other in the church, indicating the claim of its worshippers to pass, according to their pleasure, from the one into the other. Now to expose the bearing of this idolatry upon the spirituality of the church and its pressure upon the welfare of souls, with due fidelity and yet with proper solemnity, may, at some points, be difficult. And if there should be an occasional seeming deviation from the gravity of our position, it may be fairly excused. The very frivolities which surround this idol are among its main defences against the assaults of the pulpit.

"But," it may be said, "you cannot cast down this idol—and even if you could, the world would soon set up another, equally, if not more exceptionable; for the world will

have its amusements." We grant it—the world will have its amusements. Nor do we think it likely that it would find a substitute in which professing Christians could any more consistently unite. For *most* of the fashionable amusements of the world, and especially those entertainments which are most pleasing to its votaries, are not at all likely to be safe or consistent for Christians. Nay, Christians are supposed to have tastes, views and feelings in many respects (of course not in all) very different if not exactly opposite to those of the world. And to expect them to enter cordially and consistently into any public entertainment, spiced with all the ingredients necessary to please, in the highest degree, a thorough worldly taste, is to expect to find a rare exception to a general rule—a rule plainly indicated by the Apostle, when he asks: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" Any amusement which is thoroughly worldly in its spirit and tendency, is unfit for Christians. just *because it is thus thoroughly worldly.* Whether

dancing, under its ordinary forms, be an amusement of this sort, is substantially the proposition which we are discussing ; and in support of the affirmative we proceed to offer you the second of six arguments, which we briefly announced in our last discourse, viz. :

“ That this amusement is inconsistent with that habitual settled devotion inculcated in the precepts : ‘ Pray without ceasing’—‘ praying always’—‘ continuing instant in prayer.’ ” That is, always pursue a spirit of prayer,—place yourself in no circumstances or position in which you cannot consistently and comfortably realize the presence of God, and offer at least a silent petition for his blessing upon whatever business or recreation you may be engaged in. And is the dancing-room a favorable atmosphere for the flame of devotion ? Is it easy to realize the gracious presence of God there and offer up silent prayer ? And when a young Christian returns from such scenes at a late hour of the night, and goes upon his knees before he retires to rest, can he pray ? can he pray in the spirit while his temples are yet

throbbing with the excitements of the scenes which he has just left, and the lively music is still sounding in his ears, and the gay dancers moving before his vision? Be it understood that we speak not now to those who *say* their prayers, but to those who know by experience what is the spirit of prayer. Now, if this amusement at each successive return destroys the devotion of one evening and sends the young Christian prayerless to his couch, it destroys far more than it is worth. And if its tendency, when persevered in, is to grieve the Holy Spirit, who "helpeth our infirmities," what greater injury can be imagined? For what is more important than prayer?

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
The Christian's native air:  
His watchword at the gates of death;  
He enters heaven with prayer."

If it should be said that there are many other amusements which interrupt the spirit of prayer: we reply, that whenever a Christian finds that such is the obvious tendency of any amusement, he should renounce it at once. He

cannot have a better proof of its inconsistency. But while we admit that there may be many other kinds of levity which are injurious to the spirit of prayer, the point of our objection to this is, that it is levity, *systematically* sustained by the world, and engaged in by professing Christians, wilfully and *premeditatedly*, with a full fore-knowledge of its nature and probable consequences. And when a professing Christian enters on a scene of amusement, with a foreknowledge of its probable, if not certain, evil effects upon his spirit of devotion, is it not a species of presumption?

The difference between such premeditated and purposed levity, and that which in young people is only occasional, impulsive and undesigned, is plain enough. But a simple illustration may make it more impressive. If a youthful traveller in driving his vehicle over a strange road should meet with an accident, we should be disposed to sympathize with him. Even if he had not been as careful and as observant of the way as he might have been, we should still remember his youth and not be inclined to

deal hardly with him. But if he had been fully forewarned that there was some rock or steep or dangerous pass in the road ; and to gratify some whim or present inclination, had driven recklessly on and injured both himself and his vehicle, we might still feel bound to pity him ; but our pity would not be unmingled with censure. Now a like judgment is to be pronounced in spiritual things ; for when a young Christian, from the liveliness or natural thoughtlessness of youth falls into *levity* and injures his habitual spirit of devotion, we may trust that his Heavenly Father, who knows his frame, will not deal severely with him. But, when prejudiced by strong inclination, he shuts his ears against just arguments and due warnings, and encounters the perils of this or any other fashionable amusement, there is no such extenuation for him. And if, in driving on, he break the wheels of that chariot of devotion in which his spirit is wont, like "Elijah," to ride towards *heaven*, he adds presumption to carelessness. And should the Spirit be withdrawn from him, it would be but the just reward of

his doings. Let it be understood then, that our objection to indulging in this amusement is not merely because, like other levity, it breaks the spirit of devotion, but because it is levity which may be foreseen and avoided—levity systematized and plainly stamped with the seal of this world, so that to engage in it seems to savor more or less of presumption. But,

3dly. “We object to this amusement as adverse in its tendency to that heavenly mindedness which Christians should aspire and seek after, agreeably to such teachings and requisitions as: ‘Set your affections on things above;’ ‘look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal;’ ‘our conversation is in heaven;’ ‘i. e., our citizenship is in heaven, remembering always that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.’” And is the ball-room, with its associations, favorable to such heavenly-mindedness? Does the mind ascend by an easy transition from the scenes of the gay dancing assembly, to those of heaven?

We grant that there are temporal pleasures and recreations which are not inconsistent with heavenly-mindedness. And there are many temporal duties which must be performed. The thoughts of every Christian should, if possible, be so regulated as to pass and repass from heaven to earth, as the angels ascended and descended upon the ladder of Jacob, without losing their heavenly purity or contracting aught of the defilements of earth. We must at least aim at such perfection, whether we can attain it or not. And when any mere amusement, whether private or public, individual or social, interrupts our spirituality of mind, it should be renounced at once. Nay, even our temporal *business*, however lawful in itself, must not be allowed to interfere with a right spirit before God. And to affirm that any lawful business must *necessarily* interfere with our prescribed duty to God, is to bring divine precepts into direct conflict with each other. For the same inspired authority which calls upon us to be diligent in business, requires us to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." And when

any temporal business does plainly interfere with personal piety, we may be assured that it is unlawful in itself, or pursued in a wrong spirit or to an unlawful excess. That there are temptations in every vocation of life will not be denied ;—our world is a world of temptation ; and whenever the proper business of a Christian leads him into scenes and associations of danger, he may hope that the grace of God will be sufficient for him. For wherever plain duty calls, there we may go, trusting that He who prescribes the duty will not permit us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. But when no duty calls,—when Christians enter places of mere amusement and self-gratification, and expect the grace of God to shield them from the consequence of their own temerity and imprudence, they consult presumption, rather than that true faith, which leads us to watch unto prayer. An illustration to enforce this important distinction, between faith and presumption, may not be impertinent.

Here is an infected district, in which a dangerous malady prevails. Now a man who has

very important business to transact in such a district might be excused for entering it : or a physician, or even a benevolent minded man, may be justified in going there to save the lives of his fellow beings : or a soldier bound to obey the orders of his commanding officer at all hazards, might feel it necessary to encounter the danger. If the individual in any one of these cases should take the disease, he would be an object of pure sympathy and compassionate care. But if a man should enter such an infected district to indulge in drinking or gaming, or to engage in some mere sport or pastime, or even from idle curiosity, or any like selfish motive, and in so doing contract the epidemic, we might pity him indeed, but it would be pity—not for his misfortune, but for his fault.

So here:—when a Christian voluntarily enters the atmosphere of a dancing room, to indulge in that exciting amusement, and thereby affects the health of his soul, we may lament over him, but we must mingle with the lamentation censure for his presumption. And what,

we again ask, is more likely to grieve the Holy Spirit than the sin of presumption? "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins," was the fervent prayer of the psalmist. And can a believer, consistently with this prayer, enter an apartment of the temple of the God of this world, over the door of which is written—"*The idol of gayety is worshipped here.*" Can he, in the world's own phrase, "enter into the spirit of the amusement," and unite it with a Christian spirit? Can he breathe freely the breath of prayer, whilst inhaling the rank incense of worldly Idolatry? We think not. And such, in our judgment, is the opinion of a large majority of the most judicious evangelical Christians, who have maturely considered the subject. But this brings us to our next argument:

"That the professor of religion, by engaging in this amusement, offends and grieves many of his brethren (call them, if you please, *weaker* brethren), contrary to the spirit of the following precepts—"Abstain from all appearance of evil. If thy brother be grieved with thy meat,

now walkest thou not charitably. If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth." This argument, with others, will be extended in our next discourse.

But in view of what we have urged, it may be said :

"Your standard is altogether too high. Such refined spirituality, such heavenly-mindedness may possibly do for the clergy, but it is quite too exalted for the laity."

But do we find in the Scriptures more than one standard of holiness for clergy and laity? We think not. For although there are official distinctions and qualifications which are peculiar to the clergy, so far as *personal* as well as *family* religion is concerned, we know of no single precept binding upon the one class, which is not equally obligatory upon both. "Be ye holy—for I am holy,"—"Be not conformed to this world,"—are commands of the Almighty addressed to every Christian, be his office or position what it may, in the visible church. And when God says, "watch and be

sober—pray always,” “set your affection on things above,” he speaks not to you or to me only, but to every believer, no matter what be his calling or condition in life. Nay, this distinction between the personal holiness required in the clergyman, and in the layman, is factitious and Popish. It is the religion of orders; that spurious standard of righteousness, by which a compromising and corrupt church can expand her bosom to embrace the extremes of ascetism and worldly gayety; including, on opposite sides, the self-macerated recluse clad in coarse garments, and the most gaily decked worldling that flutters in the dance. And not only so, but she claims the right to apply the *surplus merits* of the one to the *deficiencies* of the other.

We are happy to find these views (expressed several years ago in our own pulpit,) so fully endorsed by the Bishop of Vermont, in the following extracts from a late work already referred to.

“The first and great rule of Christian morality is, to follow Christ as the high and perfect model of social life and duty. But who

can associate the following of Christ with the dancing party or the ball-room? Who can reconcile the appropriate style of dress with the apostle's precept, that women should be 'soberly apparelled?' Who would be willing to see even an ordinary minister of the Gospel take his place in the dance, notwithstanding there may be some who fancy it all right enough in his family?"

"But it may be said that such reasoning proves too much. There is a difference universally acknowledged between the clergy and the laity, so that many things are allowed in the one which would be totally inadmissible in the other. To this, however, I answer: Not so, in the moral principle of the Gospel, which makes Christ the example of us all. The principle is enjoined in Scripture on the people, as well as on the ministry. 'Be ye followers of me,' saith St. Paul, 'as I also am of Christ.'

"For, although it is their office, not only to preach the Gospel, and administer the sacraments, but to set a good example to their

people, as leaders in the path to heaven; yet the path itself is the same to all; and it is manifestly absurd to expect the minister to *lead*, if the flock be under no obligation to *follow*."

"The Church of Rome, indeed, for many ages has patronized this popular, though perfectly baseless, distinction between the priests, the monks, and nuns, on the one side, and the laity on the other. And, therefore, within her pale, there is no inconsistency whatever between the unrestrained enjoyment of worldly pleasure and the character of the regular communicant, so far as laymen or women are concerned."

If a young minister were to engage, even in the most temperate manner, in the dance of the best regulated evening party, he would be regarded with astonishment by the most decided advocates and admirers of the amusement. If they did not at once lose confidence in his ministerial character, they might, as the more charitable alternative, suspect him of insanity. And if an older minister were to invite a large gay company to his house, and engage a band

of music, and throw open his rooms for dancing, and supply the usual refreshments, and allow the entertainment to be kept up to the hour of midnight, he would at once lose the respect of every sober-minded member of his congregation. And yet it is as certainly lawful for a young minister to dance, or for an older one to give a dancing party, as it is for any member of his communion to do either.

If it should be said that a minister is bound to make sacrifices, and to practice self-denials, for the sake of his usefulness, and even to forego his lawful rights and recreations when they are offensive to the consciences of his pious, although perhaps weaker brethren, or even to the prejudices of sober-minded members of the community ; we admit the force of the argument. The apostle uttered the same in substance, when he said—" All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient,"—" All things are lawful, but all things edify not,"—a precept for holy conversation, given, with others already quoted, not *exclusively* for the benefit of the clergy, but for *every* professed

disciple of Christ. And if it can be shown that professing Christians, by indulging in or favoring this amusement, offend many of their brethren, or otherwise impair their usefulness, they are bound, by this very precept of the apostle, to renounce it. But this is a point, which will be more fully argued in our next discourse.

## SERMON V.

**"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, then walkest thou not charitably."—ROMANS xiv., 15.**

**"Lead us not into temptation."—MATTH. vi., 13.**

**"Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."—MATTH. xxiv., 44.**

IN commencing a course of sermons on dancing, we proposed to hold up that amusement as an exemplification of worldly conformity. This object we have steadily kept in view. Every argument urged has been based upon some precept, or principle of Scripture, serving to indicate the line between the world and the spiritual kingdom of Christ. And each precept has tended to bring before the conscience the question : Am I a Christian indeed ? Am I *of* the world, or *of* Christ ? Of course, our arguments have been addressed *directly* to professing Christians only. But not without the

hope of indirectly awakening in the unconverted mind the question: What have *I* to do with these things? Have *I* part or lot in this matter?

But we may be asked, must real Christians then withdraw themselves entirely from the world? stand aloof from all evening parties or mixed companies, and avoid all social intercourse with worldly people? To such questions we have already, in substance, answered in the negative. We now repeat that negative. Christians have no *right* to withdraw themselves entirely from social intercourse with the world. They should be, in common phrase, "*in* the world but not *of* it." Hold *intercourse* with it without being *conformed* to it. And we maintain that there are common grounds, not only of business but of social intercourse, on which they may meet with their worldly friends. For example, we should see nothing objectionable in their attending an evening party not too *large* or too *crowded*, held at a seasonable hour, and not swayed and controlled entirely by a worldly

spirit. In such a mixed company, a Christian might engage in a cheerful and improving conversation, and not only so, but religious conversation, if he met with those who were congenial to him. He might enjoy good music, good drawings, and partake thankfully of generous refreshments. But if his worldly friends insist on giving a prevalent worldly tone and spirit to the company by introducing the dance; if they must bring in their idol, and commence their whirling, tripping adorations, and expect the Christian to give up his thoughts and feelings to a complete worldly current, and continue to witness sights and sounds so uncongenial to his tastes: they expect too much. And who, that has witnessed such scenes, has not remarked how immediately the introduction of the dance makes the whole spirit of a mixed company thoroughly worldly. It is no longer *common* ground. And let the professing Christian, who would be found faithful, take care how he compromises on such occasions. He will not secure less of the *real* respect of his worldly friends by acting with

decision ; nay, he cannot do them a greater kindness than always to keep the line between him and them distinctly marked. And let this be done, not in the proud pharisaical spirit of,—“stand by, I am holier than thou,”—but with gentleness and affection, practically saying,—“Come thou with *us*, and we will do thee good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” And while Christians should in the true spirit of the apostle “seek to please all men in all things” to their spiritual good, they should take care not to carry the principle so far as to partake in or sanction any amusement inconsistent with the requirements of Scripture. That the amusement of dancing is thus inconsistent, is, in substance, the proposition which we are now maintaining ; and in support of which we shall proceed to amplify our three remaining arguments, the first of which is :

“That the professor of religion, by engaging in this amusement, is offending many of his weaker brethren.” This is the lowest Scriptural ground on which we can place the subject.

And yet, low as it is, it is sufficient for our purpose. For, if a communicant of the church, by indulging in the dance, weakens the confidence of his brethren in his personal piety, and thereby impairs his own usefulness, it is his plain duty to renounce it, on the principle of such passages of the Scripture as the following:—“Abstain from all appearance of evil;”—“If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth;”—“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything wherein thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak;”—“If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.”

We think we might venture to take bolder ground and call upon the professor of religion, who engages in this amusement, to renounce it out of respect to the weight of Evangelical authority and example. For we could easily show, that a very large majority of the Evangelical Divines of the country are with us on this point. But if the advocate for it still says: “I claim the right to judge for myself;

I call no man master, or set of men masters, upon earth;" then we must only beg him to regard us, and all who are with us, as "weak brethren," and treat us accordingly. If he has reached some high point on the mount, from which he can look down upon us and see that we are all in error, and that some strange fanatical blindness on this subject has smitten the great mass of Evangelical clergy, and even many pious laity, then let him consider their very weakness as a sufficient reason for abstaining from the indulgence.

That we do not assert too much in claiming that the weight of Evangelical authority is clearly with us on this subject, we have already partially proved by quotations from eminent divines. But allow us to add an extract from a little tract, written many years ago, we believe, by the venerable Dr. Lyman Beecher, entitled—"A Time to Dance." The author traces dancing through the various forms in which it is mentioned in the Bible, and sums up with the following conclusions :

1. That dancing was a religious act, both of the true and also of idol worship.

2. That it was practised exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or great victories.

3. That it was performed by maidens only.

4. That it was performed usually in the daytime, in the open air, in highways, fields, or groves.

5. That men who perverted dancing from a sacred use to purposes of amusement, were deemed infamous.

6. That no instances of dancing are found upon record in the Bible, in which the two sexes united in the exercise, either as an act of worship or amusement.

7. That there is no instance upon record of social dancing for amusement, except that of the "vain fellows," devoid of shame; of the irreligious families described by Job, which produced increased impiety, and ended in destruction; and of Herodias, which terminated in the rash vow of Herod, and the murder of John the Baptist.

This tract bears the imprint of the "American Tract Society," and we have another be-

fore us, bearing the following title—"DANCING AS A SOCIAL AMUSEMENT BY PROFESSED CHRISTIANS, OR THEIR CHILDREN." We need not remind you that the "American Tract Society" is sustained by Christians of every Evangelical denomination, and is, therefore, the fairest representative that can be found of sound Protestant sentiment, upon any point, of doctrine, or practice pertaining to the "common salvation."

If it be true then, that the great mass of Evangelical authority is with us; we can see but one of two positions to be taken by the advocate of dancing, viz: He must allow that his spiritual vision is too dim to perceive the evil of it, and then he ought to respect the weight of authority: or else, he must contend that he sees more clearly than the majority its entire consistency: and if the latter, he is bound to yield to the prejudices of his weaker brethren. With either horn of this dilemma, we think we can push aside the most specious defences of this fashionable amusement. We proceed, therefore, to our next argument:

“That the amusement of the dance, in its ordinary forms, is in conflict with that petition of the Lord’s Prayer, which reads ; “Lead us not into temptation.” We have admitted, in a former discourse, that we do not consider dancing *in itself* immoral.\* And while we allow that there are some forms of it, which are offensive to common delicacy, we confess that we have never been able to see, in the ordinary motions of the social dance, anything more exceptionable than in the promenading—grouping—or lively gesticulation which is so natural among young people at a cheerful evening party. We always regret to hear the mere physical motions of the *ordinary* dance indiscriminately identified with vulgar impurities. Such exaggerated assaults often, we fear, produce a reaction in favor of the amusement. But while we cannot consider dancing, in its ordinary forms, as impure in itself, we certainly believe its tendency to evil brings it into conflict with the prayer, “Lead us not into temptation.” We know not how a delicate young

\* See note on page 42.

Christian, after having recited this prayer in the morning, can consistently remain to a late hour of the night, engaged in a pleasure, which, from its very nature, opens the doors and windows of the heart to temptation. Of its moral dangers to young men, we have no doubt. In the best circles of society, the *sequel* of the dance, if fairly given, would often reveal facts painful to every well regulated mind. Let it not be said that young men who give way to temptation on such occasions, would easily find others for indulging the same intemperate propensities. We cannot admit the truth of this broad assertion. Candid experience and observation will testify that young men of ordinarily good habits are sometimes precipitated into vicious excess by an impulse given by the excitements of the midnight dance.

Let us suppose a case: There is a youth who has been in most respects well trained by professing Christian parents; he eschews the theatre, the circus, and other like haunts of vice, but his worthy parents, acting under the common notion that the dancing school was

calculated to impart an easy, graceful carriage, and a general polish of manners, took care to have him duly trained in the art. He became fond of it, and under such circumstances, having no suspicion of danger in connection with it, he went forth into the world.

Now methinks, the great adversary, in contemplating such a victim, might reason after this manner: "That young man is not to be reached by any of the ordinary means of temptation, he is too strongly fortified by his early training; nevertheless there is one avenue by which I can approach him; he has been taught to dance, he is very fond of the amusement—its innocence is insured to him by all the sacredness of parental approbation! he hasn't the least suspicion of evil in connection with it; I'll lead him to a ball, I'll take care to have my agents there to tempt him. As he becomes animated with the dance, they shall lead him aside at intervals and ply him with glass after glass; as they know he is a *very moral* and correct young man, they will only take the more pains in ensnaring him. And

when the ball is ended they shall lead him to the bar-room, thence if necessary to other resorts of vice, and finally lay him in his bed, helpless, senseless, degraded and disgraced, to wake in the morning with an aching head and a still more aching conscience." This is no mere fancy sketch. It is a picture for which it would not be difficult to find originals. And even where the issue of the dance is not such gross immorality, what languor of mind and body—what inefficiency for ordinary business—what dissipation of sober thoughtfulness, and what utter disrelish for all spiritual exercises, are its almost inevitable consequences! But lastly :

“ We object to this amusement, because indulgence in it, is not consistent with that habitual preparation for death, which it is the duty and privilege of Christians to cultivate.” “ I die daily,” says the Apostle : that is, I keep death always near me, and endeavor to be prepared for it. Bishop Burnet, in speaking of Archbishop Leighton, says : “ In a free and frequent conversation with him for above two and twenty years, I never saw him in any other

temper than that which I wish to be in, in the last moment of my life." These are certainly bright and eminent examples, and that habitual state of preparation for death, which they exhibit, should be diligently sought after by all true Christians. Whatever is inconsistent with it ought to be renounced. For thus it is written: "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." Now these passages plainly teach us that a Christian should engage in no pleasure or even *business* at which he would not be willing to be found when death comes to summon him to the bar of God. We need no better general test of the consistency of our enjoyments. And who, we ask, in all simplicity and solemnity, would choose to die in a ball-room? We grant that sudden death, under any circumstances, is generally considered

an evil ; perhaps any Christian, if he had his election, would prefer to have some forewarning of his death, and would wish, if it were the will of his maker, to close his life in circumstances fully harmonizing with the solemnity of the event. But this explanation only brings us to the *point* of our question, which will be better understood by presenting it in comparative forms, thus : would a father be as willing to die in a ball-room at midnight, as in his own parlor, while engaged in an innocent romp with his children ? Would a young lady be quite as willing to drop dead in a ball-room dance, as to die suddenly in the fields, while in the act of presenting a flower to one of her young companions ? Would a young man be as willing to die in the midnight dance, as in the counting-room at mid-day, with the pen in his hand, while talking cheerfully with his associates ? No doubt the thought of sudden death in any of these cases gives a shock to the feelings, but there is something in the thought of dying suddenly in a ball-room, which produces a kind of creep-

ing, chilling sensation, which we cannot but think is quite peculiar. And this is a fair test : it is trying the amusement by the light of eternity ; a light before which all misty sophistry vanishes. Nor is it more clear to the man, who has his natural vision, that the sun shines at noon, than it is to the enlightened Christian that he ought to live every day, yea, every hour, as if it might be his last.

We here close our argument in favor of our first main proposition ; and we naturally ask, have we proved that dancing is inconsistent with any one of the Scripture precepts which we have adduced ? For if there be but *one* text of Scripture which clearly condemns it, it ought to be renounced by every respecter of the revealed will of God. Nor is it even necessary, to entitle us to call for such a renunciation, to claim that our arguments are perfectly *conclusive* ; it is enough if any one of them, or all of them united, have produced a *reasonable doubt*. Such a *doubt* brings it directly under the principle applied by the Apostle to another subject, when he says : “ He that doubteth is

condemned if he eat." No mere amusement which is *equivocal* in its character, can be consistently indulged in by a Christian. No affectionate child will do, except from necessity, what he even *apprehends* may be offensive to his parent. No faithful subject will bring his loyalty into suspicion, by venturing for mere amusement into a territory of *doubtful* neutrality, or into *questionable* association with the subjects of a hostile power. If, therefore, we have done no more than shed a *mist*, or raised a *cloud* of reasonable *doubt* respecting this amusement, it ought to be sufficient to satisfy every enlightened conscience of its inconsistency with scriptural piety!

And now, if any of my worldly hearers should ask, What shall *we* do? Would you advise *us* to relinquish this amusement? And if so, what other would you recommend as more innocent or consistent? We answer, None. To recommend to you any amusement from this sacred place, would be a monstrous inconsistency. What! recommend amusement to those who are abiding under the wrath of

God—amusement to those who ought to be seeking at once, and supremely, a saving interest in Christ! What! diversion to those who are every moment exposed to that sentence: “Depart from me ye accursed, into everlasting fire!” What! discuss the propriety of dancing as an amusement for those who, if they dance at all, must dance on the thin and uncertain platform of human life, without knowing how soon, or at what hour, or moment, it may give way and drop them into everlasting burnings! Oh, no, my dear friends! we have neither this nor any other amusement to recommend to *you*. As a preacher of the Gospel, in our appropriate place, we have nothing to recommend to you but immediate repentance toward God. “Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance.” So far, indeed, as this or any other amusement, or even any ordinary matter of business, interferes with bringing forth such fruits, you will of course avoid it. Nay, seek with your whole soul an interest in Christ, and when you have obtained 't. confess Him before men, in His ap-

pointed ordinance ; and then will be the time to consider how far this amusement, or any other recreation, may harmonize with such a confession. And may the Lord Jesus Christ direct you by His Spirit, and save you by His all-sufficient grace, for His name's sake. Amen.

## SERMON VI.

“Feed my Lambs.”—JOHN XXI, 15.

IF the person who addresses you were a physician, appointed to watch over the health of the congregation, he would be expected to be faithful to his trust. The children of the congregation would claim a large share of his attention. If unwholesome fruits were abundant, he would be expected to give due warning to the parents; and if he knew of some play-ground, or favorite resort of the children, the atmosphere of which was pervaded by a dangerous miasma, what would be his duty?

This is but a figurative representation of the real position which we occupy. We are here, in the providence of God, through your suffrages; not indeed to watch over the physical health of the congregation, but for the infinitely more important purpose of watching

and guarding their spiritual welfare. And one very important part of this commission is given in the words of the text,—“Feed my lambs :” that is, look to the children of the flock as far as you can ; see to it that the lambs have wholesome pasturage ; keep them as far as possible from all poisonous herbs, and dangerous rocks and precipices.

With an ultimate view to this duty of our pastoral office, we commenced this discussion by laying down two main propositions :

*I. That dancing, under its ordinary forms, is inconsistent with that spirituality of mind, and holiness of conduct, which the Scriptures require : and*

*II. That it is, therefore, wrong for Christian parents to produce and foster in their children a love for that amusement.*

The argument for our first proposition was closed in our last discourse ; and although the second follows as a necessary conclusion from the first, it is of sufficient importance to demand careful illustration and enforcement. It points to the error of many professing Chris-

tian parents throughout our land, in *schooling* their children in the art of dancing, and otherwise encouraging them to indulge in it as a social amusement.

We begin, then, with the following question, often asked, and having a direct bearing on the point :

“ What harm is there in dancing, as a family amusement, even if the party should embrace a few visitors from neighboring households ? ”

And the parlor dance, and the piano dance, are so completely acquitted, by many, of all evil, or even tendency to evil, that it requires a seeming temerity to proscribe them. Now we promptly admit, that in the domestic dance, in *itself* considered, we can see no evil ; and we object to it, not as intrinsically wrong, but because of its direct tendency to excite in the young a strong desire for the fascination of gayer and larger assemblies. *Intrinsically*, there is no more harm in moving one set of muscles to the sound of music, in the domestic dance, than in using another set in shuffling, throwing, and gathering up painted papers in a

family game of cards. Neither can be shown to be immoral in *itself*; but we object to both, and for like reasons. The one tends to produce a taste for gaming, which is vicious in itself, and still more vicious in its fruits; the other cherishes and promotes a relish for the fascination of the gay, fashionable dancing assembly, with its present unspiritualizing inconsistencies and its ulterior evil tendencies. Observe, we place the domestic dance, and the family game of cards, in a parallel—not because dancing and gaming, as matured amusements, are *equally* immoral—but because there is—a *like* tendency in both to divert and estrange the mind from spiritual things. And we must seriously doubt whether it be consistent in any Christian parent, to encourage the incipient stages of either.

To show that we are not peculiar in our views upon this point, take the following extract from a Pastoral Letter, published several years ago, by the Bishop of Ohio :

“ Let me now turn to two subjects, in which there is no difficulty of discrimination—the

*theatre and the dance.* The only line I would draw in regard to these is, that of *entire exclusion.* And yet, my brethren, I am well aware how easy it is for the imagination to array both of these in such an abstract and elementary simplicity, so divested of all that gives them their universal character and relish, that no harm could be detected in either. And the same precisely can be easily done with the card-table and the horse-race. The exercise of graceful movement in the dance, and the exercise of speed in the horse-race, may easily be conceived of in such a light as to make them very innocent. But what if they were attempted to be got up under such an abstract form, and made common amusements in such elementary simplicity—how would they succeed? Their deadness as to all that makes their usual interest, would be their sufficient condemnation. The question is not what we can imagine they may be; but what they always have been, and will be, and must be, in such a world as this, to render them pleasurable to those who patronize them. Strip them bare,

till they stand in the simple innocence to which their defenders' arguments would reduce them, and the world would not have them. To be genial to the taste of those who would sustain them, they must be matters of worldly fashion and gayety ; and not only so, but designed to promote the spirit of such things, and so dependent on them, that in proportion as these condiments are lacking, they are rejected as insipid. Were the trial made of a series of dancing assemblies, conducted in all respects as becomes the sobriety and spiritual-mindedness of the Christian character, so that it would be nothing inconsistent if every attendant were a devout and earnestly pious person, it would need no prophet to predict their entire failure. The world would ridicule such a dance ; and Christian people would think they had something else to do than to attend to it."

We have already quoted from other eminent divines, of different denominations, to show the concurrence of evangelical sentiment on this subject. Take in addition the following extracts bearing directly on the point in hand,

from a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Rice, a distinguished minister of the Old School Presbyterian Church :

“ I am aware that there is some difficulty in the discussion of this subject, arising from the various *phases* which it assumes, from the family dance in the parlor of a professor of religion, under the eye of the head of the family, to the gayest and most brilliant ball, and even the *masquerade dance*. We labor under the same difficulty in showing the sinfulness of card-playing, horse-racing, and the theatre. It might be difficult to prove it a sin in itself for a few young persons to amuse themselves, an hour or two, by playing at cards. We know, however, that it is an attractive and exciting amusement ; that when once our children have become pleased with it, they are likely to yield to the suggestion, that by risking a few cents, additional interest will be imparted to the game ; and we know that, having gone thus far, they are fairly introduced to the gaming-table, and that they are likely enough to become regular gamblers. We proceed, therefore, upon the Latin adage

*obsta 'principiis,'*—resist the beginnings of evil. Or, rather, we are guided by the word of inspiration—'Abstain from all appearance of evil.'

“On the same general principle we oppose dancing, as now conducted. Suppose we admit that there is nothing improper in the family dance in your parlor; we know, perfectly well, that this is but the commencement of the difficulty. Your children learn to dance; they are delighted with dancing; you have admitted that there is nothing improper in it; and now that the principle is conceded, they will carry it out for you. And you will find it no easy matter to prove to them that dancing in the parlor is proper enough, but dancing in a large and elegant ball-room, quite sinful. They will attend balls, the gayest and most brilliant of them; and you cannot prevent it. You have introduced them to an amusement of the most fascinating character; you have conceded and contended that dancing is not wrong; and now that they have reached the age when they claim to act for themselves, they will pay little regard to your prudent advice.”

You will perceive, then, that our objection is not to the family dance, as an *insulated* amusement, but in its natural and almost necessary *connection* with the gay, fashionable party, and the public ball.

To illustrate our meaning more fully, take the following incident : Some time ago, we were informed by a friend who was a retired wealthy merchant, living in a delightful rural mansion, that he had partly made up his mind to erect a private billiard table, for family amusement ; but on mature reflection, he had deemed it inexpedient. He knew the natural connection of that attractive game with the habits and associations of public billiard saloons in a neighboring city. He therefore considered it dangerous to produce and nurture in the young people of his family and household a fondness for it. The gentleman to whom we refer was not a professor of religion, although a man of high moral character, and clear moral perceptions upon most points. In our humble judgment, in resolving to exclude the billiard table from his family amusements, he reasoned most

justly. The argument which we urge against the family dance, you will perceive, is precisely parallel. We can see no escape from it. Certainly none to those Christian parents who believe with us that dancing, in its ordinary forms, is contrary to the spirituality and holiness required by Scripture. For Scripture requirement, be it remembered, is but *Scripture morality*; and no Christian parent is at liberty to aim, either for himself or his children, at any standard which falls short of the morality of the New Testament.

But it may be asked : Must a Christian parent be always sad or grave—must he always frown upon the amusements of his children—or even pass by their little plays or performances with cold indifference ? We answer, promptly, No. We hold it to be the duty of a pious parent to provide appropriate amusements for his children ; and the more especially so, if he feels bound to veto some of those in which other children are indulged. We hold that a pious parent may not only provide plays for his children, but that it is not beneath his true dignity

to play with them. Dr. Adam Clarke, we learn from his biographer, used to come down from his study, at twilight, to exercise himself in a lively romp with his little children. A similar incident is related of Dr. Chalmers :—while on a visit to the Highlands of Scotland, he gathered a group of little children on the top of a mountain and entertained them by rolling large stones into the valley beneath, enjoying their emotions of mingled pleasure and surprise, as the rocks bounded from cliff to cliff, echoing and re-echoing their thunderings over the neighboring hills. Each of these learned divines, no doubt, returned to his studies with a mind refreshed and invigorated by bodily exercise. And the little children—what harm was done to them? None ;—no taste was engendered in their hearts for fashionable amusement—their little feet were not planted in any of those paths which lead into the larger avenues of vanity and dissipation. Pious parents should imitate such condescension to little children ; encouraging them to an affectionate but respectful familiarity, so as to open their hearts more

effectually to instructions which concern their highest interests.

But it may be said that this matter of the dancing school, or the children's dance, is a trivial thing, and that preaching a course of sermons with reference to such an evil, is an unnecessary waste of time and strength. Now, we beg to remind you, that we are not preaching against the children's dance, the family dance, or the dancing-school, or all of them, *in themselves considered*, but in their *necessary* connection with the fashionable amusements of the day. For we hold that these incipient forms of the dance are but anterooms to a suite of grand apartments, presided over by the God of this world, in which he is wont to assemble his more mature and devoted worshippers.

A few illustrations here will show more definitely what we are now preaching against.

If your pastor were to enter your parlor, and see your children intently engaged with others in divers little games of chance, he might think it wrong ; and in some future sermon on religious education, he might deem an emphatic al-

lusion to it necessary or expedient. But if professors of gaming were to set up a school in our principal towns and cities, and such school were as generally patronized as dancing schools, your pastor might feel it his duty to preach not only one, but a series of sermons in reference to them.

Again: if in walking in the suburbs of the city, we were to see a number of little boys belonging to the congregation, engaged in a military parade, with music playing and colors flying, we might pass it by even with a smile—certainly we should not preach a single sermon on the subject. But if military schools were to become as common as dancing schools, and should be as generally patronized by professing Christian parents, we might feel it to be our solemn duty to preach more than one sermon against such a general and systematic cultivation of “the war spirit” in the youthful members of our flock.\*

\* The author does not mean here to moot the question, how far it may be expedient to *tolerate here and there throughout the country* a few well-regulated private or public military schools, to provide due preparation for what many may deem

Once more. If we were to see a group of little girls, belonging to the congregation, earnestly engaged in dressing and fixing themselves off before a mirror, in jewels and gay ribbons, we might quietly note it in our mind, and in some future discourse on female education, we might refer to it after the manner of the Apostle (1 Tim. ii. 9), and sustain our reference by one or two brief quotations from our venerable Homily on "Excess of Apparel." But if *dressing* schools, taught by foreign *fashionables*, were to become as common and as well patronized as dancing schools, with a technical name for every frill, ruffle or adornment, we might consider them dangerous schools of vanity,—so injurious to the lambs of our flock, as to call for solemn and repeated warnings.

These illustrations, we trust, will show with sufficient clearness, that the evil against which we are now bearing testimony, is not an *occasional* fault of childhood; or an occasional

necessary or defensive war. His assumption, for the sake of illustration is, that such schools are as *common as dancing schools*.

error in parental government; but error completely organized and sustained, through paid professional teachers, as a very desirable, if not necessary, branch of refined education!

If, to evade the force of this reasoning, it should be urged that children are by nature sinful—that we cannot expect to gather “grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles,” and that dancing is as *tolerable* a mode of sinning as any other, we reply that,—there is a very essential difference between *toleration* and *training*. As long as our children remain unconverted, we are obliged to tolerate their imperfect works, and perhaps occasionally to wink at their more trivial faults; but there can be no excuse whatever, for deliberately *training* or *schooling* them in any fault, or into a fondness for any fashionable amusement inconsistent with Scripture. Let it be understood, then, that the hinge of our argument here turns upon the word *schooling* or *training*, as we have connected them with the dancing of children. And had we a voice of thunder, we would utter it in *accentuating*—*emphasizing*—and *elongating* these words,

SCHOOLING!—TRAINING!—so as to impress every parental mind, as deeply as possible, with the utter inconsistency of *training* their children in any fashionable pleasure at war with the requirements of the New Testament!

But enough for the present. In our next discourse we shall endeavor to establish the following positions :

I. That schooling children in the dance, conflicts with the judicious efforts which Christian parents ought to make for their early conversion. And—II. That this amusement is a serious hindrance to the piety of young people, and one of the strongest bonds to be broken in persuading them to renounce the world.

And may the Spirit of grace and truth enable us to come up to the faithful consideration of these points. Amen.

## SERMON VII.

“Train up a child in the way he should go.”—PROV. xxii., 6.

IN concluding our last sermon, we dwelt with much emphasis upon the inconsistency of *training* or *schooling* children, in any practice or pleasure, at variance with Scripture. We admitted that it might be necessary, or proper, to *tolerate occasional* minor faults of childhood. We must still doubt the expediency of verbally reproving every such fault. The couplet—

“Be to their faults a little blind,  
Be to their virtues very kind,”

—with due Christian modification, may be applied to our children as well as to other members of our households. Unceasing rebuke might rather tend to harden than soften the heart. But whether it be right to *tolerate* or

*ignore* an occasional minor fault of children? is one question. Whether it be proper to *train* or *school* them in any fault, or in any practice or pleasure, inconsistent with Scripture requirements? is another, and an essentially different question. Silently *ignoring* a minor fault may in some instances be excused. Literal *training* or *schooling*, in any wrong or dangerous practice whatsoever, we hold to be utterly indefensible.

It is quite possible, indeed, that a pious parent, who discountenances the dance, may occasionally indulge his child in an amusement less refined and respectable. But the chief objection to the dance is its moral danger, or ulterior tendencies. If a pious parent should knowingly or carelessly allow his child to row a plank over some muddy shallow pond, for an hour or a half a day, it might be wrong. In such a play, the child would probably soil his clothes, and perhaps injure his health. But when a pious parent trains or encourages his child in the dance, he does something more than allow him to play on a shallow pond,

whose metes and bounds are plainly visible. With his own hands he launches him in a beautiful little boat on a pretty stream, which winds through the tall grass and the thickets, around the hills and through the plains, widening as it goes, until it issues in the broad river of worldliness, which is naturally and necessarily connected with the great ocean of "Pomp and Vain Glory." \*

If it is said that a pious parent, in such a case, only *intends* that his child shall go so far and no farther, and may give him express instruc-

\* We have an incident so aptly illustrative of this point, that, even at the risk of provoking a smile, we may venture to state it in a foot note:—

A lady on seeing a little boy, whose parents discountenanced dancing, amusing himself with others in riding a large hog, remarked somewhat sharply:—"That, for her part, she thought it better taste to indulge children in dancing, than in such amusement." The little boy, on being told of the remark, replied:—"Well, Mother, I don't know about that, for you see pig-riding will soon come to an end; there is no danger that I shall keep on at it, when I get to be a larger boy; but if I get to dancing, I may go on with it after I am grown up, and *there's no telling when that will end!*" This little boy certainly deserved a rebuke for indulging in a vulgar amusement; but he appears to have understood the *doctrine of tendencies*.

tions not to pass beyond certain limits,—what assurances, we ask, can he have, that his instructions will be obeyed? Will there not be a strong temptation in his child to follow those who are gaily sailing by him, and highly enjoying themselves on broader streams of worldliness? Is this bringing up children according to the precept of the text,—“Train up a child in the way he should go?” Is it not setting their faces *worldward*, rather than *Heavenward*? And most of all, my brethren, is such training consistent with our daily prayer for ourselves and our children,—“Lead us not into temptation?” Can it be right thus to produce and foster in our children a strong temptation, in the hope that, either in their own strength or by special Divine grace, they may be able to resist its force?

We admitted in an early part of this discussion, that dancing would be a pretty amusement for little children, *if* it could be separated from its ordinary connections and tendencies, and practiced in proper times and places. But the “IF” here is emphatically important.

We doubt whether it be possible, in the present state of society, to separate the dancing school and the children's dance from their connections with the ball and the fashionable dancing party. Nor are children's dances usually held in proper times or places. In our humble judgment, the proper time would not be night, but day; and the place, not the heated, crowded room, but the broad, well-shaded green, fanned by the refreshing breeze. That such are not the ordinary connections and conditions of the children's dance, we well know. You will find them well described in the following extract from a distinguished writer :

“To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven,” said the wise man ; but he said it before the invention of BABY-BALLS, an invention which has formed a kind of era, and a most inauspicious one, in the annals of polished education. This modern device is a sort of triple conspiracy against the innocence, the health, and the happiness of children. Thus, by factitious amusements, to rob them of a relish for the simple joys, the

unbought delights which naturally belong to their blooming season, is like blotting out spring from the year. To sacrifice the true and proper enjoyments of sprightly and happy children, is to make them pay a dear and disproportionate price for their artificial pleasures. They step at once from the nursery to the ball-room, and by a change of habits as new as it is preposterous, are thinking of dressing themselves, at an age when they used to be dressing their dolls. Instead of bounding with the unrestrained freedom of little wood-nymphs over hill and dale, their cheek flushed with health, and their hearts overflowing with happiness, these *gay* little creatures are shut up all the morning, demurely practising the *pas grave*, and transacting the serious business of acquiring a new step for the evening, with more cost of time and pains than it would have taken them to acquire twenty new ideas."

The writer from whom we quote was not a clergyman, or a recluse who looked through a lattice on the gay world at a distance. The extract is from the writings of Hannah More,

who had moved for a long time in the highest circles of British society; and had observed and gauged for herself the nature and tendency of every fashionable amusement. And can such encouragement of little children to imitate gay adults in their nightly balls and parties, be reconciled with the precept,—“Train up a child in the way he should go?”

But this brings us to the two final positions which we propose to establish:—

*I. That schooling, and otherwise encouraging children in the dance, conflict with those judicious efforts which every pious parent ought to make for the early conversion of his offspring. And*

*II. That love for the dance is a serious hindrance to youthful piety, and often one of the strongest bonds to be broken in renouncing the world.*

Our first position, you will perceive, assumes that the highest desire of every pious parent's heart is for the early conversion of his children. And yet, in making this assumption, we fear we are touching the root of much error and unbelief in the church. Many professing

Christian parents, we apprehend, are somewhat sceptical in regard to the practicability of such early conversions. They have a *sort of half-belief and half-dread* of them: and not unfrequently entertain the notion, that religious impression tends to spoil the beauty and brightness of the youthful character. But can it be necessary on such a point, to quote such familiar passages of Scripture as,—“Remember thy Creator now, in the days of thy youth;” “Seek first the kingdom of God;” “They that seek me early shall find me;” &c.? Or need we refer to such examples of youthful piety as those of Samuel and Timothy, or to many other well authenticated instances of early conversions in modern times? Surely every pious parent has enough to encourage him to labor in hope for the conversion of his children. But can such labors be conducted, simultaneously and consistently, with training and encouraging them in the dance? Is not a series of well-directed efforts for the conversion of children, likely to suffer the most serious interruptions from the interludes of the dancing

school, or the preparations for the gay little ball? Can the pious mother consistently exhort her daughter to repentance,—and especially, can she warn her against the “pomp and vain-glory of the world;” and the next hour, or the next day, dress and decorate her for the dancing school or the children’s ball, and dismiss her with suitable instructions for either? Can the teachings of the dancing school during the week be made to harmonize with the instructions of the Sunday-school on the Sabbath? Ah! my brethren, if we are as anxious for the spiritual health of our children as we are for their bodily health and temporal prosperity, we shall take care not to encourage them in any practice or pleasure which may be prejudicial to either. And where is the truly pious parent who would not prefer to see his child a Christian in poverty, to a Cræsus in wealth; a pious peasant, rather than a potentate wearing an imperial diadem; an obscure believer, unknown beyond the limits of his own parish, rather than an unconverted man of fame, dwelling in the very centre of

the brightest halo of earthly glory? Dear brethren, if our hearts do not respond with a prompt affirmative to such queries, we may conclude, most assuredly, that they are not right in the sight of God. And if they do, let us be consistent in avoiding in the training of our offspring every dangerous practice, or even *doubtful* pleasure, which may hinder their attainment of the great object for which we profess to labor, and pray, and hope.

The inconsistency of teaching and encouraging children in the dance, with earnest efforts for their conversion, is sufficiently expressed in the following passage from a tract, by the venerable Bishop of Virginia, already referred to:—

“When taught to the young at an early age, it is attended with an expense of time and money which might be far better employed; it promotes the love of dress and pleasure to which the young are already too prone; it tempts to vanity and the love of display; it induces a strong desire to enter on the amusements of the world at an early period, in order

to exhibit the accomplishments thus acquired, and to enjoy the pleasures for which a taste has been formed ; it promotes forwardness instead of modesty ; it leads the young ones exactly in the opposite direction to that pointed out by the word of God, and pledged in the baptismal vows. Thus educated, they are, in this respect at least, trained not in the way as they ought to go, but in the way they should forsake, according to almost universal consent, if by divine grace they are ever turned to God in true penitence and faith."

This brings us to our next and final position : "The love of the dance is a serious hindrance to youthful piety, and often one of the strongest bonds to be broken in renouncing the world." In beginning this discussion, we pronounced the dance a most fascinating amusement. And such it certainly is to many young people of lively temperament, with a quick ear for music, and the requisite bodily agility. Persons of middle age, who have lost their relish for the amusement, may smile at it as a serious obstacle, and talk coolly of the ease

with which it may be relinquished. But they must be persons of naturally calm temperament, or they must have forgotten the ardor of their youthful days. Dr. Adam Clarke, the learned commentator, gives his personal experience and observation on the subject in the following words: "I learned to dance. I grew passionately fond of it; would scarcely walk but in measured time. \* \* \* \* I grew impatient of control, was fond of company, and wished to mingle more than I had ever done with young people. I, in no case, ever kept any improper company; nevertheless, dancing was to me a perverting influence, an unmixed moral evil. It drowned the voice of a well-instructed conscience, and was the first cause of impelling me to seek my happiness in this life. And I can testify, that as far as my own observations have extended—and they have had a pretty wide range—I have known it to produce in others the same evils that it produced in me. I consider it, therefore, as a branch of that *worldly* education which leads from heaven to earth, from things spiritual to things sensual, and from

God to Satan. Let them plead for it who will, I know it to be evil, and that only."

Among the ordinary amusements of the world, there is none more attractive to a youth of lively animal spirits than the dancing-hall, with its brilliant lights, its exciting music, and its array of gay and jewelled damsels, waiting to be led forth by the proffered hands of beaming partners. Of the sanctioned pleasures of fashionable society, the God of this world has none more specious or alluring. Too often, by bringing up such scenes, has he turned aside serious inquirers from their earnest pursuit, and enticed young communicants to violate their solemn private and public pledges.

Imagine a young lady of lively disposition, impressed with a sense of the importance of religion, and the duty of confessing Christ. She seeks, attempts to pray, reads her Bible, perhaps confers with her pastor. But just at this crisis, a large party is to come off with great *éclat*. Young associates are on the alert in making their preparations. She says nothing, but satisfied that such a gay party

will interrupt her pursuit of the one thing needful, she determines to remain at home. Her silence and neglect of the usual preparations are observed and inquired into. With a slight tinge of the cheek, she reluctantly acknowledges the cause. Young associates laugh, and sneeringly exclaim, "Why, you must be getting very religious, indeed!" Older persons are informed of it, who are perhaps professors of religion. In rather a reproving tone, they give it as their opinion, that such amusements for young people are not inconsistent with true piety; and perhaps insinuate that she ought not to set up her judgment against that of older friends. Now, from my very heart, I pity such a youthful inquirer, thus struggling against a fascinating fashionable amusement on the one side, and on the other against that petty persecution to which young minds are so sensitive. It is no wonder that she yields to such a double temptation: quenches the spirit! loses all seriousness! and in a little while floats as gaily as ever on the broad stream of vanity and worldliness!

Nor is amusement less efficient as an instrument of the god of this world, in seducing young professors of religion from their steadfastness. Take, for example, the following account of an apostacy, which occurred under our own eyes :—

More than thirty-five years ago I made a profession of religion, in connection with a young man of the same age, who seemed to be hopefully pious. We read, conversed, and prayed together in private, and knelt together at the altar. He was apparently sincere, and much affected. He ran well for a season. But in less than a year, although still regular in his attendance on public means of grace, he became cold and worldly. We roomed together ; and on seeing him busy at his dressing table, I asked him where he was going? He said he was going to a dancing party that I had previously heard was to take place that evening. I remonstrated. He replied in the usual style about the innocency of such amusements, and the evil of so much over-strictness about such small matters, &c. He went to

the dance. And from that time he rapidly failed in his external consistency, so that his "last state was worse than his first." His first step in the dance appeared to be a primary symptom, as well as an accelerating cause, of his apostacy. We believe it to be only one out of many instances, in which young professors of religion have been tempted by this amusement into dangerous, if not fatal, inconsistency. And we cannot better wind up our warnings on the subject, than in the language of our own faithful and eminent Bishop:—

"If the writer be asked, whether in his view in '*the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,*' which are renounced in baptism, are included *theatrical amusements and dances,* he answers without hesitation in the affirmative. If he be asked whether, under the apostle's exhortation '*Be not conformed to the world,*' they are, in his view, included as matters of worldly conformity to be forsaken: he answers, Certainly. If he be asked whether those things are consistent with the cultivation of a spiritual mind, and the maintaining of a rightful Christian in-

fluence, by example, for the good of man and the glory of God: he must answer, they are, in his view, *very inconsistent* with such duties. He thinks they are renounced in baptism, that their renunciation is ratified in confirmation, and professed in every participation of the Lord's Supper. He prays the time may come, when all communicants will unite in rejecting these things."\*

And now, dear brethren, permit us in conclusion to ask, whether the arguments which we have urged against this amusement have been fairly based upon Scripture precepts and principles? If they have, they cannot be safely disregarded. God's favor is life. Nothing but a sincere obedience to the truth can insure it. A wilful neglect, or resistance of the light, is fearfully dangerous. If it does not provoke God's *wrath*, it will assuredly bring upon us his fatherly *chastisements*, with a severity proportioned to our presumption. "The fashion of this world passeth away."

\* A Word in Season to Candidates for Confirmation. Ps. 38, 39, 40. Pro. Ep. Soc. for Pro. Ev. Kno.

“ For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away ; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” May we all be prepared for that final judgment, which will not be according to the fallible opinions of man, but the perfect and ever-abiding word of God. Amen.















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