

The modern dance, by Jas. H. Brookes

THE MODERN DANCE

BY JAS. H. BROOKES

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PREFATORY NOTE.

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At one time in my pastorate, I was constrained by a conviction of duty to preach to my people on the subject of dancing. As the community at large had little to do, owing to the prostration of business and the absence of excitements, the sermon caused an amazing and amusing flurry, and for a while it was "the town-talk." All the devil's servants flew at me like wasps from a disturbed nest, and lies fell thicker than soot from the smoky atmosphere of our city. I was fiercely assailed in the public journals by anonymous scribblers whose villainy I had exposed, and in private circles by debased libertines whose crimes I had denounced.

Among other absurd rumors which were circulated, it was currently reported that the discourse had rent my congregation in twain, and that scores had withdrawn from my church. Even if this had been true, not one word that I uttered about dancing would have

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been retracted, because retraction would have dishonored my Master; but the facts are, that up to the present time two persons who asked for their letters have returned to their customary place of worship, and one family has forsaken my ministry, while during the same period about fifty souls have been added to our communion.

After the sermon was delivered, I followed up the attack on dancing in a series of letters to a young friend, written very hurriedly, at intervals snatched from the incessant demands of pulpit and pastoral work. My consent to their publication in the present permanent form has been gained, first, by the request of many of God's people whose wishes deserve my respect; second, by my desire to bear permanent testimony against an appalling and growing sin in the Church; and, third, by the hope that, notwithstanding the crudeness of the entire performance, the Lord Jesus will be pleased to bless what is here said in vindication of His outraged cause.

It has seemed to me proper to make the foregoing statements, that the reader may account for the personal style of address found throughout the book, and understand certain expressions which have reference to local events. The young Christian whom I had in view while hastily preparing these letters for publication has renounced dancing forever; and my prayer is that every Christian may soon be led to exclaim, in a spirit of enthusiastic consecration to the Redeemer. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!" J. H. B.

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THE MODERN DANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT IS DEFINED.

YOU desire an expression of my views upon the subject of dancing, adding that you can see no wrong whatever in this fascinating and popular amusement. It is a subject which is

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very wearisome and distasteful to me, simply because the wish to dance on the part of a professed disciple of the Lord Jesus indicates a state of heart of which I can think only with the deepest sadness.

I sometimes feel like saying to those who take the position you assumed in our interview, "Well, if you do not see the wrong in dancing, dance on as much as you please; for it is not worth while to argue the matter with one who is unable to perceive at a glance the gross impropriety and inconsistency of indulgence in this fashionable custom by any sincere follower of the Savior."

Still, I must repress my impatience, and endeavor to comply with your request in writing, as I have complied with similar requests in private conversation, very, very often in the course of my ministry. You are a young man, a member of the church, giving promise of a decided influence in future life either for good or evil; and if I can in anywise determine the character of that influence for the glory of the divine Redeemer, I shall address myself to the task you set before me, not only under a sense of duty, but with the greatest eagerness.

And besides my obligation to the Master and my love for you, I am constrained to gratify your desire by the admonition addressed in the sacred Scriptures to the preacher of the gospel, when it is said, "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Let us, then, in the first place, distinctly understand the question that is to be discussed. It is Locke, I believe, who tells us he once listened to a long and animated debate, that waxed sharper and fiercer, until it was happily suggested that the heated disputants should

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clearly define the sense in which they used the terms under discussion, when it was discovered, to the 7 surprise of all parties, that there was no ground for controversy.

It is important, therefore, that you should know at the outset what I mean by the terms “dancing,” when I affirm that it is utterly unbecoming a Christian, and that I should know what you mean when you affirm that it is an innocent amusement.

Worcester says the word “dance” signifies, “a graceful movement of the figure, accompanied by measured steps in accord with music;” and “dancing” he defines as “the act of moving with regulated and graceful steps.” Webster says the word “dance” denotes, “a lively, brisk exercise or amusement, in which the movements of the persons are regulated by art, in figure, and by the sound of instruments, in measure;” and “dancing” he defines as “leaping and stepping to the sound of the voice or of an instrument.”

Now, I am far from saying that “the act of moving with regulated and graceful steps” is inherently and necessarily sinful; for such a position would force us to conclude that David committed sin when, as an act of worship, he “danced before the Lord with all his might.” Nor do I say that “a graceful movement of the figure, accompanied by measured steps in accord with music,” is essentially sinful; for then it would follow that God frowns 8 upon the gambols of a child that are in harmony with the sounds of a piano, and abhors the solemn movements of a funeral procession that are in unison with the strains of a dirge.

The question, therefore, is not whether the mere act of dancing, in itself considered, is always and unchangeably sinful. I do not know any, even of the most “straight-laced Presbyterians,” who are silly enough to take the affirmative at this point.

But neither is the mere act of swallowing wine or brandy always and unchangeably sinful; for our Savior commands us to drink wine in celebrating His dying love, and a physician may, in some instances, prescribe brandy as a remedy for disease; and yet if so much wine is taken that drunkenness ensues, or if a weaker brother is led, by our indulgence in

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the occasional use of spirituous liquors, into hopeless degradation, the act, harmless in itself, becomes a heinous offense.

The same act, as you are well aware, assumes very different aspects, according to the motive or disposition which prompted it. Take, for example, the act of killing a man which may have no moral character whatever, as when it is entirely unintentional; or it may be commendable, as when an officer of the law, in obedience to an order of the court, executes a convicted murderer or it may be highly criminal, as when the stealthy assassin destroys the life of his victim for money.

So the act of dancing may have no moral character whatever, as when a merry and thoughtless child dances in its play; or it may be commendable, as when David danced before the Lord in solemn religious worship; or it may be utterly wrong, as I propose to prove with regard to the fashionable amusement of which I am now writing.

Nor is the question to be discussed concerning dancing as it might be, but concerning it as it is. The sexes might dance separately, or the amusement might be strictly limited to the old-fashioned cotillon or stately minuet; or it might be confined to an hour or two of exercise in a private parlor, and then it would be less objectionable, to say the least. But I am speaking of dancing as now almost universally practiced with its unavoidable adjuncts of large assemblies, indelicate dressing, unwarrantable freedom of intercourse between the sexes, levity, revelry, excitement, forgetfulness of God, thorough worldliness; and it is this modern, common dancing which I shall undertake to prove is directly contrary to the obligations of a Christian.

Nor is the question concerning ecclesiastical rules and regulations. Every church, of course, has right to protect itself against the introduction into its bosom of elements of discord and dissolution, and no one should unite with a body of professing Christians without a willingness and a purpose to conform to their usages and laws. But, after all, a church has no right to bind the conscience in virtue of its own authority, and unless I can

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show that dancing violates the rules laid down in God's Word, I do not ask you to renounce it.

The plain, simple question, therefore, which I wish you to consider is this: Can a Christian engage in dancing as it is without sinning against God; and, hence, is it the duty of the Christian to abstain entirely from any dancing known in this day, and from giving it the slightest countenance?

In the subsequent discussion of this subject, I shall endeavor to prove that the only way by which we can avoid sin, is not only to take no part whatever in "dancing," but, on the other hand, to discourage and oppose it with all earnestness.

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CHAPTER II.

ARGUMENTS IN ITS DEFENSE.

It is hardly proper to dignify what is usually said in favor of dancing by the name of arguments, for the greatest length to which Christians of my acquaintance venture in its advocacy is to present apologies or excuses for the practice.

For example, they frequently urge that it is no worse than many other things which are done by members of the Church, and not so bad as tattling, and slander, and hypocrisy, and bigotry. I am willing to grant this, without a moment's hesitation; but does it follow that dancing is innocent, or that it is proper for a follower of Jesus Christ to engage in it? Can two wrongs make a right? Will the adulterer plead, in extenuation of his crime, that he has not been guilty of falsehood, and theft, and murder? Such an excuse may avail at the bar of public opinion, but it cannot at the bar of a holy God, who never weighs one sin against another in order to pronounce the lighter one a virtue.

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Again, many affect to sneer at the discussion of the subject as of trifling importance, and declare that, after all, it is a little thing, unworthy the dignity of the pulpit and undeserving the serious notice of a preacher of the gospel. In the language 12 of the late venerable Episcopal Bishop of Virginia, when speaking of dancing, "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 'revellings, banqueting,' and such like things, warning against every inconsistency to which Christians are tempted." But suppose I again grant that it is only a little thing, —I then ask, why do not its advocates abandon it? They will scarcely insist that it is a Christian duty to dance, and, as they are obliged to confess that it is condemned by a vast majority of all earnest, working, praying disciples of our Lord, and that it brings sorrow to many a pious heart, and that it is the cause of much anxiety and trouble to the Church, surely they should be willing to forsake a custom which, after all, is but a little thing, of trifling importance.

Again, it is insisted, with some plausibility, that the young must have amusements, and if they are denied the privilege and pleasure of dancing, religion will be presented to them in gloomy and repulsive colorings that will lead them to hate the very name. To this I reply, that if the pursuit of amusement is the end for which they are created; if they are under no obligation to remember their Creator in the days of their youth: if it is right for them 13

HARMLESS AMUSEMENT? "No harm in the dance?" Yet the blame lieth there For this heart-broken father And the daughter's despair.

14 to put off all serious thoughts about God, and eternity, and salvation, until they are old, or until death lays a sudden arrest upon their career of gayety and frivolity, there is some force in the apology. But if, on the other hand, it is wise and Christian to train them even in early life to habits of self-denial; if it is their duty to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; if they should give all diligence to make their calling and election sure; if they are required to glorify the Savior in their bodies and spirits; if it is incumbent upon

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them to be prepared for the eternal world through belief of the truth and sanctification of the Spirit, the reasoning is utterly worthless.

Again, you intimated, in our conversation, that my strict views and severe denunciations of this amusement keep many of the young people out of my church, and drive many of them to other churches that are more lax in their discipline, more genial in their religion, and more adapted to the tastes of fashionable society. To this I answer, in view of my responsibility to God, if dancing keeps the young out of the Church, they ought to be kept out, and if it drives them from the Church, they ought to be driven from it. I hope I am not entirely indifferent to the sympathies and pleasures of the youthful; and I know I love the Church, in whose service I am 15 willing to labor and suffer, and yet I deliberately say it would be better, in my judgment, if none should enter its sacred portals than to enter them to dance; and it would be better if the Church should be blotted from the face of the earth than to surrender its principles at the demand of worldly-minded professors of religion. Or, if admittance into the Church could save the soul, I would not utter one word upon this subject; but when the Bible tells us that without holiness no man shall see the Lord,—when it tells us that “she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth,”—when it tells us that many—yes, many—of the professing disciples of Christ will awaken at His second coming to the frightful realization that they are undone forever,—I am obliged to sound an alarm in the ears of those who cannot deny themselves and take up the cross to follow Him here.

Again, it is often said that the few who still oppose dancing in the Church cannot succeed in putting it down, and therefore they might as well retire at once from the field of conflict. For one, I do not expect to succeed. I expect, according to the plain predictions of the Scriptures, that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived;” being “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;” “having a form of godliness, but 16 denying the power thereof,”—“until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” In the series of letters which I propose to address to you and to other dancing disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus connected with my church, I shall not struggle to achieve mere

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success in the argument, but I shall strive “to declare unto you all the counsel of God;” I shall strive to warn you that “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock;” I shall strive so to bear witness for the truth, that at the appearing of the Judge I may be able to say, “I am pure from the blood of all men.”

Again, it is urged that dancing is a healthful exercise, and necessary to promote ease and elegance on the part of the young. As to the former assertion, I might easily summon the highest medical testimony to prove its absurdity; but it is such sheer unmitigated nonsense, I shall not insult your understanding by supposing for a moment that you believe it. If heated rooms, and sumptuous feasting, and whirling round and round, and jumping up and down until two or three o'clock in the morning, and then sudden exposure to the cold air, followed by a day of slumber or ennui, tend to promote health, the physicians are all in the dark with regard to hygienic laws, and my own observation has greatly deceived me. As to the superior carriage of those who are given to dancing, this, too, is bold assumption and utterly untrue. Compare, if you choose, the manly walk of an ingenuous youth, who has caught his steps from the promptings of a conscious rectitude and high purpose, with the mincing tread of a brainless fop, whose grandest achievements are wrought in the ball-room. Compare the natural grace of a pure girl, taught by a pure mother, and by a native sense of delicacy, with the disgusting affectation and brazen effrontery of a pert miss, who is trained by a foreign dancing-master not to blush, and you can judge for yourself whether there is any force in the oft-repeated plea that children should be sent to the dancing-school to learn manners.

Once more, it is sometimes feebly suggested that the Bible itself furnishes authority for modern dancing; but a glance at the Scriptures will expose the fallacy of the position. I have not time at present to go into an extended examination of this subject, but must content myself with quoting the closing part of Dr. Lyman Beecher's celebrated tract on Dancing, issued by the American Tract Society. I will only say that the views presented in the following quotation are substantially set forth in Kitto's "Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature," in the works issued by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and

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the Presbyterian Publication Committee, and in the published sermons of many eminent ministers of the gospel who have carefully examined every text of Scripture that refers to dancing. After giving the various passages in the Bible which allude to the subject, Dr. Beecher adds,—

“From the preceding quotations, it will sufficiently appear, 1. That dancing was a religious act, both of the true and also of idol worship. 2. That it was practiced 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 day-time, 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 19 and the foul murder of John the Baptist.”

In my next, if the Lord permit, I shall show the character of the witnesses who are ready to defend this perilous pleasure

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CHAPTER III.

CHARACTER OF WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENSE.

It is a significant fact that the devil exhibits signs of great distress whenever a minister of the gospel inflicts upon dancing a well-directed and vigorous blow. Straightway he stirs up his followers to rush to the defense of his favorite stronghold in the Church, and they obey his summons with a zeal worthy of a better cause. Their envenomed darts begin to fly thick and fast at the head of the man who has assailed their cherished pastime, and

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every slander which malice can suggest or ingenuity devise is unsparingly hurled against him. The well-known words of the heathen Cicero, that “no one dances unless he is either drunk or mad,” seem to be entirely forgotten, and in place of them many professing Christians are ready to say no one will denounce dancing unless he is either drunk or mad.

Surely it is a very weak or a very bad cause which is compelled to use such weapons for its protection and every sensible person must at once see that nothing is gained for dancing, even admitting the coarse calumnies of its advocates to be true. Suppose it can be proved that those who oppose the introduction of this amusement into the Church are guilty of murder, 21 theft, adultery, and every other offense in the catalogue of crimes, the question still remains to be answered, Is it right for Christians to dance? There may be others who do things far worse; but does their sin make dancing innocent? This is the inquiry to which I wish to direct your mind; nor do I intend to have your attention diverted by any side issues that are always thrown with satanic cunning into a controversy about dancing, when those who uphold it feel that they cannot maintain their ground.

I ask you, then, to look at the character of the witnesses appearing in its defense, from the ranks of those who claim to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Among the members of every Christian congregation with which I am acquainted, there are two very distinct classes. The one is composed of those who may be called, under God, the life of the Church, and who seem to be necessary, not only to its progress, but to its very existence. They are always found in their places in the sanctuary, they teach in the Sabbath School, they keep up the prayer meetings, they visit the sick and the sorrowing, they endure hardness as good soldiers, they are actively and constantly engaged in the work to which their Master has called them. The other class is composed of those who have made a profession of religion, 22 and this is the most that can be said of them and said for them. If the prosperity of the Church depended upon their interest in its welfare, it would soon perish from the face of the earth. You no more expect to see them in the Sabbath School, or in the prayer meeting, or employed in any personal efforts for the advancement of the cause of Christ, than you expect to see the common herd of unbelievers laboring for

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Jesus. They have a name to live, and if we are permitted to judge a tree by its fruits, or a man by his works, this is all they have.

Now, I affirm, without fear of successful contradiction, that, as a rule, the members of the Church who defend and practice dancing belong to the latter class, and the members of the Church who oppose it and are grieved by it belong to the former class. I still further declare that I have never known a member of the Church to engage in it without the manifest loss of spirituality, of delight in the services of the sanctuary, and of concern for the divine glory. If you are in doubt concerning the truth of these statements, consult any experienced pastor or faithful session, and you will soon learn that they are fully confirmed by the observation of others.

Here, then, we have as Christian witnesses in favor of dancing, those who seldom take any personal part in carrying 23

THERE ARE MANY PROFESSING CHRISTIANS WHO DANCE.

24 forward the various enterprises of the Church; those who seem to be contented with a form of godliness; those who come as near as possible to the impossible attainment of serving God and mammon, those who seek first the recognition and admiration of fashionable society; those who, it appears, would rather win the smile of the rich than the approval of Christ; those who are determined that their children shall enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; those who have occasional spasms of religious fervor, especially about the time of Lent; and those whose lives are made up of a series of sharp tricks to hold on to the world and at the same time to keep out of hell.

But other witnesses rush to the assistance of these followers of the Lamb, and raise their voices in defense of the graceful and harmless practice of dancing. Look at them carefully, for they are a motley crew. They come from the clubs of infidels; they come from the circles of spiritualists and free-lovers; they come from the "dance-houses" of our cities; they come from the chambers of the "strange woman" whose "feet go down to

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death;" they come from midnight revelries in dens of infamy; they come from the darkness of heathenism. These all agree in defending the dance as proper and essential to their enjoyment of life, while 25 they almost universally unite in condemning it if practiced by a Christian. Do not suppose for one moment that I design to degrade all who uphold dancing to a common level, for I could not be so unkind and ungenerous to thousands of respectable people who dance, but who also shrink with horror from any approach of impurity and from any association with the vile. My design is to show you that those in the Church who stand up as witnesses for the innocency of dancing, must have their testimony corroborated, not by the earnest disciples of Jesus, but by a crowd with whom they would not be willing to appear in the advocacy of any other cause.

A writer in the "New American Encyclopaedia," who certainly cannot be accused of prudery, after speaking of "the voluptuous movement of the waltz," and after noticing the fact that the Mohammedan religion forbids dancing, even within the harem, goes on to say, "Dancing exists among all savage peoples which travellers have visited; and negroes on the African coast have been said to throw themselves at the feet of a European playing on a fiddle, and to beg of him to desist unless he would tire them to death; for while he played they could not cease dancing. Dancing was one of the principal amusements of the American aborigines, being 26 more common among them than in any civilized society."

Bear in mind, then, that those who, in Bible times, perverted the exercise from a sacred use to purposes of amusement, were pronounced profane and infamous; that among the ancient Romans, according to Kitto, "it was considered beneath the dignity of a person of rank and character to practice it;" that "dancing is not one of the pleasures of paradise promised by the Koran;" that those in the Christian Church who engage in it, as a rule, are never known to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" that it is the chosen and cherished amusement of the fallen and the outcast; that it is the favorite pastime of savage tribes and untutored negroes; and then you may judge aright of the character of the witnesses for the defense.

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To these I add, most reluctantly, the testimony of poor Byron, so gifted, so dissolute, so wretched. Nothing could induce me to quote his shameful language except my intense anxiety to save you, my friend, and others like you, from the infernal fascinations of a recognized custom, which I believe to be fraught with the greatest peril to the soul, to the virtue of the young, and to the very foundations of society. I wish you to see how such a master, and such a slave, by turns, of the 27 human passions, as Byron, looked upon fashionable dances, and how other men look upon them, if they would honestly express the real ground of their admiration for the waltz.

“Muse of the many-twinkling feet! whose charms Are now extended up from legs to arms; Terpsichore!—too long misdeemed a maid! Reproachful term—bestowed but to upbraid — Henceforth in all the bronze of brightness shine. The least a vestal of the virgin Nine. Far be from thee and thine the name of prude; Mocked, yet triumphant; sneered at, unsubdued; Thy legs must move to conquer as they fly, If but thy coats are reasonably high; Thy breast—if bare enough—requires no shield. Dance forth,— *sans armour* thou shalt take the field, And own—impregnable to *most* assaults, Thy not too lawfully begotten waltz.

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Endearing waltz!—to thy more melting tune Bow Irish jig and ancient rigadon. Scotch reels, avaunt! and country dance, forego Your future claims to each fantastic toe! Waltz—waltz alone—both legs and arms demands, Liberal of feet, and lavish of her hands; Hands which may freely range in public sight Where ne'er before—but—pray ‘put out the light.’ Methinks the glare of yonder chandelier Shines much too fa—or I am much too near: And true, though strange—waltz whispers this remark, My slippery paths are safest in the dark. But here the Muse with due decorum halts. And lends her longest petticoat to waltz.

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Seductive waltz!—though on thy native shore Even Werter's self proclaimed thee halt a whore; Werter—to decent vice though much inclined, 28 Yet warm, not wanton; dazzled, but not blind— Though gentle Genlis, in her strife with Stael, would even proscribe thee from a Paris ball.”

It is a sad sign of the times that a practice about which such words could be written has, through the mere force of habit, come to be enthroned in established supremacy over the circles of fashionable society, and admitted even into the bosom of the loved and blood-bought Church of Christ, purchased at such a cost and redeemed for purposes so high and holy.

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CHAPTER IV.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT.

I PRESUME you are prepared to admit that dancing, as at present conducted, has, to say the least, an appearance of evil. It would be difficult to find any respectable person bold and brazen enough to deny the truth of this statement. Those who defend the amusement most earnestly, and engage in it most eagerly, insist that the evil of which so many complain is in appearance only, and not in reality; but still they are forced to concede that it has the appearance of evil, for it calls forth the admonitions of the wisest and best men in the various denominations of Christians; it grieves the hearts of thousands of the Savior's most faithful followers, and it excites the grave apprehension even of irreligious parents, who prize the virtue and purity of their children, lest it should run into excesses that are evil in fact.

Granting this, as I think you are willing to do, I beg you to remember, in the first place, that the Word of God explicitly enjoins upon us to “abstain from all appearance of evil.” Now, I ask you whether we are not bound to obey this positive rule, as well as every

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other precept plainly revealed in the sacred Scriptures? “Ye are 30 My friends,” says our Lord, “if ye do whatsoever I command you;” “and hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” One of His commandments requires us to abstain from all appearance of evil. It is conceded by everyone who is worthy of notice, that dancing has the appearance of evil; and, therefore, I argue that the sincere Christian will gladly abandon the practice.

Barnes, commenting on the text I have quoted, says:—“A great variety of subjects, such as those pertaining to dress, amusements, the opera, the ball-room, games of chance and hazard, and various practices in the transaction of business, come under this general class; which, though on the supposition that they cannot be proved to be in themselves positively wrong or forbidden, have much the appearance of evil, and will be so interpreted by others. In these instances it may be certain that there will be no sin committed by abstaining; there may be by indulgence.”

Matthew Henry says:—“We should abstain from evil, and all appearance of evil. He who, shy of the appearance, shuns not the occasions of sin, and who avoids not the temptations and approaches to sin, will not long abstain from the actual commission of sin.” A true child of God, anxious to make his calling and election sure, will 31 strive to keep on the safe side of every question that involves his duty to Jesus Christ and to his fellow-men; and although he may ignorantly allow himself to indulge in habits that have the appearance of evil, yet convince him that they really have this appearance, and he will conquer them or die. If, therefore, you acknowledge that dancing has the appearance of evil, you are bound, at the peril of your soul, to abstain from it.

In the second place, you are doubtless ready to admit that dancing is a worldly amusement, in the sense in which the term world is so often used in the Bible, as denoting that part of mankind who are not Christians. Certainly it does not spring from faith in Christ; it is not suggested by faith, it does not strengthen our faith, it is not connected with faith in the slightest extent; and yet the Word of God says, “without faith it is impossible to please

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Him,” and “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Upon this latter passage, Dr. Hodge remarks:—“Whatever we do which we are not certain is right, to us is wrong. There is evidently a sinful disregard of the divine authority on the part of a man who does anything which he supposes God has forbidden, or which he is not certain He has allowed.”

Now, you cannot be certain that God has allowed dancing as an amusement, for 32 no communion of His professed followers on the earth so interprets His Word as to require its members to dance for enjoyment; and the most that can be said for it in relation to any Christian Church is, that it is merely tolerated. It is, therefore, confessedly worldly in its origin, worldly in its character, worldly in its associations, worldly in its tendencies; and surely the disciples of Jesus, who discover in their hearts such a relish for this pleasure that they cannot cheerfully forsake it, ought to ponder carefully the following solemn admonitions and declarations of the sacred Scriptures:—

“Be not conformed to this world.” “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a 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.” “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” “Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Our Lord Jesus Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world,” “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this 33 present world; looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” “If ye were of the world,” He says, “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.” The great principle underlying such statements is manifestly applicable to all ages and all lands; and as Dr. Chalmers, in commenting on the first text I have here quoted, well says, “The enormities of the heathen world of which we read in the descriptions both of

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the New Testament and of profane authors were as little scandalous, then, as the gayeties and amusements, and those various companionships from which all sense of God and all the conversations of godliness are excluded, of the festive, and fashionable, and general society of our modern world can possibly be now.”

In the light of these passages, it seems to me perfectly obvious that professors of religion who have been in the habit of dancing must either abandon the practice, or abandon the delusive hope that they are born of God, and are on their triumphant march to heaven. Keep in mind, I pray you, that we are discussing a fashionable 34 amusement, which by universal consent is shown to be altogether worldly, and then that the Holy Ghost explicitly informs us if we are Christians we will not love the world, we will not be conformed to the world, we will overcome the world, we will be separate from the world, as a peculiar people, zealous of good works. If, therefore, a member of the Church finds that he cannot forsake this amusement, which certainly associates him distinctly and intimately with the world, there is too much reason to fear that he has only a name to live while in fact he is dead. Weigh well, my friend, the words of Jesus, that are as true today as they were when they fell from His lips. “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. And whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.”

In the third place, not only does fondness for the dance indicate a relish for the world in itself considered exceedingly alarming, but it increases this dangerous relish, and inevitably leads on to greater and still greater excesses, until the love of Christ totally dies out of the heart. I solemnly 35 declare to you I have never known a member of the Church who indulged in this evil practice without a shocking declension of religious life, without ceasing sooner or later to attend the prayer meeting, without exhibiting less and less interest in the ordinances of God's house, without sinking into a state of indifference to

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the claims of the Redeemer, and without being betrayed into the commission of other sins, which seem to grow naturally out of dancing.

I remember an occurrence which illustrates the statement just made, and, as it may serve to give force to my argument, I shall relate it just as it took place. If necessary, I can give you the names of reliable witnesses, who will confirm the correctness of the narrative. A few years ago, a young man was arraigned before the session of the church to which I was ministering, on the four charges of dancing, attendance upon the theatre, intoxication, and profanity. In the evening appointed for his trial he entered the session-room with an angry and defiant air, that plainly betokened his purpose to break another solemn vow, by which he had pledged himself to submit to the discipline administered in God's house. After hearing the charges read, he promptly confessed his guilt, adding that he was willing to acknowledge the wrong he had done in going 36 to the theatre, in becoming intoxicated and in using profane language, but very emphatically declaring that he did not see any harm in dancing, and was fully determined not to forsake it.

One of the elders remarked that there was no need of further testimony, and moved that he be suspended from the privileges of the church until he gave satisfactory evidence of repentance. At this I interposed, and begged, as a personal favor, that definite action might be postponed until our next meeting. Meanwhile, I had a long, friendly interview with the young man, and when he appeared before the session the second time, he stated that if there was any difference between the offenses which he had committed, he was convinced that dancing was the worst of all, because it was so insidious, and had led him on step by step, steadily and surely, to the other sins of which he had been guilty.

In explaining what he meant by this remarkable statement, he said that for some months he had been a member of a social club which met regularly for the purpose of dancing. His participation in the amusement gave him an increasing distaste for the services of the sanctuary, and even for private devotion, and drove him to the society of the worldly for companionship. A friend, who belonged to the 37 dancing club, asked him to accompany

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the other members to the theatre, as an actor of some celebrity was advertised to play, and he found that he could not with the slightest consistency refuse to go on the plea of conscientious scruples. He did go, and, while witnessing the performance, he discovered that when the curtain was dropped for any considerable time, it was the fashion among the young men to adjourn to a drinking saloon, which, of course, was most convenient to the theatre. Still feeling obliged to imitate their example as he had done in other respects, he accepted their invitation to drink, and the intoxicating beverage powerfully exciting his brain, he was quickly led to utter profane language.

Thus, upon serious reflection, he could see that dancing prepared the way for an easy descent to degradation, and conducted him almost like a chained captive to do the bidding of Satan. He acknowledged his error, deplored his folly, thanked the session for their faithfulness in warning him of his danger, and promised to abandon dancing forever. Of course I do not mean to intimate that the practice is really worse than the other offenses for which he was arraigned, or that it will always result in the same kind of iniquity; but I do mean to say, most emphatically, that, constituted as many of us are, it is 38 not only evil in itself, but it will open a flood-gate for other evils which may drown the soul in destruction and perdition. The only safeguard, therefore, is in a stout and steadfast resistance of every temptation to dance, and thus in refusing to make the first fatal start in a downward course. My arguments against the custom are by no means exhausted; but I reserve them for another letter.

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CHAPTER V.

BALL-ROOM ACQUAINTANCE.

The fourth argument which I urge against indulgence in dancing by those who profess to be Christians, is derived from the fact that the amusement is in direct conflict with the nature of the Church, and, therefore, with the fundamental principles of church

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membership. The word translated “church” in the New Testament comes from a Greek verb, which signifies “to call out,” and, of course, it refers to those who are called out, and separated from the world.

Now, we are told that “Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Again, we are taught that God created all things by Jesus Christ, “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church—by those called out from the world—the manifold wisdom of God,” and “unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.”

If you desire to know what sort of calling the Christian has received, the apostle informs us that God “hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling;” that we are “partakers of the heavenly calling;” that we must press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” and that we are “called to be saints;” and that we are “called to be saints;” that is, holy, and separated, and devoted to God. The word “calling” in these passages comes from the same Greek verb from which the word “church” is derived, and hence any true church is summoned to a “high” and “holy” and “heavenly” separation from the world, or from that portion of mankind who are not Christians.

In what respect, I ask, are members of the Church separated from the world by a high and holy and heavenly calling, when they are found in the dance and in the companionships and associations with which dancing is unavoidably connected? In what way do they show that they answer the design for which the Savior died, when He gave Himself for them to redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works? In what particular do they differ in character and conduct from the respectable part of the community who are without God and without hope in the world?

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Alas! I know too well the ready answer 41 to all this on the part of many members of the Church, and even on the part of some who appear to be ambassadors for Christ. It is a sneer and the flippant words “cant” and “fanaticism.” It is just this method of treating the solemn truth I have announced which has brought the Church at large to its present low and lamentable condition, from which I see no way of escape except in the personal coming of the Lord, or in a wonderful baptism of the Holy Ghost that shall consecrate the people of God anew to the great end for which they have been redeemed. Unless the Bible is a fable, there must be the difference I have indicated between the Church and the world,—a difference which, you are compelled to admit, dancing directly tends to obliterate. Unless, therefore, the Bible is a fable, the members of the Church who refuse to make this difference, and are unwilling to be known as “peculiar people,” distinct and distinguished from those who are called the enemies of God, are cherishing a hope of salvation which will prove to them the mockery of an idle dream in the terrible awakening of the last day.

Fifth. Dancing is utterly inconsistent with the duties, privileges, and tastes of true Christians, as these are set forth in the sacred Scriptures. Who are Christians? They are believers in Jesus Christ 42 who confess Him before men and are consecrated to His service. Through faith in His precious name, they are “passed from death unto life,” they are “justified from all things,” they are “complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power,” they are “accepted in the Beloved.”

It is not enough to say that they shall be saved, but they are saved already; not only partially saved, but fully saved from the condemnation of God's broken law; not only freely saved, but saved solely on the ground of Christ's accomplished sacrifice in their behalf; not only saved from the punishment of sin, but from the power of sin. They were crucified in Christ, they died in Christ, they arose in Christ unto newness of life, they are members of Christ's body, their bodies are the temples of Christ's Spirit, their calling is of God “unto

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the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord;" and hence they confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He has left them here a little while among those who despised and rejected and slew Him; but in due time He will come for them, as a bridegroom cometh for his bride, and receive them into the royal mansions of His Father's house, and put beautiful crowns on their heads, and clothe them in white raiment, and invite them to sit with Him upon His throne. And now what would you think of a waiting and expectant bride who should hear that her betrothed had been cruelly murdered, and then should amuse herself by conforming to the practices of his murderers, by going eagerly into their company for pleasure, and by doing that which she has every reason to believe dishonors his memory?

Do you tell me that no impropriety of conduct is exhibited and that no wrong is done the Savior when those whom He has so tenderly loved, and for whom He has so cruelly suffered, prefer to be found among the people of the world, participating with "vain fellows" in all the hilarities and revelries of the dance? Out, out, upon the base, ungenerous thought! I tell you, in reply, that the real Christian who has not turned like the dog to his own vomit again, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, will never feel at home amid such scenes; and he will wonder that any who know God, or, rather, are known of Him, can resort for happiness to such weak and beggarly elements, that furnish neither improvement to his mind nor gratification to his heart.

Sixth. You will not deny that indulgence in dancing by members of the 44 Church is a cause of grief and an offense to very many faithful disciples of Christ. I am willing to admit, if you insist upon it, that they are weak brethren who are grieved, and still I claim that unless you feel under obligation as a matter of conscience and of duty to dance, the Word of God plainly requires you to abandon the practice for the sake of these weak brethren. In the kingdom of Christ "no man liveth unto himself and no man dieth unto himself." In that kingdom every man is bound to look not only on his own things, but also on the things of others. "All things are lawful for me," says the apostle, "but all things are not expedient; all

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things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's welfare.”

Such, then, is the unity of the body of Christ that the conduct of each member, however obscure, must produce an effect for good or for evil upon the Church at large. “By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” If, therefore, a Christian grows weak in faith and worldly in life, he inflicts an injury upon the whole body of which Christ is the exalted Head; but, on the other hand, if he walks worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called, he is a 45

A BALL-ROOM ACQUAINTANCE

46 blessing and a comfort, and a source of strength to all the people of God.

Let us see, then, what duty springs out of the relation we sustain to other Christians, who, with ourselves, constitute the glorious body of the ascended Redeemer.

Let us look at an important principle, which is plainly stated in the Word of God, which manifestly applies to the subject of dancing, and which clearly condemns the practice, even on the supposition that there is no wrong in it, in itself considered.

In the Corinthian Church, during the life of the apostle Paul, a question arose touching the propriety of eating meat, a portion of which had been offered to the idol gods in heathen worship. When a victim was brought to the temple to be presented as a sacrifice, one part was laid upon the altar, another part was given to the priest, and still another part was retained by the worshipper who owned the animal. If the priest and the offerer did not need the allotted portion, it was sold in the public market, and hence Christians might buy it for their own use, or be invited to partake of it in the houses of their unconverted friends.

Some of the members of the Church held that there was no harm in eating such meat; others thought that it was wrong to encourage or support idolatry even that 47 far; and

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hence the case was referred to the decision of the inspired apostle. He replies by promptly admitting that, "as concerning the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world;" and hence, "neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." Eating or not eating, therefore, was in itself considered a matter of indifference, and, apart from any other consideration, was certainly not blameworthy. In their circumstances, however, it not only might be wrong, but it was positively sinful, because it was a grief, and an offense, or an occasion of sin to their weaker brethren. Encouraged by their example, those who had conscientious scruples about eating such meat would be led to do what the inward monitor condemned, and hence they would contract guilt; for "he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Whoever, therefore, was uncertain whether he ought to abstain from meat offered in idol sacrifice, and yet indulged in eating, owing to the influence of other Christians, evidently sinned, and brought himself under condemnation.

"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom 48 Christ died." "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." It is not enough, consequently, that an act should be in its own nature harmless to justify us in doing it. If our performance of it is the cause of grief or offense to our brethren, it at once changes its character, and becomes plainly sinful, so far as we are concerned. "When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

Such was the generous and unselfish principle which governed the apostle, and the same principle will control every sincere and magnanimous Christian now. Even if I admit, therefore, that the fashionable amusement against which I am pleading is entirely harmless as you indulge in it, and that it is harmless when confined to decent dances and proper hours, still, if it may be the occasion of sin to less stable souls, by leading them

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to neglect their duty to God, or by carrying them, under the spell of its fascinations, to dangerous excesses, surely, my friend, you cannot, you will not, hesitate to abandon it forever.

Seventh. If dancing is proper for one 49 member of the Church it is certainly proper for another; and if it is really innocent, as you insisted in our interview, you would raise no objection, I am convinced, although your minister, ruling-elders, deacons, and all other Christians, should catch the proper steps in a dancing school, and then crowd your gay assemblies to exhibit their proficiency in the high and ennobling art. See where your position will lead you. I know you will not claim the privilege of doing wrong; and if dancing is not wrong, then it cannot be wrong for any Christian to engage in it. Suppose a minister of the gospel should become a member of a social club organized for the purpose of dancing, and faithfully attend its meetings, even at times appointed for prayer in the house of God, and participate in all its customary revelries; how long would it be before the votaries of pleasure themselves would turn from him with unconcealed contempt and open ridicule?

But why lose confidence in him for doing what so many stoutly affirm is harmless and entirely proper for other Christians? He is under no stronger obligation to abstain from dancing than any member of his church. He was no greater sinner; his soul was in no greater danger; its redemption cost no greater price, and the Savior has no greater claim upon his love, his services, 50 and his self-denying consecration than he has upon every child of God who has been bought with precious blood. And yet I venture to say that you, and other Christian advocates of dancing, yea, and irreligious advocates of dancing, would be shocked to hear that a preacher or any prominent and active member of the Church had indulged, even once, in this graceful and innocent amusement, as you call it.

I ask you, then, in all candor and kindness, whether you are nor in danger of dishonoring the name of your Master, and of bringing sorrow to your own soul, by joining yourself with the profane and unbelieving, and making common cause with them in the controversy

about the world's favorite pleasure? When Jehoshaphat, the pious king of Judah, was foolishly beguiled into an alliance with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, and, as a consequence, almost lost his life in the disastrous battle of Ramoth-gilead, on his return to Jerusalem, a faithful prophet said to him, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

My concluding arguments I must reserve for another letter.

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CHAPTER VI.

SOME OF ITS INCONSISTENCIES.

THE eighth argument which I desire to press upon your attention as a dancing Christian, is the gross inconsistency of this fashionable amusement with such texts of Scripture as the following:—"What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."

What solemn and tender considerations are here presented to the sincere believer to wean him from the world, and to win him to the service of his Lord! He was one "dead in trespasses and sins," and dead in the eye of the divine law which condemned him to suffer the pangs of everlasting death, because he had broken its holy and unchangeable precepts. From 52 this dreadful condition and condemnation he was redeemed, not by the power of the faultless example or the sublime doctrines of Christ, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." The death of Christ, then, is accepted as paying the penalty of the violated law, and as satisfying the claims of infinite

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justice in place of his death; and now he lives, lives in peace with his own conscience, lives in fellowship with the Father; lives in hope of the heavenly inheritance, lives forever in spite of the powers of darkness, only because the gracious Redeemer died in his stead.

From the moment he simply believes that the Savior “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself,” and, so believing, trusts in Him alone for salvation, he “is passed from death unto life,” and, under the constraining influence of the love of Christ, he now does all things with a view to the glory of God. He cannot henceforth live for the gratification of his natural desires, for the promotion of his personal interests, or for the admiration of the world, but he is bound to render all of his own plans and pleasures not only subordinate, but subservient to the great end of the glorifying God. His body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and you know that a temple is hallowed, because it is the dwelling-place of God, and because it is devoted 53 solely to the service of God. He has been bought with a price, and therefore belongs, not figuratively, but literally and really, to Jesus, being, in the expressive language of the Bible, the slave of Christ. In all that he does, consequently, he is under the strongest conceivable obligation to consult the will and consider the honor of his Master, and if he fails to do this, either in his pursuits or recreations, he is guilty of cruel ingratitude and positive sin.

You are no doubt ready to acknowledge the truth and force of these statements in their bearing upon the conduct of every Christian, and, if so, I ask, how can you dance? Do you engage in this diversion out of regard for the glory of God? If you do not, you are certainly violating one of His plainest commandments, and “he that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Can you earnestly implore the blessing of God to rest upon you, and lead you to please Him, while making preparation to assist the poor votaries of pleasure in their studied attempts to exclude from their minds all thought of eternity?

Can you pray?—I do not ask can you say your prayers, which a senseless parrot may be taught to do, but I mean, can you fervently and joyfully hold communion 54 with your

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Lord when you return from the house of revelry, in which the earnest Christian would be at once compelled to exclaim, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place?" Is the ball-room, public or private, a proper place for the temple of the Holy Ghost? Would you be willing to have Christ reveal Himself to you while whirling in the dance, and fix upon you the sad and searching glance which pierced the heart of Peter when he denied his Lord?

Oh, my friend, I am sure you will not persist in affirming that a child of God, redeemed by the agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary, does no wrong when he allows himself to indulge in a practice which, to say the least, cannot glorify his Savior. That practice in which we dare not seek God's protection must be wrong; that enjoyment for which we dare not render God thanks must be criminal. Nor will it avail to reply that dancing is not more inconsistent with the purpose which led the Lord of glory to lay down His life for sinners than many other things done by Christians; for, admitting this to be true, still the amusement against which I am pleading stands condemned by the passages which we have just noticed. A faithful disciple of Christ will constantly aim, whether he eats or drinks, or takes needful recreation, or whatsoever he does, to glorify God in his body and spirit, which are God's, remembering that he has been bought with a price.

Ninth. Indulgence in dancing by professed Christians invariably destroys their influence for good. You may reply, that this is assertion rather than argument; but if you are willing to accept the testimony of hundreds of ministers of the gospel, belonging to various denominations, the assertion will be armed with all the strength of overwhelming demonstration. I expect, in due time, to present the views of some of the most prominent among these ministers; but for the present will appeal to your own observation and candor. I ask you, then, whether it is not the fact that people of the world, as a rule, disapprove of dancing by members of the Church, and speak slightly of them when they refuse to abandon an amusement which is, at least, of questionable propriety?

Again and again, since these letters were commenced, have unbelievers said, directly to myself or to my friends, that I am right in the position I have taken in relation to this

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subject, and that they have little confidence in the piety of those who profess religion but love the world too much to give up the dance. If I am not greatly mistaken, such is the general sentiment of the unregenerate, who are quick 56 to mark the inconsistencies of Christians, and who too often make these inconsistencies an excuse for their personal neglect of the Savior's claims upon their faith and obedience. The great obstacle in the way of the conversion of men is not found in the hardness of the sinner's heart, but in the low state of piety in the Church, that "grieves the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption."

More than once, during a busy ministry of fifteen years, I have known the believing wife yield to the solicitations of an unbelieving husband, and accompany him to the theatre, or participate with him in the hilarities of the dance, on the specious plea that by relaxing a little her hightoned Christian principle, she would render her religion more genial, and gradually win him over to the cause of Christ. I have never know an instance in which this plan succeeded. On the other hand, the wife always, I believe, loses whatever influence she might have possessed as a child of God; while the husband is confirmed in ungodliness by the compromise which she has made at his entreaty, or perhaps upon his demand. I have seen such women weep bitter tears over their folly and sin, and lament with unavailing regret the terrible mistake they had committed.

I will only add, touching this point, that 57 I have never heard of a convicted sinner, sending for a dancing Christian to inquire of him the way of salvation, nor of a dying sinner sending for a dancing Christian to hear from his lips the words of Jesus and the words of prayer. No, no. In the hour of awakening from the deep insensibility of sin, and in the hour when the trembling soul hangs on the verge of a neglected and undone eternity, a Christian of very different character is needed, and the dancing disciple of Christ is left behind with the things of the world which are forsaken.

Tenth. I need hardly say, after all that has gone before, that indulgence in this fashionable amusement is a source of unspeakable injury to those who are not Christians, and greatly

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increases their danger of being lost forever. Let the following narrative, out of many similar instances that might be gleaned from the field of pastoral observation, illustrate the solemn statement just made:—

“I was once called,” says an aged pastor, “to visit a young lady who was said to be in despair. She had at some time previous been serious, and had, it was hoped, resolutely set her face Zionward. In an evil hour some of her former associates called on her to accompany them to a ball. She refused to go. The occasion, the company, the parade and gayety, were all utterly dissonant from her present feelings. With characteristic levity and thoughtlessness they employed persuasion and ridicule, and finally so far prevailed that, with a desperate effort to shake off her convictions and regain her former security, she exclaimed, ‘Well, I will go, if I am damned for it!’ God took her at her word. The blessed Spirit immediately withdrew His influences, and, instead of the anxious sigh and longing desire to be freed from the body of sin and death, succeeded, by turns, the calmness and the horrors of despair.

“The wretched victim knew that the Spirit had taken His final leave: no compunctions for sin, no tears of penitence, no inquiries after God, no eager seeking of the ‘place where Christians love to meet,’ now occupied the tedious hours. Instead of the bloom and freshness of health, there came the paleness and haggardness of decay. The wan and sunken cheek, the ghastly, glaring eye, the emaciated limb,—the sure precursors of approaching dissolution,—were there. The caresses of friends, the suggestions of affection, were all unheeded. The consolations of piety—the last resource of the miserable—were to her but the bitterness of death. In this state of mind I was called to visit her. When I entered the room and beheld her pale and emaciated and reflected that the 59

A VICTIM OF ONE NIGHT'S PLEASURE.

60 ravages of her form without but faintly shadowed forth the wreck and desolation within, I was almost overpowered. Never had I conceived so vivid an idea of the woe and misery of those who have quenched the Spirit.

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“I proposed prayer. The word threw her into an agony. She utterly refused No entreaties of friends, no arguments drawn from the love of God, or from the fullness and freeness of atoning blood, could prevail to shake her resolution. I left her without being able to find a single avenue to her heart, or to dart one ray of comfort into the dark bosom, which, to all human view, was soon to be enveloped in the blackness of darkness forever. Never shall I forget the dreadful expression of that ghastly countenance, the tones of that despairing voice. The impression is as vivid as though it had been but yesterday. Oh, that all the young, gay, thoughtless ones, who stifle the convictions of conscience and repress the rising sigh, and dance along the brink of utter reprobation and despair, would read and lay to heart the warning!”

There are hundreds of ministers who can testify that they have seen revival influences rudely checked, and awakened sinners suddenly sunk in the fatal slumber of spiritual insensibility, by an ill-timed dance. If dying confessions mean anything, 61 its pleasures are often purchased at the price of the soul; and in the day of judgment the appalling fact will be revealed to the gaze of an astonished universe that the professed disciple of Jesus who gave to this evil practice his countenance and support, lived, not to bless, but to curse, his circle of unbelieving acquaintances, who felt the force of his ruinous example.

I cannot do better, just here, than to quote a paragraph or two from a sermon by Dr. Chalmers on the “Amusements and Companies of the World.” He, first, most eloquently portrays the peril in which the theatre and the dance involve the Christian himself, and “how utterly at antipodes they are with the soul and habit of one who is singly aspiring after immortality.” “And what gives additional soreness as well as subtlety to this oft-recurring mischief,” he adds, “is, that it may not only injure the Christian, but may cause him to reflect the injury back again on those who are around him. Let him have but the name and authority of religiousness,—let it be held enough by the many that they reach the standard of his attainments,—let his example be quoted as the measure of a safe and sufficient

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imitation,—and then let them witness with what kindred delight he can give himself up—and that for hours together—participating 62 in a scene of unmingled earthliness.

“Let it be seen how willingly he can disport himself among fellow-men who, if his Christianity be true, are on the brink of a lake from whose devouring billows there is no other way of escape than by the living faith and thorough regeneration of the gospel. And after all this, will it be said that no damage is sustained by human souls from this man's easy connivance at the ungodliness of the world, or from his complacent toleration of those parties by whom a sacred or scriptural utterance would be felt as a most unseemly and most unwarranted intrusion, and so put a sudden arrest on all that hilarity which they had met to indulge in?

“Think you not that these will serve to reduce still further in the eyes of men the high topics of immortality? And will they not foster the delusions of that practical infidelity which so abounds among us? And do they not tend to satisfy that heart which, did it feel as it ought, would be all awake and in disquietude about its sentence of condemnation? And do they not lend a most pernicious sanction to the whole habit and history of creatures who have taken up with the world as their resting place, and, engrossed with the bustle of its companies and its joys, never cast one look of earnestness to the eternity beyond it?” Alas! multitudes of these 63 creatures are held back from Christ by an idolatrous attachment for the pleasures of earth; and the dancing Christian strengthens this ruinous attachment by going with them into all their revelries, or by casting from his conduct, the shadow of a dark and fatal suspicion upon the reality and value of religion.

Eleventh. The surrender of this fascinating amusement furnishes nearly the only proof of willingness that can be given these days, especially by the young, to deny themselves, in accordance with the Savior's high example and positive requirement, when He says, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me;” “and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of Me.” If the youthful Christian cannot deny himself the pleasures of the dance, pray, in what respect

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can he be said to deny himself in anything? And if he denies himself in nothing, what love does he show for his Lord? What change has been wrought in him? What consecration does he exhibit to the cause of Jesus? And what right has he to indulge a hope that he is truly born of God through faith in Christ?

The time has been in the history of the Church when a confession of the Savior was made with the rack, the stake, or the den of wild beasts in full view; and surely, 64 my friend, I am not extravagant nor fanatical when I say that the sincere Christian will cheerfully and gladly give up what to him should no longer be the fascinating amusement, but the pitiful enjoyment of the childish and nonsensical dance, for the sake of his Master, who not only bore the cross, but was nailed to the cross for our sins.

Twelfth. You observe that the arguments which I have urged against dancing in the Church of Christ rest entirely on religious grounds; but, if time permitted, I think a powerful argument could be constructed against the "round dances," as they are called on the ground of delicacy and decency. These "round dances," into which the "square dances" seem certain to run, I here and hereafter, and on all occasions, denounce as disgraceful and infamous. Fashion, which is often a fool, and still oftener a fiend, even while wearing a smiling face, has succeeded in enthroning the waltz, and her still more lascivious sisters, as the recognized queens of our best society, and under their sway it is fast getting to be our worst society.

At the beck of these base tyrants, there are young ladies, I am sorry to say, who will permit liberties to be taken with them in public, which, if attempted in private, they would instantly resent as the most shocking insult. There are fathers and 65 mothers who permit their daughters to attend the "club" or the "Lop;" and after gliding for hours through the "voluptuous movement of the waltz," they are accompanied home, it may be, by an accomplished libertine, half drunk with champagne. And shall these shameful practices go unrebuked because, forsooth, some weak-minded parent, or giddy girl, or debased voluptuary, chooses to grow furious at the man who hurls his indignant

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remonstrance against the outrage upon purity and morality which is committed night after night throughout the land?

Would you be willing for your sister, or, in the event of your marriage, would you be willing for your wife, to engage in these dances that are “all the rage” now? If you would, I pity, and I was about to add. I despise you. But if you would not be willing, then observe, you have no right as a gentleman,—to say nothing of your character as a Christian—to indulge in familiarities with another man's sister or wife which you would forbid if offered to those dear to your own heart. Do not affect astonishment and indignation at these words, as if I suspected your chastity; for I tell you candidly, I do suspect the chastity of thought and feeling of any young man who is willing to dance the round dances, but unwilling to have his sisters dance them.

66

CHAPTER VII.

TESTIMONY AGAINST IT.

I HAVE not written one word against dancing when indulged in by unbelievers, “for what have I to do to judge them also that are without?” Nor have I mentioned all of the reasons that have occurred to my mind why even believers should abstain from the practice. I might show its injurious effects upon the health; its frequent termination in death, when carried to excess, to which the young are so liable; its inevitable tendency to form for the Christian improper associations; its frightful diversion of the mind from serious thoughts and elevating subjects; its artful ministering to vanity and love of display; its resistless power to excite the passions and train the soul in the school of vice; its prodigal and sinful expenditure of time and money that could be devoted to so much better purpose in the service of our Lord; its inherent childishness and folly as an amusement, that—

Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

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and still other objections that would be presented, if I thought it best to press them upon your attention.

I have, however, preferred to lay before you certain principles of Christian conduct⁶⁷ clearly taught in the Word of God, and if, after prayerful reflection, you conclude that dancing is not inconsistent with those principles, I have nothing more to say. I do not wish you to abandon the custom simply because your pastor and the church to which you belong deem it to be wrong, but because your own judgment is convinced, and your own conscience demands the decision that it is improper and dangerous for a disciple of Christ to join with the enemies of God in the dance.

It may aid you to reach this decision if it can be shown that various churches, and the leading men of various churches, differing widely in many respects, unite in condemning the dance as it is and must be conducted at the present day. You will hardly say that these various bodies of professing Christians have conspired without any reason to rob the young of an innocent pleasure, and certainly you are willing to read with attention and respect the testimony of men eminent for their learning, piety, and wisdom.

First of all I ask you to ponder the following statement, found in the Pastoral Letter of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States:

“In this connection, we consider it to be our duty to warn our people against those amusements which may easily become to⁶⁸ them an occasion of sin, and especially against the fashionable dances, which, as at present carried on, are revolting to every feeling of delicacy and propriety, and are fraught with the greatest danger to morals.”

Mark it! This council solemnly declares that fashionable dances “are fraught with the greatest danger to morals,” and through the confessional, which reveals to the priests of the Catholic Church the very secrets of the heart, it is easy for them to know what practices are dangerous to morals. Here, then, all of the archbishops and bishops of this

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vast country deliberately affirm that fashionable dances “are fraught with the greatest danger to morals.”

The present Pope of Rome has, in a General Letter, expressed similar views; but as I cannot lay my hand upon it at present, I will only add, in this connection, the testimony of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, as given in a Lenten Pastoral to his people. He says:—

“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.”

I cite, next, the testimony of prominent witnesses in the Episcopal Church, and ask your special attention to it, because many seem to suppose that this Church is not opposed to dancing. Such a supposition is a total mistake, for every sincere Christian in that denomination is deeply grieved when the members of the body to which he belongs violate, by engaging in the dance, their solemn vows to “renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world.” I am not aware that any Episcopal convention has formally pronounced upon the subject; but I know that the ablest and most distinguished Episcopal bishops of the land have pronounced upon it in unmistakable language. Thus we find Bishop Hopkins, of Vermont,—the senior bishop at the time of his death, and perhaps the strongest intellect in his Church,—writing as follows:—

“In the period of youthful education. I have shown that dancing is chargeable with 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 70 sobriety and principle, and its tendency to the love of dissipation, are so manifest, that no ingenuity can make it consistent with the

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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.”

The late venerable and beloved Bishop Meade, of Virginia, speaking of dancing 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 abuses, should not make us frown upon it in all its forms?...It has always been considered so disreputable to excel in this as a public performer, that such persons have been excluded sometimes from civil, and always from religious privileges, and from respectable society. Can the practice of it then, even in a more private way, be suitable or becoming in a serious Christian? Very few persons can be found who 71

THE PATH OF DISOBEDIENCE IS EVER A PATH OF DANGER.

72 do not answer, no. I shall not dwell on these two arguments further, for obvious reasons. To my mind they are conclusive to show that social dancing is not among the neutral things which, within certain limits, we may do at pleasure, and even that it is not among the things lawful, but not expedient, but that it is, in itself, wrong, improper, and of bad effect.”

Bishop Mellvaine, of Ohio, who still lives, thank God, to “Stand up for Jesus,” and to stay for a little while the fall of his suffering and distracted Church, thus writes:—

“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 these in such an abstract and elementary simplicity, so divested of all that gives

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them their universal character and relish, that no harm could be detected in either...The question is not what we can imagine them to 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...

73

“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 this world,’ they are included as matters of worldly conformity to be forsaken, he answers, ‘Certainly.’ If he be asked whether these things are consistent with the cultivation of a spiritual mind and the maintaining of a rightful Christian influence, by example, for the good of men 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 that the time may come when all communicants will unite in rejecting these things.”

Bishop Coxe, of Western New York, recently addressed a “Pastoral” to his people in view of the season of Lent, in which he uses the following forcible language:—

“The enormities of theatrical exhibitions, and the lasciviousness of dances, too commonly tolerated in our times, are so disgraceful to the age and so irreconcilable with the gospel of Christ, that I feel it my duty to the souls of my flock to warn 74 those who run with the world to ‘the same excess of riot’ in these things, that they presume not to come to the holy table. Classes preparing for confirmation are informed that I will not lay hands, knowingly, on any one who is not prepared to renounce such things, with other abominations of ‘the world, the flesh, and the devil.’ Let all such choose deliberately whom they will serve; and if salvation be worth striving for, let them be persuaded to a sober life,

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to self-denial, and to the pure and innocent enjoyments which the gospel not only permits, but which it only can create. It is high time that the lines should be drawn between worldly and godly living; and I see no use in a Lent that is not sanctified to such ends.”

The Protestant Episcopal Female Tract Society, of Baltimore, has uttered its testimony by declaring that “indecent dances, involving personal liberties between the sexes which would be unsafe and indecent anywhere, become fashionable, and finally indispensable at the meetings of good society;” and that for “parents to have their children taught to dance is nothing else but leading the little ones into temptation, exposing them to a snare. They may in theory dance innocently, but practically they will not.”

The Rev. J. T. Brooke, D. D., formerly rector of Christ Church, Cincinnati, exclaims, 75 “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!”

I am willing to weigh such testimony against those feeble-minded clergymen who choose to disgrace the Episcopal pulpit by publicly defending or privately patronizing the dance with the hope of inducing the wealthy and the fashionable to enter their Church. Verity they have their reward; but they have it only here. When they come to stand before their indignant Judge, who will require at their hands the blood of the wicked and the worldly whom they were too timid or too careless to warn, they will wish they had never been born.

But I pass on to cite other witnesses, and will now present an extract from a little book written by a Methodist preacher, and called, “An Appeal to all Christians especially the Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, against the Practice of Social Dancing.” The writer says,—

“There is another very important reason why members of the Methodist Episcopal Churches especially cannot be allowed to dance with impunity. It is a flagrant violation of

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the 'General Rules' of those 76 Churches, both North and South and of the assurance they gave, on being received into the Church, of a 'willingness to observe and keep the rules;' and all who desire to continue in the fellowship of those churches are required to abstain from 'all such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus; and this has always been interpreted as prohibiting their members from attending theatres, circuses, balls, dancing parties, etc. And so frequently is this rule read, expounded, and enforced upon the membership, that to ignore its existence is to manifest a degree of ignorance of which anyone in fellowship with those churches ought to be heartily ashamed. And this rule is not a dead letter. Every probationer is required to 'evidence his desire of salvation' by keeping it in connection with the other 'general rules; and none can be received into full fellowship until, in addition to other prerequisites, they give satisfactory assurances of a 'willingness to observe and keep the rules of the Church.' So that if members of these churches dance, or attend dancing parties, they not only violate one of the fundamental rules of their church, but they are also guilty of violating a solemn pledge, given by themselves in the presence of the Church, to 'observe and keep the rules' of the Church.

77

"It was our good fortune, years ago, to hear one of the General Superintendents of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, deliver a pastoral address to an Annual Conference, in which he referred to the evident increase of dancing propensities among the membership, and earnestly exhorted the ministers to enforce the rules of the Church against all such 'disorderly walkers.' In concluding his remarks upon this point, he averred that if the Church of his choice should ever connive at this practice in her official capacity, and permit persons to remain in her fellowship habitually addicted to it, he would feel it his duty to withdraw from her pale and seek Christian communion elsewhere."

I will not weary you further at present; but in my next I propose to adduce the testimony of other witnesses to prove that dancing is not the harmless thing you so confidently asserted it to be.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A SEVERE ARRAIGNMENT.

THE next witness I cite against dancing, is the "Baptist Quarterly." My personal knowledge of the amusement is so very limited, I am not prepared to say whether the serious charge contained in the extract from this able and dignified periodical can be substantiated; but, judging from remarks which I am reliably informed are constantly made by young men who are fond of the dance, I am constrained to believe that the terrible accusation can be sustained so far as the majority of gentlemen are concerned.

I do not believe it is well founded if the writer had young ladies in view; for, low as is my opinion of human nature, I doubt whether their depravity takes the direction here indicated. I am sure there are thousands of girls who retain their purity of heart even when engaged in the "round dances," and I have always felt that they deserve far lighter censure than their foolish parents who permit them to form such habits.

Still, having made this admission in all sincerity, I am bound to add, there can be no doubt that very many of the vast number of abandoned women who, according to police reports, fill the houses of illfame and flock to the assignation-houses, found in every city, received their first schooling in vice in the theatre and the dance. If a young girl will so sacredly guard her maidenly modesty and delicacy of feeling that she will not consent to look at the shameful performances and profligate performers so generally found in the theatre, and will not permit the unwarrantable liberties so constantly allowed in the dance, she is not in much danger of falling into the deep degradation which drags multitudes of her sex into everlasting ruin.

It is time, however, to present the Baptist testimony against dancing; and I hope you will read it, although it may call a blush to your cheek.

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“Our accusation is that the dance, instead of affording an opportunity for mutually ennobling companionship between man and woman, inspired with a chaste and sweet interfused remembrance of their contrasted relationship to each other,—that the dance, instead of this, consists substantially of a system of means contrived with more than human ingenuity to incite the instincts of sex to action, however, subtle and disguised at the moment, in its sequel the most bestial and degrading. We charge that here, and not elsewhere, in the anatomy of that elusive fascination which belongs so peculiarly to the dance, we lay our scalpel upon the quivering secret of life. Passion,—passion transformed, if you please, never so much, subsisting in no matter how many finely contrasted degrees of sensuality,—passion, and nothing else, is the true basis of the popularity of the dance.

“For it is no accident that the dance is what it is. It mingles the sexes in such closeness of personal approach and contact as, outside of the dance, is nowhere tolerated in respectable society. It does this under a complexity of circumstances that conspire to heighten the impropriety of it. It is evening, and the hour is late; there is the delicious and unconscious intoxication of music and motion in the blood; there is the strange, confusing sense of being individually unobserved among so many, while yet the natural ‘noble shame’ which guards the purity of man and woman alone together is absent, such is the occasion, and still, hour after hour, it whirls its giddy kaleidoscope around, bringing hearts so near that they almost beat against each other, mixing the warm mutual breaths, darting the fine personal electricity across between the meeting fingers, flushing the face and lighting the eyes with a quick language, subject often to gross interpretations on the part of the vile-hearted,—why, this 81

THE DANCE OF DEATH.

82 fashionable institution seems to us to have been invented in an unfriendly quarter, usually conceived of as situated under us, to give our human passions leave to disport themselves, unproved by conscience, by reason, or by shame, almost at their will.”

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After this long sentence we will pause a moment to take breath; and, meanwhile, I will say that the writer uses language which seems to indicate a record of his personal experience, previous to his conversion to God, of the dangerous tendencies and effects of the dance. He writes like one who had felt the evils of which he complains, and, if so, I ask you to make allowance for his apparent indelicacy and real zeal in denouncing a practice which, with the Catholic archbishops and bishops, he believes to be “fraught with the greatest danger to morals.”

But let us listen to his testimony a little further:—

“We say that the dance is not fortuitously such. It is such essentially. Its real nature is shown by what it constantly tends to become in new figures introduced stealthily from time to time (under silent protest from any who suffer their modesty to be overborne by the fear of being charged with prudery), a little more doubtful than the old, and in wanton whirls, like the waltz and the polka. Always the 83 dance inclines to multiply opportunities of physical proximity and contact between the sexes,—always to make them prolonged and more daring....But if what has already been said and suggested fails to convince any that our analysis of the pleasure of the dance is true, we have a little problem to propose for their solution: why is it that the dance alone, of all the favorite diversions of gay society, requires the association of the two sexes in it?...And then consider, ye Christian fathers, and brothers, and husbands, to what horrible hazards of contact the opportunities of the dance expose your daughters, and sisters, and wives. For who that has gained any experience of the world is ignorant of the fact that hardly once does a considerable party assemble, even in the most respectable society, without including some man whom his associates know to be a libertine at heart, if not in life? To think of pure women being pastured on, with palms of pollution, and with imminent eyes of adultery, by such a human bull of Bashan the evening long in the promiscuous corral of the dance! What better facilities could be imagined for an accomplished voluptuary to compass the capture of his prey?...Oh Fashion! Fashion! What power hast thou to brow-beat holy nature, so that

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she dares not speak to assert her sacred claims 84 against thy imperious sway!... We abruptly dismiss this hateful subject without completing the discussion of it. If our readers have winced at the exceptional plainness of speech which we have used, we beg them to believe that it has cost us sincere pangs of resolution to use it. But we have written under duress of conscience that did not suffer us to shrink. The engineering skill of the devil has defended the dance with a masterly dilemma that leaves open barely two alternatives of attack about equally ineligible. You may either exhaust your strength in demonstrating the minor and incidental evils of the usage, in which case you can win an easy but also a barren victory; or you must freely encounter the peril of damaging your own fair fame for purity, and deliver your blow full at its inherent and essential immorality. We have deliberately chosen the latter alternative. We can trust the honest heat of indignation that has warmed our words to take away the offense of their extreme fidelity. As for the risk of being charged with bringing the impurity that we find, we contentedly accept it. It is a charge which two classes of persons certainly will not prefer. These two classes are, first, those who know us, and, secondly, those who know themselves.”

The next witness I cite is the American 85 Tract Society, which has the sympathy, and, to some extent, the support of all evangelical Christians in the land. It may, therefore, be fairly considered the best representative we can find of the views entertained by various religious bodies with regard to any doctrine or duty presented and urged in its publications. Do not forget, then, that this society has repeatedly published its testimony against dancing, and I have never heard that any denomination has withheld its countenance or contributions on account of such testimony. The only possible inference is, that the united voice of evangelical Christians in the United States, as expressed through the American Tract Society, has declared the amusement which I am opposing to be sinful, while you affirm it to be innocent. Are you perfectly sure that you are right, and that the great majority of the disciples of Christ of every name are wrong?

In this connection I will add a paragraph from the “Church Union,” which may be considered, like the Tract Society, a kind of representative of various ecclesiastical bodies,

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as it has been established for the object of bringing Christians of all denominations into closer fellowship. My eye fell upon the paragraph while opening the paper for a moment this morning, and I have no doubt a vast amount of similar 86 testimony could be gathered from the religious press, if one would take time to collect it. The “Church Union” speaks as follows:—

“Beecher says well, in his lecture on amusements: ‘Whenever amusements become demoralized, it is better to get new ones than to put the old in hospitals: the turf is past redemption.’ And he might have added the stage, and cards, and dice, and billiards, which were but gambling-tools in their very origin, and the dance, which has been devoted to revelry and lasciviousness ever since such things existed, and in the modern world never had so much as an exceptional better use, unless the refined dissipation of God-forsaking modern people be better (which we than the beastly dissipation from which it descended.’”

I now adduce the testimony of the Presbyterian Church; and, first of all, call your attention to the fact that the General Assembly has again and again uttered its solemn admonition against dancing. According to the last minutes to which I have access, the Assembly adopted the following resolutions:—

“That whilst the pleasures of the ball-room and the theatre are primarily intended by the ‘dancing and stage plays’ forbidden in the answer to the 139th question in the Larger Catechism, the spirit 87 of the prohibition extends to all kindred amusements which are calculated to awaken thoughts and feelings inconsistent with the Seventh Commandment, as explained by the Savior in Matthew v. 27, 28.

“That whilst we regard the practice of promiscuous social dancing by members of the Church, as a mournful inconsistency, and the giving of parties for such dancing on the part of the heads of families as tending to compromise their religious profession, and the sending of children by Christian parents to the dancing-school as a sad error in family

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discipline, yet we think that the session of each church is fully competent to decide when discipline is necessary, and the extent to which it should be administered.”

In October of the same year, the Synod of Missouri met in the town of Columbia, and unanimously adopted the following paper, which I present only as an illustration of the action which various Synods and Presbyteries have taken scores of times in relation to dancing:—

“The committee call the special attention of Synod to the deliverance of the Assembly on dancing, and recommend them to say that, in the opinion of this Synod, there are many pleasures and practices deemed innocent and proper by those who are not professors of religion, which are nevertheless utterly inconsistent with the 88 teachings of God's holy word, injurious in their influence on Christian character, and inimical to the cause of Jesus Christ. The injunction not conformed to this world,’ and kindred passages of Scripture, imply that something more is required of God's children, in their walk and conversation, than simply to lead what is called a correct moral life; and a Christian professor who in any way encourages the gay and fashionable amusements of the world, especially dancing and attendance upon theatrical performances, furnishes sad evidence that he has not yet ‘put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,’ nor ‘put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,’ and that to him, at least, the promises and hopes of the gospel are a very unsatisfying portion.

“He thus brings dishonor and reproach upon his religious profession, throws a stumbling-block in the way of sinners, offends them that are weak, and grievously wounds the Savior in the house of his friends. There is a line of distinction between those worldly amusements which are harmless and those which are sinful. It may sometimes be difficult to determine where that line should be and a Christian who has much of the mind and temper which were in Christ, and would 89 keep his conscience void of offense, may and

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will avoid indulgence in many things which, from their intimate connection with lawful and necessary pursuits, may not with unerring certainty be held to be absolutely sinful.

“But with regard to dancing and theatrical performances there can be no such difficulty. They are the most giddy, thoughtless, and fascinating pursuits the world has to offer to her votaries on the very utmost limits to which worldly amusements can go. And if the Christian may not go all lengths with ungodly men in the pursuits which Satan so successfully uses to divert them from the consideration of serious things pertaining to the soul's eternal welfare, he must certainly pause in his indulgence far before he reaches the highest of the world's gay follies.

“1. It is, therefore, resolved, That the practice of dancing, of giving or attending private or public dancing parties or theatrical exhibitions, and of educating their children in the art of dancing, by professing Christians, is clearly forbidden by the spirit of the gospel, condemned by our Confession of Faith, and by the decisions of our highest Church judicatories, and in violation of the covenant obligations entered into by every one who connects himself with the Church of Christ; and that such conduct is an offense which a due regard to the purity as well as the peace of the Church will not permit her courts to overlook or disregard.

“2. Synod does, therefore, recommend and enjoin that the sessions of all churches within our bodies treat these sins as other recognized sins are to be treated, and, by proper instruction, admonition and re-proof, endeavor in the spirit of Christian gentleness and fidelity to remove all such practices from our churches. And that when milder measures fail, they proceed by the exercise of discipline to correct the evil, or to separate those who wilfully persist in these sinful practices from the body of Christ, that the cause of Christ be not hindered, and that we may thus co-operate with him in presenting ‘to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it may be holy and without blemish.’”

In my next, I hope to conclude the testimony of witnesses, by presenting the views of some of the most eminent men in the Presbyterian Church.

91

CHAPTER IX

A MULTITUDE OF WITNESSES.

THE late Dr. Alexander, whose name will be honored and revered by Presbyterians while their church continues to exist, speaking of fashionable amusements, well says:—

“The growing laxity of the age gives peculiar meaning to the exhortation, ‘Be not conformed to this world.’ The rule of most is corrupt and dangerous; it is to do as others do. The consequence is mutual injury and perpetual declension in the Church. You will find professors who as they increase in wealth constantly enlarge their license. It requires a keen eye to discriminate between their pleasures and expenditures and those of the ungodly. If they abstain from the theatre, they go freely to the opera; or, if they scruple at this, they linger at the midnight ball. The step is so easily taken from apparently innocent dancing to that which is free, indiscreet, amorous, and licentious, that a tender conscience will find it safest to reject all. Apply, if you can, to such assemblages, however common, the divine maxim, ‘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.’ That young communicant is near 92 his fall who is often asking how near he may go to the brink of sin and yet be safe. Observe the families which have made this passage from ancient strictness to fashionable Christianity, and you will find their children, one by one, sliding away to looser forms of religion, if not to utter carelessness.”

My next witness is Rev. William S. Potts, D. D., for many years the faithful and beloved pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of St. Louis. Mo. In a sermon which he published on the text: “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather

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reprove them," he first affirms that dancing is one of these unfruitful works of darkness, and then says of the public ball:—

“The female is expected to make her appearance in a ball-dress, which means that as much of the person as modesty will at all permit shall be exposed. She may be held in the embrace of the smooth-tongued stranger whom she never saw before, and whose heart is filled with lust, and her panting breast drawn close to his, while waltzing or practicing any of the still more indelicate dances now most fashionable. Do these assemblies and acts commend themselves as very proper for either your sons or daughters? There is enough of virtue and sense of sound propriety yet to decide that these, too, are not 93 the places for the lovers of light and purity.

“We come, next in order, to the dancing party given by an individual in his own house.... Let us examine into the difference between this case and the public ball.... Now, the rules of the ball-room are the rules in his house, the moment the dance is announced as the amusement of the evening. The same dresses, the same indelicate dances, the same excitement, the same refreshments and drinking, the same late and unseasonable hours; the numbers, too, are about the same. There is a little less caution and restraint on the part of the females, because of a sense of a greater security against impropriety from its being a private party.... But let us, according to the principle with which we set out, apply the Scripture marks to the amusement, as now described under four different phases, and thus see whether it comes under the prohibition of the text. Is it unfruitful? Who ever heard of anyone being made more upright, a better citizen or neighbor, by dancing? What vice or evil in society did dancing upon the stage, at the masquerade, the public ball, or private party, ever reform? Who is more sober, more honest, more charitable, more public-spirited or industrious, in consequence of dancing? Who is more prayerful, more diligent in reading the Scriptures, in training his family for God, in leading men to a 94 Savior, by virtue of his dancing? Who ever was converted to God by dancing?

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“Perhaps you say these are questions entirely foreign to the subject,—it is no part of the design of dancing to reform society or advance religion; they are amusements simply, and are not to be viewed in any other light. Then, Christian, they are not for you. You promised, when you gave yourself to God, that whether you ate or drank, or whatsoever you did, to do all to the glory of God. To engage in works, giving to them your time, money, and attention, while you pronounce them unfruitful in any good, is an open violation of your own solemn covenant with God. To you, at least, these amusements are sin.... Expensive dressing and its attendants, pride and vanity, are inseparably connected with this amusement. Drinking is encouraged, the fires of lust are fanned, the veil of female modesty removed, and, in the cases just mentioned, the foundations of female chastity are shaken and often overthrown.

“Now, I direct your attention again to God's command:—‘Have no fellowship with them.’ Keep your mind for a moment simply on that. Remember it means, ‘Don't countenance, don't become an apologist, don't go part way, don't aid or abet.’ Can God command less? Can He in anywise admit of your being a partaker 95

THE HABIT OF DANCING WILL NOT AID US TO RESIST OTHER TEMPTATIONS

96 in other men's sins? Then you break God's command by going yourself to such scenes, or suffering those under your authority to go. And still more, if you convert your house into a ball-room for the enacting of such scenes, you become an aid to Satan in his work.

“There is also involved in this command that you shall not send your children to the dancing school. That is to countenance the whole evil; it is the root from which all the rest springs. It is to become by your conduct an apologist, and your example will be quoted by every advocate of the dance in all its forms. It is to aid and abet in a most decided manner, giving the minds of your children, as well as your money, to perpetuate the evil. This is the most strange infatuation that ever possessed the mind of a Christian parent....The viper's egg is harmless, but, watched over and warmed into life, it has a deadly fang.”

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Rev. N. L. Rice, D. D., who does not need an introduction to you nor to any other Presbyterian in the land, has published his views in regard to the great danger of permitting even children to learn to dance; and his testimony is in harmony with that just given from the pen of Dr. Potts. In a printed sermon on dancing, he says,—

“I am aware that there is some difficulty in the discussion of this subject, arising 97 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 98 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

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now that they have reached the age when they claim to act for themselves, they will pay little regard to your prudent advice.”

Rev. B. M. Palmer, D. D., of New Orleans, who stands in the very front rank, as you are aware, of preachers and thinkers in our day, says, in a published sermon on dancing,—

“Above all, do we profess to be the followers of Him whose style and title on earth was ‘the man of sorrows’? Do we profess to ‘bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus;’ and have we been to the communion table expressly to remember Him in His death and to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings? Oh, tell it not out to earth, lest it rend again the very rocks and break once more the slumbers of the dead,—A dancing disciple of a Crucified Redeemer!... Indeed, so deeply impressed is my own mind with the 99 inconsistency of dancing with baptismal obligations, I hesitate not to utter my mature conviction that members of the Church who consent to the dancing of their children are perfectly amenable to the discipline of God's house, on the ground of their breach of vows. ...Promiscuous dancing between the sexes is essentially voluptuous and demoralizing.... Nor is it a sufficient answer to say that multitudes dance who are never conscious of any improper associations. It might not be safe for many whose character is above suspicion even to themselves to make too nice an analysis of the pleasures they experience in the dance.... How comes it that even in communities where the gospel lifts its voice, and therefore virtue has a sure abode, the waltz so extensively prevails?—a species of dance I do not hesitate thus publicly to denounce as undisguisedly licentious.

“The liberties, too, taken in the dance are such as can hardly be safe, even when sanctioned by the sacred laws of kindred and tender friendship. And it seems strange to us that a freedom which, if indulged in ordinary intercourse, would be chastised as impertinence, should be allowed in the public assembly, and even to perfect strangers. Take human nature as it is, fallen and depraved, and subject to the domination of wicked passions, and I judge ye whether the concomitants of the dance are not as dangerous as the smoking brand to the magazine of powder. The ball-room dress,—not generally

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such as a severe test would approve,—the electric touch of the hand, the fascination of the eye, the excitement of physical emotion, the gay confusion of sounds, the bewildering glare of light, act powerfully upon the senses, and occasion a vague and wild delight, into the source of which there is little opportunity to examine. What aggravates the evil still more is that the persons who are chiefly subjected to this severe ordeal are the least able to abide it. And at no period of life is it so difficult to stem the current of appetite as when the passions begin to develop, and, in all the freshness of novelty, fill the mind with images of pleasure. The young are the very last who should be surrendered to such a trial. It is just the season when sense and appetite enter the lists against reason and principle,—just the season when the lusts of the heart rise up from their lair, hungry as young lions, and the judgment is untrained by experience,—just the season when the die is cast for life,—and just the season when every evil thought leaves a stain upon the soul indelible forever. In short, if the dance has not worked out its worst results among us, it is because Christianity will not close her jealous eye nor 101

ABUSING THE ROBE OF CHARITY.

102 hush her warning voice. Let these Bibles be closed, these pulpits be silent, the voice of weeping and intercession, now heard between the porch and the altar, be stifled, let no banner be lifted up by the Spirit of the Lord, and the tide of profligacy and vice will sweep on, until religion and common morals shall go down together beneath their gloomy waves.”

Rev. S. R. Wilson, D. D., pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Louisville, Ky., who is one of the ablest and purest of ministers in any denomination, preached a sermon on dancing, which has been sanctioned and published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication. In it I find the following language:—

“Without the least hesitation it may be affirmed that this fashionable amusement, as taught by French monsieurs and mesdames, whether to children or grown-up boys and girls, and as indulged in by a thoughtless world, at soirees, at fairs, at weddings, or at balls, belongs to the forbidden category of ‘chambering and wantonness,’ which the Spirit of God has

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associated with 'rioting and drunkenness.' This amusement can never, with propriety, be participated in by Christians....The promiscuous dance is incompatible with modesty. This remark may be applied to the children's dance in the parlor, and to the dancing of grown-up men and women 103 in other places, according to the measure of each. The evil, indeed, begins in the dancing-school, which, instead of being called a school of easy manners, ought rather to be styled a place where girls are taught to substitute the finesse of the coquette for true female delicacy, and boys take their primary lessons in the art of seduction."

Rev. Stuart Robinson, D. D., pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Louisville, Ky., whose vigorous intellect and fearless advocacy of what he believes to be truth, have made him well known throughout the land, says, in a recent article in the "Free Christian Commonwealth,"—

"To intelligent Christian men and women, with the Word of God in their hands and in their hearts, as the infallible rule of faith, it is simply impossible that this question of indulgence in such worldly pleasures as the theatre, the masquerade, the card-table, and the dance, can be a doubtful or debatable question....And the ground on which the Christian pastor warns and rebukes is chiefly neither because of any inherent sin in the amusements themselves, nor even the ethical precepts of the gospel against worldly conformity, but as evidences of a decay of spiritual life and danger of making shipwreck of faith. Whether able metaphysically to prove the sin or not, or to demonstrate 104 the points of casuistry arising under the application of the gospel rule, or to confirm by testimony of the Church or not the signs of spiritual decay are manifest, and therefore he warns and enforces the gospel precepts upon the declining believer."

Rev. LeRoy J. Halsey, D. D., the accomplished Professor of Historical and Pastoral Theology and Church Government in the Northwestern Theological Seminary writes,—

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“We can see no defense of our modern promiscuous dancing from the charge of being an irrational, unscriptural, and injurious custom....And shall parents train their children to all the ‘misty mazes’ of the dance, and yet, with strange inconsistency, expect God to convert and save them while thus placing one of the greatest obstacles in the way?”

Rev. W. M. Engles, D. D., in an introduction to a tract on dancing, issued by the Presbyterian Board of Publication, uses the following language:—

“Supposing, however, that you are now actually contending for the innocence of dancing, we ask if your present opinion has not been preceded by an evident decline in your religious sensibilities,—the cooling of that fervor which characterized your first love? Have you not been neglecting 105 the duties of the closet? Has not religion lost much of its impressiveness? Have you not been silencing conscience and giving way to temptations? In a word, does not your heart testify that you are backsliders? These are serious questions, and they deserve serious answers. Our own opinion is that no true Christian can become an advocate of promiscuous dancing until he has gone through this fearfully retrograde process.”

The New School General Assembly, in 1843, and again, substantially, in 1853, declared,—

“The fashionable amusement of promiscuous dancing to be entirely unscriptural, and eminently and exclusively of the world,...wholly inconsistent with the spirit of Christ and with that propriety of Christian deportment and purity of heart which His followers are bound to maintain.”

Rev. Albert Barnes says,—

“Dancing, balls, and parties lead to forgetfulness of God., They nourish passion and sensual desires. They often lead to the seduction and ruin of the innocent....No child dances into heaven; but many a one dances into hell.”

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Mr. Horace Holden, for many years a well-known ruling elder of the Brick Church in New York City, exclaims, "The 106 scenes witnessed at dancing and waltzing parties do not look much like waging war with the world. Here I am in a vortex: I am surrounded by fashionable, dancing, late-party Christians. My children are exposed to their influence. We have no other society. What am I to do?" His pastor, the venerable Gardiner Spring, D.D., whom I met in the winter of 1860, said to me, in the presence of his colleague, Dr. William J. Hoge, as nearly as I can remember the words, "Sir, dancing has been a source of greater trouble to me in my church than all other causes of disquietude combined."

But, even if time permitted, it is useless to cite other witnesses. I could quote from leading men in all the evangelical Churches both in this country and in Europe; for the true people of God of every name give precisely the same testimony on this subject.

One more letter will conclude what I have to say about dancing.

107

CHAPTER X.

THE VERDICT.

My Dear Friend:—

IF you have followed me carefully through these letters, which are now brought to a close, I am sure you have already resolved not to dance again. I do not say that you have found here a thorough and exhaustive discussion of the subject; for I have written hurriedly, amid the constant pressure of manifold duties. But I am satisfied enough has been said to make you doubt whether a Christian should ever engage in this fascinating and fashionable amusement. And now, if I have succeeded in raising a doubt in your mind, my labor has not been in vain in the Lord; for no true child of God will pursue a course of conduct that is of doubtful propriety. He cannot rest until he knows he is on the safe side.

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Let us review for a moment the ground over which we have passed in the progress of this investigation. After stating the precise question to be discussed, noticing the apologies or excuses that are usually presented by the advocates of the dance, and examining the character of the witnesses that appear in its defense, I brought forward twelve arguments against it.

108

The first of these is found in the fact that dancing, as at present conducted, is forbidden by those passages of God's Word which require us to "abstain from all appearance of evil." Second. It is condemned by those passages which charge us to "be not conformed to this world." Third. It was shown that the practice increases this dangerous relish for the world, while it leads to the neglect of the ordinances of religion and to evil associations. Fourth. It was proved to be inconsistent with the fundamental principles of a true Church and of church membership. Fifth. It is in direct conflict with the duties, privileges and tastes of sincere Christians as they are set forth in the sacred Scriptures. Sixth. It is a source of grief and cause of offense to many of the disciples of our Lord, and is, therefore, clearly unlawful. Seventh. If "there is no wrong in dancing," as you affirmed, then no wrong would be done although your minister and ruling elders and all other members of the church should rush into the frantic whirl of gayety; but this you could not tolerate for a moment. Eighth. It is forbidden by those Scriptures which declare that the body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that he is bound to live with reference to the glory of God whether he eats, or drinks, or whatsoever he does. Ninth. 109 It invariably destroys the influence of professed Christians for good. Tenth. It is a source of unspeakable injury to those who are not Christians. Eleventh. It furnishes the most important test, perhaps, that can be made in our day, of the willingness of the young disciple to deny self in conformity with the example and precepts of the Savior. Twelfth. Fashionable dancing, into which every form of the amusement is certain to run with the great majority of those who indulge in it at all, is essentially immoral and licentious.

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After presenting these arguments, I adduced the testimony of various witnesses to sustain my position; and, although they disagree about many questions of doctrine, and church government, and forms of worship, they perfectly agree in their condemnation of the dance. I gave the testimony of the Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops, and the testimony of four leading bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the testimony of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to which I wish to add that, since my last letter was written, I have received a communication from a distinguished member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, in which he says,—“Of course no good Methodists ever dance. Our discipline and general rules are plain and direct on the question.”

110

Then I offered the testimony of the Baptist Church, and of the Tract Society, supported largely by the Congregational Church, and of the “Church Union,”—a representative, in some sense, of all the churches,—and of the Presbyterian Church, in the resolutions repeatedly adopted, without a dissentient voice, by the General Assemblies, both Old and New School, and in the tracts issued by their Boards of Publication, and in the published sermons delivered by some of their most eminent ministers. Drs. Alexander, Potts, Rice, Palmer, Wilson, Robinson, Engles, and Barnes were quoted; and I could add the testimony of many others on both sides of the Atlantic, including such names as Payson, McCheyne, John Angell James, Adam Clarke, Chalmers, and scores of the most illustrious men who have ever preached Christ.

And now, I ask you with all earnestness, in the first place, whether you believe that all of these churches and distinguished ministers of the gospel have conspired to deprive you of an innocent enjoyment; and, in the second place, whether you believe that they are all deluded fanatics; and, in the third place, whether you believe that dancing is of too trifling importance to be seriously noticed. I am aware that there are preachers who pretend to ridicule any mention of the subject 111

HER PASTOR DOES NOT DISAPPROVE - HE SEES NO HARM IN DANCING.

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112 as beneath the dignity of the pulpit; but I also know that they are more anxious to gain the applause of the fashionable, by connivance at their worldliness, than they are to gain the applause of our Lord. I am willing to place against their affected sneers the solemn warnings of the principal Churches of Christendom, and the most prominent leaders of these Churches, whose shoe latchet they are not worthy to unloose.

Look at these warnings, and then look at the brazen effrontery of some sappy fop who is only a vulgar fraction of a man, and of some giddy girl whose brains have run to her heels, when they lisp that the remonstrances which are raised against dancing by faithful pastors are “cant” and “fanaticism.” It is questionable whether they have sufficient intelligence to understand the meaning of such terms, which they so flippantly use. Let them dance on, for, probably, it is the only species of enjoyment which they are capable of receiving or appreciating; and let us comfort ourselves with the thought that there is a bare hope of their salvation on the ground that the divine mercy is extended to infants and idiots in a peculiar way.

But for you, my friend, who possess an intellect and profess to be a Christian there is no such excuse and no such hope, 113 if you continue to indulge in an amusement so clearly condemned by the Word of God and by the unanimous verdict of His true followers. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” You certainly know that not one person of any sense claims that it is a duty to dance, while thousands upon thousands of the most earnest Christians claim that it is sinful to dance. You certainly know that the bearing of the Bible is against modern dancing, while the world, which is the enemy of God, approves and upholds it. You certainly know that those whose wisdom, experience, and piety entitle them to be heard, insist that it is a practice fraught with imminent peril to the soul and to the blood-bought Church of Christ, while, as a rule, the young, the thoughtless, and the impenitent are its chief advocates.

But even among these last mentioned there are many who see the gross impropriety of fashionable dancing apart from all religious considerations, as the following occurrence

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will show. While engaged in writing these letters, I was called to officiate at the marriage of a friend, and, after the ceremony, was thrown into the company of several young men who were present. During the progress of our conversation, the subject of dancing was incidentally mentioned, and at once it became the theme of an animated discussion.

114

Three of these gentlemen, I am sorry to say, are not Christians, and two of them are members of “dancing clubs,” so that I had the testimony of eye-witnesses with regard to the scenes that transpire in their midnight revelries. I was struck with the fact that these eye-witnesses condemned the “round dances” without a moment's hesitation, one of them particularly expressing himself in terms of severest denunciation. Nor could I wonder at the violence of his language when informed that respectable girls frequently appear at these club-meetings with dresses so shamefully low in the neck that the bosom is exposed, and with dresses so shamefully short that in “the voluptuous movement of the waltz” the limbs are fully exhibited to view, covered only with flesh-colored stockings and drawers, while the young men make comments during the entertainment or afterwards upon the comparative shapeliness of the “fine legs” revealed to their gaze.

Such is the “earthly, sensual, devilish” thing which, with unblushing brow, demands recognition in decent society and even in the Church of God. Such, too, is the amazing impudence of the devil, who “is a liar and the father of it,”—I mean the father both of the lie and the dance,—that he roars most pitifully because I have struck this infamy a blow which it

115

HIS RECOMMENDATION. BY WILLIAM REED DUNROY.

HE dances well.” So said the lookers-on Who watched him moving in the mazy waltz; Fair women smiled and waved their jeweled fans. “He dances well, whatever else his faults .”

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And so through life he danced his thoughtless way. Was welcomed by the idle, laughing throng; The open sesame, "He dances well," As o'er the flowery path he tripped along .

But Death reached out and clutched the dancer's feet— The merry music changed to dirge and knell— And up to heaven's gate he carried in his hand The verdict of the world, "He dances well ."

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richly deserves. One would think from the noise he makes that I had sapped the foundation of his kingdom, or carried by assault his chief stronghold among men. With the help of God I shall give him occasion to roar and writhe again.

If, however, you are ready to admit, with the better portion even of worldly and fashionable people, that the "round dances" are disgraceful, and hence fall back upon the "square dances" as proper and allowable, permit me to say that such a compromise is utterly unworthy of a child of God. The "square dances," while far less objectionable than the wanton waltz, certainly have so much "the appearance of evil" as the question now stands, and exhibit so much conformity to the world, and so decidedly define your position among those who are seeking to corrupt and destroy the Church, that the only safe rule for the Christian is to abstain from them all, and to abstain from them entirely. In the language of Bishop Mellvaine, when speaking of the dance as well as the theatre, "The only line I would draw in regard to these is that of entire exclusion." In the language of Bishop Meade, "we ought conscientiously to inquire whether its great liability to abuse, and its many acknowledged abuses, should not make us frown upon it in all its forms."

117

When a man discovers that he has an appetite for strong drink, his only safety consists in total abstinence; and when a Christian discovers that he has such fondness for the dance that it is difficult for him to surrender its fascinations, he ought to abandon it at once and forever. Nearly every argument which I have presented against "round dances" applies

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with equal force to “square dances,” so far as the Christian is concerned; and when you reflect that the latter, in a vast majority of instances, inevitably lead on to the former, and that their influence is against Christ and His cause, and that they divert the mind from religious duties, and that they involve a sinful waste of time and a foolish expenditure of money, and that they associate you intimately with ungodly companions, and that they destroy your positive influence as a disciple of Jesus, and that they are manifestly unsuitable to one who is an heir of glory, I think you will cheerfully renounce them to seek higher and nobler pleasures.

It is said that Daniel Webster was once asked by a dandy why he did not dance. “Sir,” replied the statesman, “I never had the ambition nor the talents to learn the art.” Surely, my friend, you do not possess the mean ambition to excel in an art more becoming untaught savages than intelligent Christians. Whatever may have been your enjoyments previous to your conversion, now that you have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, you should promptly say to all who solicit you to dance, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” If you are really “born again,” your aims and aspirations, your pleasures and pursuits, are all changed, and you can turn back the world's pressing temptations with the brave confession, “The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excesses of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.”

Go forth, then, under the constraining love of Jesus, to work so earnestly for the promotion of His kingdom that you will have neither time nor taste for the poor and pitiful amusements of this perishing earth. Go forth, stirred by the sublime consciousness that “the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you,” and impelled to deeds of heroic daring and devotion by the thrilling battle-cry of the sacramental host, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Go forth, panoplied in the whole armor of God, to resist “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” and to walk in the footsteps of your Lord, who went about doing good, and hath left you an example,

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“that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

When such a man, familiar with the skies, Has filled his urn where those pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things, 'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings:
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide, And tells us whence his treasurers are supplied.

Praying that God will bless this imperfect effort to vindicate His insulted cause and defend
His outraged Church, I remain

Your friend and pastor, James H. Brookes .

[THE END.]

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