

An appeal to all Christians, especially the members of the Methodist Episcopal church, against the practice of social dancing. By Rev. John G. Jones..

AN APPEAL TO ALL CHRISTIANS, ESPECIALLY THE MEMBERS OF THE Methodist Episcopal Church, AGAINST THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL DANCING.

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PREFACE.

Feeling it a duty which I owed to the spiritual safety and final salvation of many who were somewhat serious on the subject of religion to use my influence, as a minister of the Gospel, in every available way, to abate a growing evil which threatened great injury to the Church and to the souls of men, in 1852 I wrote a series of short articles against the practice of Social Dancing, which were published in the Nashville and Louisville *Christian Advocate*, over the *nom de plume* of "Hobab." It was earnestly desired by many, who

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had no personal knowledge of the writer, that he would revise and enlarge his articles, and put them in a more permanent and convenient form for the use of the Church. But being engaged in the active duties of the pastorate until the inauguration of the late unhappy war, and then having heavy additional domestic duties imposed upon him during its continuance, he has not had sufficient leisure and composure of mind to perform the task until now. Being laid aside—he trusts only temporarily—from the active duties of the ministry by physical disability, and the return IV turn of peace having released him from the burden of domestic duties, he embraces the first opportunity offered to comply with the wishes of highly-esteemed Christian friends. Indeed, there seems to be just now a special necessity for a calm and scriptural discussion on the subject of Social Dancing, for extraordinary efforts are being made by the advocates of the fascinating amusement to draw our young Church members and the children of religious parents into the gay and giddy whirl of the ball-room. Our arguments shall be addressed to the judgment, conscience and great personal interests of the persons concerned. If, in this way, we can not reclaim them from the delusive dangers of the dancing saloon, we have nothing more to do—after having prayed earnestly to the “Father of lights to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God”—than to wait, with painful anxiety, their coming doom. May He whose “word is truth”—who is himself “the truth”—bless this humble and unpretending effort abundantly in the accomplishment of the desired and intended good, is the sincere prayer of the

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AN APPEAL ON SOCIAL DANCING.

CHAPTER I.

“A. Time to Dance.”—Eccl. iii. 4.

We have often beard social dancing denounced, in the most unmeasured terms, as of impure and heathenish origin, totally incompatible with the purity and refinements of

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civilized and Christian society, and suspicion thrown broadcast on the chastity and good morals of those who indulge in it. On the other hand, we have heard it reiterated with a boldness which seemed to fear no successful contradiction, that it is an innocent, healthy and elevating amusement—the natural recreation of young people—free from those moral evils which are said to be its invariable concomitants; and, though of impure and barbarous origin, it has been civilized and almost christianized in our happy country by receiving the patronage: not only 6 of the most refined and elegant society outside of the Church, but sometimes that of professing Christians, and, in some instances, of grave divines. With all these sweeping denunciations on one hand, and stereotyped assertions on the other, we shall have but little to do in this discussion. We conscientiously believe that social dancing, as commonly practiced in our country, is evil in its inception and irreligious in all its tendencies; but we shall not attempt to sustain this honest conviction of ours by mere denunciation or bold assertion, but by arguments drawn from the Holy Scriptures, the mature opinions of sages and saints, and the uniform utterances of experience and practical observation. The “Father of Mercies” employs no means inconsistent with the freedom of the human will to coerce men away from sin and constrain them to a life of holiness; and we only have authority to employ such means as the Scriptures indicate to accomplish such inestimable results; and, if after we have done this to the extent of our ability and opportunities, our fellow men still seek death in “the error of their way,” we can only give them up to their self-selected and self-imposed destiny. But the success which, 7 under the Divine blessing, often attends the use of Scriptural means in “striving against sin” should encourage us to labor diligently, even at this point, to reclaim heedless sinners from their gilded and flowery way to ruin. Let us, then, in the name of God, and relying on him for success, betake ourselves to the work before us.

The fact can not be disguised that dancing is gaining favor, not only with those who disregard the obligations of Christianity, but also with too many who are professedly the followers of Christ; so that it has become a matter of importance, in view of the peace and prosperity of the Church, to settle the question, whether it is admissible for

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professing Christians to engage in, or in any way give encouragement, to this fashionable amusement? By what authority shall we decide this question? There is nothing in the conventional rules of general society that either authoritatively enjoins or prohibits dancing. Nor is the verdict of public opinion uniform either for or against it. While some zealously contend for it as an innocent and healthy amusement, others, with at least an equal show of reason, condemn it as morally evil in its origin and all its tendencies. The 8 opinions and disciplinary rules of most Protestant Churches are against the practice, but the action of the churches is quite at variance in regard to those who indulge in it. Some professors of Christian discipleship give countenance and encouragement to it by being voluntarily present at dancing parties, or by permitting the junior members of their families to engage in it without parental restraint, or, perhaps, by sending them to a dancing school. Others, while they abstain themselves, connive at it among their membership, while the executive officers of their churches suffer all to pass uncensured and unpunished. But others pursue quite a different course. They not only condemn dancing, as it is commonly practiced in our country, as being detrimental to the salvation of souls, and at variance with the prosperity of the Church, but they expel all from their communion who will not wholly abandon the practice. Seeing, then, that the opinions and practices, not only of the people of the world, but also of the professed followers of Christ, are so discordant, the question again recurs: "By what authority shall we decide whether it is admissible or not for professing Christians to engage in, or in any way countenance, common dancing?" My answer is, that we must in the first instance, appeal to the Bible to settle this question; for, however little regard is paid to its authority by those who are beyond the pale of the Church, such as are members of it have subscribed to the doctrine "that the Word of God is the only rule, and the sufficient rule of our faith and practice in all things." After we have settled the question primarily by the principles and facts clearly set forth in the Holy Scriptures, we may then add, as illustrative and confirmatory testimony, the uniform language of experience and observation, as well as the opinions of great and good men of all ages. As the following chapters are designed primarily for the members of the Church, and for such as may intend to become members, we shall endeavor to present

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strictly scriptural views of the subject of dancing; for be it remembered that the subject is often alluded to in the Bible, and it would seem strange if we could not, from those allusions, determine something decisive as to the character and tendencies of dancing as practiced in our day and country. As we intend to be guided by the best scriptural light we have in the discussion 10 of this subject, we expect to prove that dancing, under some circumstances, is not sinful while, under other circumstances, like the unrenewed heart of man, it is “evil, only evil, and that continually.” The spirit which prompts it, the circumstances that attend it, and the ends had in view in the indulgence of it, determine the innocence or guilt of those who engage in it.

CHAPTER II.

“Let them Praise His name in the dance.”—Psalm exlix. 3.

We trust those of our readers who are opposed to ordinary modern dancing in all its phases will not be deterred from reading this chapter, because we shall undertake to prove, from several passages of Scripture in the Old Testament, that dancing, under some circumstances, can not be considered sinful; so far from it, that it has all the marks of true piety and exalted devotion connected with it. The first quotation we take from Exod. xv. 20, 21: “And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her 11 with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he hath thrown into the sea.” After the exciting scenes that had lately transpired in Egypt preparatory to the exodus of the Israelites, they had just now, by the mighty hand of God, escaped the pursuing army of Pharoah and the perils of the Red Sea; and they celebrated the occasion by singing an appropriate song, in which they ascribed their deliverance and also the destruction of their enemies wholly to the God of their fathers. In the chanting of this song Moses led the devotions of the men, and “Miriam, the prophetess,” those of the women, who “went out after her with timbrels and dances.” While the people generally engaged in singing this triumphant song, Miriam and the women accompanied their voices

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with instrumental music and appropriate bodily gestures called “dances.” And what was the burden of that unrivaled piece of Hebrew poetry? It is found epitomized in the response of Miriam: “Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he hath thrown into the sea.” And, now, who will say it was wrong for that pious sisterhood, overwhelmed as they were with a sense of the Divine goodness, and filled to overflowing with gratitude to the author of their late deliverance, to praise him with song and timbrel, and dance? No word of disapprobation do we find to their singing, or instrumental music, or dancing, in all the Bible.

The next quotation we make in favor of the position assumed in this chapter is from 2 Sam. vi. 14: “And David danced before the Lord with all his might.” We learn from the context that this pious monarch had gathered together a large delegation from all the tribes of Israel to assist in transferring “the Ark of the Covenant” from Gibeah to a more eligible place in the city of David. But neglecting to have it borne on the shoulders of the priests, as the law required, and placing it instead upon a new cart drawn by oxen, his first attempt proved fatal to Uzzah, and fearing to proceed further at this time, he turned aside and placed it in the house of Obedom. At the end of three months another procession was formed, and after appropriate sacrifices had been offered, it moved forward under a full chorus of vocal and instrumental music, the twenty-fourth Psalm 13 being used for the occasion. In the midst of this great religious solemnity God filled the heart of David with joy and gladness, and he was not ashamed to express his sense of the Divine goodness by “dancing before the Lord with all his might.” And who but such a one as the proud and impious Michal would dare to say that David acted inconsistent with his religious profession and character by “dancing with all his might” on that glad day? In Psalm xxx. 11, where he seems to refer to this very event, he records the goodness of God for having turned his “mourning” for the death of Uzzah “into dancing.” In Psalm exlix. 3, we find the following language: “Let them praise His name in the dance;” and in Psalm el. 4 we find a similar exhortation: “Praise Him with the timbrel and dance.” We are aware that some of our best Biblical critics contend that the original translated “dance,” in the two last quoted

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passages, does not necessarily imply any physical exercise like dancing, but refers, probably, to the use of wind instruments of music. Be this as it may, it is evident from the first two quotations, and others of a kindred character, that dancing was sometimes united with the most exalted piety and the purest strains of praise to God. And where it was the Spontaneous result of fervent devotion, and was the outward exhibition of a heart overflowing with gratitude to God, who will say that it was wrong in itself or evil in its tendencies? Such dancing is nowhere reprobated in the Scriptures, nor did it ever prove injurious either to those who engaged in it or to others. But this can not be said of that sort of dancing which is prompted by irreligious feelings and carried on in an irreligious way, as we shall attempt to show in a succeeding chapter.

But, before we leave the subject considered in this chapter, let us notice some of the peculiar characteristics of the dancing just reviewed. And, first, there was no commingling of the sexes. In the quotation from Exod. xv. 21, only the “women went out with timbrels and dances;” and in the quotation from 2 Sam. vi. 14, David alone seems to have “danced before the Lord.” Secondly, no previous arrangement seems to have been made for those pious dances, but they were the spontaneous effects of a high state of religious joy and gladness at the time. And just such scenes, leaving out the instrumental music, we have sometimes witnessed in our day, when the people of God have been favored with unusual “times of refreshing from his presence.” We have seen them, without any previously concerted plan, spring to their feet and dance for joy.

CHAPTER III.

“Our dance is turned into mourning.”—Lam. v. 15.

In the preceding chapter we have attempted to show that where dancing is spoken of in the Scriptures as the natural result of fervent piety, and of a heart overflowing with gratitude to God for his abundant goodness, it is not disapproved. We shall now proceed to show that where it was not performed as an act of exultant piety and true devotion to

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God, but was the offspring of a vicious heart, and was done either in idolatrous worship or to glorify men, it was followed by disastrous occurrences that strongly indicated the Divine displeasure. We shall first refer to Exod. xxxii. 19: "And it came to pass as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing; and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the 16 tables out of his hands and brake them beneath the mount." Here we have an instance of dancing connected with an idolatrous feast, at which "the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Without, perhaps, any formal renunciation of that God who had done so much for them, and who had brought them safely where they were, or any formal abjuration of his prescribed worship, they had determined to seek excitement and pleasure in their own way. And what were the consequences? The anger of God "waxed hot against them?" and he threatened to consume them. The original tables of stone prepared by the hand of God were broken in their presence, perhaps to remind them that they had broken their covenant with God; and, in addition to these sad and alarming tokens of the Divine displeasure, they had to mourn the death of "about three thousand" of their brethren as the result of their idolatrous feasting and dancing. Well may it be said of them, their "dance was turned into mourning."

We next refer to 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7: "And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all the 17 cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one to another as they played, and said, Saul hath stayed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." As innocent and patriotic as this dance may at first seem to have been, there was something irreligious in it. Instead of imitating the pious Miriam and her associates in singing, "the Lord hath triumphed gloriously," the special providence of God, as manifested in the late overthrow of their enemies, was left out of the question, and in their "dances in all the cities of Israel" they ascribed their victory to Saul and David, making an invidious distinction in favor of David. And what was the immediate result of this God-forgetting and worldly dancing? It aroused the jealousy of Saul and periled the life of David. It originated a feud in the royal family,

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which brought on a civil war between Saul and David at a time when their united skill and military prowess were greatly needed for the protection of the nation from external foes, and which only ended with the utter downfall of the house of Saul.

We shall now consider briefly an instance 18 of fashionable and worldly dancing as recorded in the New Testament. It is found Matt. xiv. 6: "But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. This birthday festival was not kept to acknowledge the goodness of God in giving him "life, and breath, and all things," but to glorify himself; and the dreadful consequences of this dancing frolic were the immediate martyrdom of John the Baptist, the holiest of men and the greatest of prophets hitherto born of woman, to gratify the malicious resentment of his illegitimate wife; and the entailment of a withering, scorching and consuming curse on himself and his family. The conclusion to which we come from the Scriptural references made in this chapter is, that where dancing was prompted by irreligious feelings and worldly vanity, like "the ploughing of the wicked," it was sinful, "evil, and only evil."

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CHAPTER IV.

"The tree is known by its fruit."—Matt. xii. 33.

Efforts are being constantly made by the votaries of the ball-room to make it appear that dancing is not only an innocent and healthful exercise, but also essential as an ornamental branch of a finished education. As the fallacy of these assumed positions in favor of dancing as usually practiced is transparent to every well-informed and reflecting mind, we shall pass them by for the present, in order to consider its ruinous effects on the religion of the heart and life. In doing this we shall mainly rely on facts "known and read of all men." Here, for instance, are persons truly awakened to a just appreciation of their spiritual and dim mortal interests. They have made up their minds to "flee from the wrath to come," and to seek a saving interest in Christ. But just as they are setting out on this all-important

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enterprise, upon the success of which depends their eternal well-being, they are invited to attend a social dancing party. They have a foreboding of the evil consequences of complying, and they are reluctant in giving their consent to go. But their attendance is only the more earnestly solicited by their pseudo friends, until, in an evil hour, they yield their consent to mingle again in the God-forgetting and soul murdering dance. It proves fatal to all their religious feelings and purposes, and again they withdraw their allegiance from God, and seek their happiness in the illusive scenes of earth.

But few adventurers among these faithless quicksands, where such countless numbers have been engulfed, have escaped as well as a special friend of ours relates he did in early life. He belonged to a refined and educated family—was polished in his manners, and generally moral in his external conduct—was gay and cheerful in his disposition, and popular among his associates; but he had been very imperfectly instructed as to the nature and obligations of a pure Bible Christianity. About the age of mature manhood he was seriously awakened to the importance of seeking salvation from sin and its fearful consequences, and betook himself to reading the Holy Scriptures, and to the duty of private prayer. His interest in his personal salvation had considerably increased; his devotional feelings had become mere earnest and constant, and he was encouraged to believe that he was making safe progress toward a state of favor with God, when he was earnestly solicited to unite with the young people of the neighborhood in a social ball. His feelings did not prompt him to go, but the solicitations of his friends were urgent. “Indeed, he must come! They could not do without him! Would feel very much disappointed if he failed to be there,” etc. From his previous training it never had occurred to his mind that there was anything necessarily antagonistic to religion in a decent and well-conducted ball-room. “He would read his Bible lesson, say his prayers, attend to his toilet, and go; his friends would expect him there.” He went, and conducted himself with moderation and temperance. But on his return home he felt that all his religious feelings had imperceptibly evaporated. In some way, not readily accounted for by himself, he had lost his interest in reading the Bible, and in private prayer He seemed to have lost all the ground he had

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heretofore gained in religion. "Why is it so?" he would ask himself. "Is it not an innocent amusement? Is it not patronized by many of the wise and good of the land? The fault must have been in me. I was not as serious and 22 prayerful as I ought to have been. I must do better next time." After having regained his lost interest in his personal salvation, and returned to the regular discharge of his religious duties, under the same delusion that there was nothing necessarily incompatible with religion in a well-conducted dance, he returned a second and third time to the ball-room, with still more disastrous results to all his religious purposes, tastes and feelings, do that, after this oft-repeated painful experience, he deliberately came to the conclusion that there was an irreconcilable antagonism between the exciting frivolities of the social dance and the self-denying, cross-bearing religion of the Lord Jesus Christ; that the one was utterly incompatible with the other, and that he must either give up one or the other. Fortunately for himself personally, and for hundreds of others who have received much spiritual good through the influence of his example, his counsel, his prayers and his liberality, he determined on a voluntary and life-long exile from the ball-room. Soon after recovering his religious feelings again he experienced a change of heart, became a regular church member, and, for many, many long years 23 has been one of the most useful laymen in all the land; and now, after a long and well-spent life, amid the closing scenes of his protracted pilgrimage, he is descending gracefully to the tomb, buoyant with the Christian's hope.

But let us return from this digression to a further consideration of the deleterious effects of the ball-room and its surroundings upon the religious interests of the soul. Here are persons who, prompted by sincere motives, have placed themselves under the care of the Church as seekers of religion—they have manifested true penitence for their past sins, and have often been to the altar asking an interest in the prayers of the faithful. Their case is looked upon as full of hope But in an evil hour they are seduced into the giddy dance, and every budding prospect is at once blighted, and they soon retrace their steps back to the follies and dangers of sin. Would we could stop here in portraying the deadly effects of social dancing upon the dearest interests of the soul! But we can not. Truth

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compels us to go further. For there are those who have exhibited all the usual evidences of having been truly converted, and who have run well for a season, attending on all the means of 24 grace. and giving promise of final success in leading a religious life. But, “as the serpent beguiled Eve,” so have they been beguiled from their steadfastness, and led off into the exciting and illusive scenes of the whirling dance, until they “have made shipwreck of the faith and of a good conscience, and have turned back to perdition.” These results almost invariably follow the attendance of serious and religious persons on dancing parties; for just in proportion as they acquire a fondness for this destructive amusement, they lose their relish for the various exercises of religion and for communion with the spiritual members of the Church. And if “a tree is known by its fruit,” we are compelled, from the uniform facts in the case, to decide that dancing, and dancing parties, as they are practiced in our country have a ruinous effect on the religion of the heart and of the life, and that no one who wishes to occupy safe ground in religion should ever be voluntarily present on such occasions, much less take an active part in them. In the next chapter we propose to produce several Scriptural arguments to prove that professors of religion are prohibited, by the tenor of their religious vows, and their voluntary association with 25 the militant Church, from participating in the amusements of the ball-room.

CHAPTER V.

“Abstain from all appearance of evil.”—I Thes. v. 22.

We have a right to expect that those who are voluntarily connected with the visible Church of Christ should yield a willing obedience to the requirements of the Holy Scriptures. Hence, if we can produce arguments legitimately drawn from the Word of God to prove that professors of religion can not engage in dancing, or even attend dancing parties, consistently with their Christian character, we have a right to expect them to abstain entirely from such indulgences and avoid all such places.

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Our first argument is drawn from 1 Cor. x. 31–32: “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offense, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.” In the first verse here quoted we are instructed to do whatsoever we do “to the glory of God.” But who can go through the preliminary preparation and 26 attend a ball and dance “to the glory of God?” What Christian ever thought of glorifying God by so doing? No one, we suppose. Then, if Christians can not prepare themselves to attend dancing parties and dance “to the glory of God,” it is certain they should not do it at all. In the second verse quoted we are taught to “give none offense.” But what church member can dance or patronize what is called social dancing in our country without becoming a stumbling block in the way of sinners and grieving the upright in heart? If, then, it can not be done without leading sinners further astray from God and grieving the hearts of true Christians, it should not be done at all.

Our next argument is based on Col. iii. 17: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him.” The language of the Apostle in this text is too plain to be misunderstood. Whatsoever is done in word or deed, by professing Christians, should all be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” But what Christian ever labored through the preliminary preparation of “fixing ups” and then went to a ball and danced “in the name of the Lord Jesus, 27 giving thanks to God the Father by him” for the privilege of dancing? We presume no member of Christ’s Church ever thought of partaking in a social dance in the name of the Lord Jesus. But if it can not be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and with a heart filled with thankfulness “to God the Father,” it can not be done consistently at all by professing Christians. Again, we are exhorted by the Apostle, in 1 Thes. v. 22, not only to abstain from what is manifestly evil in itself, and evil in all its tendencies, but to “abstain from all appearance of evil.” Now, we have shown in a preceding chapter that the attendance of serious people and professing Christians on balls and dancing parties is only evil, and that continually. They invariably lose their seriousness and forfeit their religious character. This being the case, they are required, by the voice of inspiration, to abstain from all such associations, as having not

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only the “appearance of evil,” but as being absolutely evil in their effects on their religious feelings and character.

We found another argument on Heb. xiii. 17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, 28 that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.” What, then, is the uniform advice of our spiritual rulers and guides in regard to social dancing, especially that of the more experienced and faithful among them? It is to keep entirely away from balls and dancing parties, as places exceedingly dangerous to our spiritual interests and our eternal well-being. And can professors of religion, with safety to themselves, disregard or lightly esteem the warning voice of those who “watch over their souls as they that must give account?” What interest have they, apart from the safety and salvation of those under their pastoral care, in exhorting them to keep away from this fruitful source of spiritual death and final apostasy from God?

In our next chapter we shall advance a few collateral arguments against social dancing.

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CHAPTER VI.

“Likewise, ye younger. submit yourselves unto the elder.”—1 Peter, v 5.

The voice of aged and experienced Christians, who cultivate sensible communion with God, both ministers and laymen, so far as we know, is almost universally against dancing as practiced in our country. They have lived to see the rise and fall of many in Israel, and they know that dancing and dancing parties have caused the downfall of many hopeful young Christians, and they feel it their solemn duty to lift up their warning voice against these soul-destroying evils. And if our young and less-experienced church members would but heed the mature lessons of age and experience in regard to this matter, many of them would be saved from the disgrace and danger of apostasy, and the church would be spared the painful reproach occasioned by their downfall. There is another important

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reason why members of the Methodist Episcopal Churches especially can not be allowed to dance with impunity. It is a flagrant violation of the "general rules" of those Churches, both North and South, and of the assurance they gave on being received into the Church of a 30 "willingness to observe and keep the rules;" and art who desire to continue in the fellowship of those churches are required to abstain from "all such diversions as can not be used in the name of the Lord Jesus;" and this has always been interpreted as prohibiting their members frets 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 any one in fellowship with those churches ought to be heartily ashamed. And this rule is not a dead letter. Every probationer is required to continue 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.

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It was our good fortune some 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, an.d earnestly exhorted the ministers to enforce the rules of the Church against all such "disorderly walkers." In concluding his remarks on this point he averted 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. We fully appreciated the feelings and views of the Bishop as expressed in this last sentiment, though we could not fully concur with him in his determination to leave the Church under

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the supposed circumstances. Where could he go to better his church relations? For though, so far as we know, all the Protestant Churches in the land have rules, either expressed or implied, against their members dancing, they are all, more or less, troubled with this fashionable evil. Better remain where we are, and 32 unitedly oppose it with Gospel weapons wherever and whenever it appears. We have admitted, in a preceding chapter, that there is “a time to dance,” and have shown that “time” to be when the people of God are so overwhelmed with a sense of His goodness as to constrain them to “praise His name in the dance.” But we contend that those who engage in social dancing, as commonly practiced in our country, never dance at the right time, because they are wholly unprepared to go through with such exercises in a Scriptural way. By what spirit are they actuated? Certainly not by the spirit of genuine piety and fervent gratitude to God for his abundant goodness to them. “God is not in all their thoughts.” They would be glad to know that he is not present on such occasions, beholding the thoughts of their hearts and making a record of all their doings, in view of future judgment and retribution. And who are usually present on such occasions? Here and there you may see a recreant professor of religion, who has more than half got his consent to “depart from the faith by giving heed to the seducing spirit” of dancing, but the great majority are professedly and practically sinners, 33 “having no hope, and without God in the world” And is it a time for such persons to dance and make merry ? They are wholly unprepared for death and an admittance into heaven. So far from it, “the wrath of God abideth on them,” and they are fit subjects for hell, while dangers the most appalling environ them on every hand. Their voluntary forgetfulness of God, and their willful perseverance in evil-doing, may occasion the Holy Spirit, insulted and grieved as he has often been by them, to abandon them forever to hardness of heart and hopeless unbelief; or death may tread on the heels of their irreligious mirth and hurry them unprepared into the presence of their Judge. And who among the most zealous advocates of “the mazy dance” would be willing to go from the ball-room to the grave and to the bar of God ? And yet any one who indulges in the practice is liable to do it. A young friend of ours, who was a party in the affair, told us that he once attended a Saturday night ball, where they danced until the broad light of the

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Sabbath morning dawned upon them. Nature being now exhausted by the exciting and laborious exercises of the night, he left with the partner of his mirth to escort B 34 her to her home. On the way she spoke of feeling unwell. As they entered the dooryard of her residence she complained of chilly sensations and excessive languor, while a leaden hue encircled her heretofore brilliant eyes. But she flattered herself that a few hours' rest would bring certain relief. She retired to bed—but alas! it was to her the bed of death. In twenty-four hours she was a corpse, and her spirit in the presence of her Judge. We have not introduced this case to prove that her death was a judgment on her and her associates for violating the Sabbath, nor that it was brought about by that “healthy exercise” called dancing, though this might have been the case; but we have done it to emphasize the question: Who, as she did, would be willing to go from the ballroom to the bed of death and to the bar of God ? And yet her case is only one of many that have come to our knowledge, where persons have suddenly exchanged the noisy mirth of the dance for the unbroken silence of the tomb.

We should always respect the feelings of the bereaved by treading very lightly on the graves of the dead. For this reason we shall not give place or name connected with the 35 following mournful and admonitory narrative, though we could do both, if necessary: During the past winter a large number of clever and respectable young people determined on a re-union ball after the close of our long and disastrous civil war. The preceding day was unusually warm for the season, which suggested that they might attire themselves in light and open apparel. The warm glow of the atmosphere continued until late in the night. when suddenly a northwester swept over the country, producing one of those extraordinary changes from summer heat to freezing cold which sometimes occur in our climate. The gay and excited crowd within were unapprized of the extreme change in the weather without until, at daylight, they emerged from that heated ball-room, covered with perspiration from their long-continued exercise, to seek that repose at home which they had denied themselves during that long and perilous night. The immediate result was, their moistened apparel froze upon their bodies, and their limbs became so benumbed

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that it was with extreme difficulty they reached their homes. In almost every case a violent catarrhal fever ensued which baffled all medical skill, and, in a few brief weeks, nine of the victims, including some of both sexes, were in the cold and mirthless tomb, while their undying souls were mingling with the stern realities of the eternal world, while others of their comrades were yet passing through a very dangerous crisis, and still hovering between life and death. We may not judge uncharitably of their final doom. We trust that some of them, at least, sincerely repented and were forgiven for Christ's sake before their probationary sun finally set. We hope that the united prayers of Christian men and women were answered in their behalf, and that in nature's last agonizing conflict some of these sons and daughters of folly were brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. We know that this is seldom the case—that genuine deathbed repentances are few, but that God, who is “full of compassion,” permits the pious heart to hope for the best.

In view of these admonitory facts, which might be multiplied indefinitely, we insist on it that if persons are not prepared for death and heaven, it is no time for them to dance. Deep penitential sorrow for sin, and an earnest seeking for “redemption in the blood of Christ,” would be infinitely more befitting their condition than “tripping the light fantastic toe” amidst the heaven-forgetting scenes of a ball-room.

CHAPTER VII.

“With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding.”—Job xii. 12.

The attention of great, and practical men of all ages, living in professedly civilized countries, has been called to the immoral and irreligious tendencies of social dancing; and, as we ought to listen to the wise counsels of age and experience, it may be well for us to devote a chapter to the recorded opinions of great and good men on this subject. We shall quote from polytheists, skeptics and christians.

Cicero, the celebrated Roman orator, philosopher and moralist, who lived within a century before the Christian era, says: “Dancing is the last of all vices. One must have run the

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career of all others—he must have delivered himself up to all other excesses before he can yield himself to this. Dancing can not exist save among those whose hearts are already possessed of every 38 other vice; for no one dances, whether in private or convivial assemblies, unless he be either intoxicated or a fool. Demosthenes, the celebrated Athenian orator, who was born 385 years before Christ, knowing the great prejudice of the Athenians against the licentious tendencies of dancing, when he would make the followers of Philip of Macedon odious in their estimation, thought it sufficient to call their attention to the fact that they were “addicted to dancing.”

At Rome, when any one desired to give the highest coloring to the portrait of a prostitute, it was thought enough to say “ that she danced more elegantly than was becoming a modest woman.”

Ovid, who entered the world the same year that Cicero left it—who was among the most immoral and voluptuous of Roman poets, styled dancing-houses “places of shipwreck for modesty, and the dance itself the seed of vice.”

Men of the world, in modern ages, have spoken in terms equally as strong against the tendencies of social dancing as those used by the ancient Pagans.

Some professed Christians stand rebuked in this matter by men of lax morals and infidel tendencies.

Petrarch says “the dance is a frivolous spectacle, unworthy of man, held in detestation by chaste eyes, a prelude to the exercise of the passions, the source of numberless infamies from which nothing issues save irregularity and ”

Bayle, the impious philosopher, who even professed to disbelieve in the existence of the Christian's God, says “the dance can only serve to spoil the heart and wage a war dangerous to chastity.”

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In the early ages of the Christian era dancing was severely condemned by the highest ecclesiastical authorities; and although we can not endorse all they said on this subject, and although the apparent rudeness of some of their remarks grate harshly on modern ears, there is a great deal of solemn truth in what they said.

Saint Gaudentius says: "Fly from feasts and dances accompanied by music. The houses in which such disorders are found present all the dangers of the theatre. Let all which relates to the pomps of the devil be banished from the houses of Christians."

Saint Ambrose, speaking of Herodias, 40 says: "She dances, but it is the daughter of an adultress. Let mothers, then, who love chastity and modesty, give to their daughters lessons of religion, and not lessons of dancing. And you, O men ! who pride yourselves upon your gravity and prudence, learn to detest those abominable places of resort and to avoid those who frequent ." The same holy father the dance the choir of iniquities, the ruin of innocence and the grave of modesty,"

Tertullian calls the places of worldly dances "the temples of Venus and the sinks of impurity."

Saint Basil describes them as "the places of traffic in shameful obscenities."

Saint Chrysostom regards them as "the high schools of impure passions;" and Saint Augustine says "it is better to till the earth on Sundays than to dance."

That great and good man,-Rev. Thomas Wilson, minister of the Gospel at St. George's, in Canterbury, England, who, more than two centuries ago, wrote one of the best Biblical Dictionaries we have ever read, bating somewhat for his Calvinism, after describing with approbation under the article "dancing" the religious dances recorded in the Bible, thus 41 speaks of profane and worldly dancing: "It is a motion of the body, seemly or unseemly stirred up by natural or carnal joy to please and satisfy ourselves or others. This kind

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of dancing is unlawful and wanton, unless it be privately, by one sex only, for moderate recreation.”

The compiler of the “Encyclopedia Londinensis,” after describing quite a variety of dances among the ancients, concludes thus: “These last, in the original of their institution, had nothing but what was decent and modest; but, in time, their movements came to be so depraved as to be employed in expressing nothing but voluptuousness, and even the grossest obscenity.”

Rev. John Wesley, a man thoroughly conversant with all that pertains to a pure and consistent Christianity, says on this subject: “I can not say quite so much for halls and assemblies, which, though more reputable than masquerades, yet must be allowed by all impartial persons to have exactly the same tendency. So, undoubtedly, have all public dancings. And the same tendency they must have, unless the same caution obtained among modern Christians which was observed among the ancient heathens. 42 With them men and women never danced together, but always in separate rooms. This was always observed in ancient Greece, and for several ages at Rome, where a woman dancing in company with men would have at once been set down for a prostitute.” Again, he says: “If dancing be not an evil in itself, yet it leads young women to numberless evils. And the hazard of these on the one side seems far to overbalance the little inconveniences” of abstaining from it “on the other.”

Many years ago, as we were ascending the Mississippi river one night, on one of our palatial steamers, a number of young people of both sexes got up an impromptu waltz in the saloon, which was continued until a late hour. Among the passengers there was an intimate acquaintance of ours, who was an eminent jurist, statesman and military commander, but emphatically a man of the world. We incidentally fell in with him just before we retired to bed, when he remarked in substance “that he was passionately fond of ordinary social dancing as an amusement and recreation for young people, but he could, under no circumstances, permit a daughter of his to engage in that species 43 of

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dancing he was then witnessing. Such an intimate commingling—such handling—such close proximity—such embracing of the sexes, and such vaulting of ladies' skirts, were all utterly inconsistent with that refinement and chastity which he looked upon as the highest and most indispensable ornament of female character?"

We have not made the above quotations because we endorse all that is said in them, or the language sometimes used. The cause of truth and virtue does not need ultra or extraneous arguments to support its claims. Of course the sages and saints whose sentiments we have just quoted knew what they were writing about, for they were describing what passed under their own observation. But the probability is that social dancing was far more irreligious and demoralizing in some ages and countries than it appears to be now around us; hence the strong language used by those writers in its denunciation. They saw that its natural tendency was to inflame the appetites and passions to an inordinate degree, and lead its votaries on to dangerous, often destructive ground. It is demonstrable from the history of the world that the lower nations have sunk into 44 debauchery and libertinism, the more popular and wide-spread the social dance has become. The more corrupt forms of dancing were introduced in the degenerate days of Greece and Rome. The better classes among the Romans, though a fun-loving people, long resisted those demoralizing dances. They were prohibited by statute, and frowned upon by the higher classes. Even as late as the days of Imperial Rome, when the manners of the people had become greatly corrupted, several Senators were removed from office for participating in the obscene mysteries of the dance; but opposition soon became of little avail, and the common dance increased until nearly all grades of society sunk into the mire of the most shameless enjoyments. The reign of Charles II, of England, was remarkable for the dissoluteness of the people generally; and never, perhaps, was social dancing more popular among the English than then. In the time of the first revolution in France, and during the Consulate and Empire, when religion and morality were almost excluded from its limits, and scarcely a decent respect for solid virtue was any where to be found, the people were Infatuated with the frenzy of dancing. 45 And we think it may

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truthfully be said of all countries much addicted to dancing, that the people are sunk in immorality. Not only the teachers of the art, but their patrons, almost to the last one, have been, and are still, irreligious and thoughtless about their spiritual and eternal interests. The art may impart a sort of artificial external grace, but it has no tendency to improve the mind or sanctify the heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

“If sinners entice thee, consent thou not.”—Prov i. 10.

In this chapter we propose to advance the reason why we, as professors of religion, can not permit the people of the world to dictate our course in regard to dancing. They tell us with a boldness that would be more becoming in a better cause, that the hilarity of the ball-room is so congenial, especially to the hearts of the young, that we ought not to deprive them, by Church discipline, of this source of innocent amusement. Now, we say it respectfully—but we say it truthfully—that we consider ourselves 46 much better prepared to judge of this matter than the irreligious are. Truth compels us to acknowledge, and we do it with sorrowful regret and unfeigned humility, that in the days of our folly and forgetfulness of God and our own best and dearest interests, some of us, like too many others, entered the whirl of worldly pleasure and sought to satiate our thirst for happiness in the merry dance. And while, for a few brief hours, we could drive away the sad and soul-disturbing thoughts of death and judgment, heaven and hell, and our immediate relation to these momentous subjects, we thought ourselves comparatively happy. But the time of sober reflection would return, and with it a fearful sense of the uncertainty of life—the certainty and near approach of death—our accountability to God for all the deeds done in the body, and the danger of being eternally lost in the unrest and despair of hell; and in a moment our dreams of happiness were all dissipated, and we were left with a bewildering sense of want the world could not satisfy. In this state of disappointment and fear, which sometimes amounted to terror, we turned away from the deceitful pleasures and amusements of the world, and, 47 with true penitence for our past follies, sought and

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obtained “redemption in the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins.” Since which time we have been “ walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,” and would not exchange one hour of sweet communion with the Holy Trinity, our peace and joy, and our hopes of heaven, for the aggregate of worldly pleasure. Having then tried both sides of the question by actual experiment, we consider ourselves much better prepared to judge of the ground to be taken by Christians on this subject than those whose experience is all on one side. We know that there are some Church members who have become “blind and can not see afar off, and have forgotten that they were purged item their old sins,” who, having lost all spirital enjoyment, have turned again to the amusements of the world, “as the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire;” and such may sometimes be found in the ball-room again. But nothing is more unseemly, in the estimation of an enlightened and devoted Christian, than to see a professed child of God and an heir of heaven descending from his elevated position amidst the scenes of pure spiritual enjoyments to seek happiness again with the giddy and gay in the whirling dance. More unseemly by far is such a sight than to see the majestic eagle leaving the pure air of heaven and descending from his native element to associate with common vultures around a putrid carcass. When we see one who has heretofore “tasted of the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come,” so forgetful of his high destiny as to mingle again in the follies of the ball-room, we are constrained to exclaim, how fallen, O, how fallen!

But we are told with reiterated audacity which braves the accumulation of stubborn facts, that “dancing is an innocent amusement, and can, of itself, do no harm;” and its advocates feign themselves astonished when religious people oppose it. Innocent indeed ! when every professor of religion who imbibes its spirit and partakes of its mirth infallibly loses his relish for spiritual exercises and the sweet communion of saints, and, if not soon reclaimed, turns away from the ordinances of religion and becomes an apostate from the Church. So general is this the result of dancing by church members that to hear of

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their doing it is almost synonymous to hearing that they have left the Church, and are henceforth to be numbered with backsliders.

Another reason why we can not permit the votaries of social dancing to dictate our course in regard to it is, that their knowledge of the Bible, which we acknowledge as the “rule of our faith and practice in all things,” is too superficial to be depended on. When they meet with opposition to their soul-destroying craft from members of the Church, knowing their reverence for the Word of God, they flipantly quote the words of Solomon, “a time to dance,” and then turn off with an air of triumph, as though they had proved by the Bible that dancing, as practiced by them, accords with the Scriptures. We have already shown from the Bible that there is “a time to dance,” but that time is only when the truly pious are constrained to “praise God in the dance,” as David did when he “danced before the Lord with all his might;” but this no more proves that dancing, as practiced by worldly people in our day, is right in the sight of God than Solomon saying in the same connection “a time to kill” would justify them in murdering their fellows in cold blood.

We sometimes hear them quote from the 50 beautiful and touching parable of the Prodigal Son the sentence, “and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing,” as an argument from the New Testament in favor of their sort of “music and dancing.” But in this, they are just as far from the true meaning of the passage as in their interpretation of Eccl. iii. 4, quoted above. Our Savior, in the sentence taken from the parable of the Prodigal Son, by “music and dancing,” represents that triumphant joy, that overflowing gladness, which is felt by true Christians, and sometimes-expressed by “leaping and praising God,” when they see lost sinners returning from their dangerous wanderings in sin to the “household of faith.”

There is just another reason why we can not permit the irreligious to judge for us in this matter of profane dancing and attending dancing parties. The Apostle says, in 1 Cor. ii. 14: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” So that no

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matter how intelligent the unconverted may be on other subjects, and no matter how well instructed they 51 may be in the etymology of the Scriptures, yet, as they never have been truly “enlightened, nor tasted of the heavenly gift, nor been made partakers of the Holy Ghost,” there is a deep spirituality in vital godliness, in experimental religion, which they can not comprehend and appreciate in their present state of moral darkness, because it can only be “spiritually discerned” by those who have been truly “born of God and made partakers of the Holy Ghost.” So that those who are yet in nature’s dark night of sin and unbelief must excuse us if we decline to adopt them as our counselors in Christian experience and practice. God, in mercy, has imparted to us a measure of spiritual light and discernment which they, by their own fault, have never received, and hence we claim the right to judge for ourselves and for those for whose religious training we are responsible, as to the morality and tendencies of social dancing. Before we conclude this chapter we will briefly advert to one or two more specious reasons, which, on all occasions are thrust upon us by the patrons of the ball-room in favor of its exercises and associations. “It is well calculated,” say they, “to develop the muscular system, to 52 secure additional agility, and to promote the general health of the participants.” These assertions, when taken in connection with the well-known facts generally attendant on social dancing, are simply ridiculous. No sensible person believes any such thing. To promote these desirable objects, the means employed should correspond with the ends to be attained. The ball-room costume is generally so arranged as to compress the most vital organs of the body almost beyond endurance, which greatly interferes with the natural play of the lungs and circulation of the blood, while other parts of the body are left unnaturally, often indecently, exposed. The night, intended by our all-wise Creator as the most suitable time for the repose and recuperation of exhausted nature, is the time preferred for the ball. The place is a room or ball, shut in from the healthy breezes without, and the self-imposed exercises take place amid the sweat and fumes and heated breath of scores of human bodies. The concomitants are ices, confectioneries, cordials and liquors, the very articles which a due regard for health would forbid the use of at such a time. And all this going on through the entire night until the chanticleer proclaims 53 the return of day. Then the wearied dancers

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emerge from their overheated room, and hasten away home amid the cold dews and chilling breezes of early morn. Sudden death, unlooked for and unheralded, has often been the result of this misnamed healthy and invigorating exercise.

If the votaries of social dancing would attire themselves in loose apparel, which would guarantee the unconstrained use of all their physical powers, and retire into a spacious and well-ventilated hall, or to the village green, at a suitable hour of the day, and only exercise enough to invigorate, not exhaust nature, whatever our views might be of the moral tendencies of the dance, we might readily admit it to be a healthy exercise; but as generally practiced it is at war with nature, and can only be a fruitful source of disease and death. But it is further asserted, with that unblushing boldness and pertinacity which are peculiar to the advocates of the ball-room, that only in the dancing school can the young acquire a graceful carriage and the “poetry of motion.” This stale assertion is also utterly at variance with the well-known facts of the case. Thousands who never enter a ball-room are elegantly 54 graceful in their movements, and form the most accomplished members of society. The various motions of the body, called the grace of manner, acquired in the dancing school are constrained and artificial, and however well they may suit the ballroom, are but little admired elsewhere by truly refined and elegant society.

CHAPTER IX.

“For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.”—Prov. iv. 16.

The zeal and untiring efforts of the advocates of dancing to promote their object are worthy of a better cause. They leave no means untried, whether fair or foul, to entrap the younger members of pious families and the more unwary members of the Church. And we regret to say that their success not only shows them to be skillful, but gives them great encouragement to go on in their unholy work. It is really humiliating to see how yielding many of our Church members are becoming. If they will not dance themselves, they will

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permit it to be done in their 55 houses. Or, if they will not permit it in their houses, they allow the junior members of their families to indulge in it elsewhere, without faithfully admonishing them of its irreligious and dangerous tendency. This being the acknowledged state of the case, at least in some instances, the question arises as to what should be done ? What remedies are to be applied to abate the growing evil? We answer, let every member of the Church, and all others who wish well to the cause of true piety, endeavor to obtain correct and Scriptural views of the subject. If they will do this "in all honesty and godly sincerity," we believe they will find nothing in the Word of God to countenance dancing as practiced in our country, but many reasons why professing Christians, at least, should wholly abstain from it. Then they will have enlightened and correct principles to govern them in this matter, and they will not be so liable to be "led away with the error of the wicked," and thereby "fall from their steadfastness." It is important for both ministers and members of the Church to be decided in their opposition to social dancing. Let them not only feel that it is a duty they owe the Church to discountenance it altogether, but 56 also that their own personal safety and ultimate success in leading a religious life solemnly requires them to do it. Decision, unwavering decision, in the moment of temptation, is of unspeakable importance to one who would run successfully the Christian race and obtain the prize. At a fourth of July festival, more than thirty years ago, gotten up almost exclusively by members of the different churches in the vicinity, and which was intended to be conducted in accordance with Christian propriety, a plan was ingeniously devised and successfully executed by the sons and daughters of folly to draw all the young people off, under a false pretext, into the hall of a public building in order to get up a dance. In company was an elegant and well-educated young lady who had recently joined the Church, and was an earnest seeker of religion. As soon as she discovered the snare, without pausing a moment or consulting any one, she left the hall, unattended, and went immediately home. She scorned that hypocritical friendship that would attempt to mar her Christian character and endanger her salvation. Her dignified and determined course on that occasion was praiseworthy, and seemed 57 prophetic of her future elevated Christian character. She was then young, but she afterward became the wife of a worthy

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Christian man and the mother of a numerous and respectable family of children, and, though surrounded by wealth, has ever maintained her integrity, and is now reckoned one of the pillars of the Church and a mother in Israel. But if her young heart had yielded in that perilous hour, and she had voluntarily remained to hear the music and witness the dance, and perhaps finally to become an actress in the scene, how different might have been her whole future history in time and eternity none can tell.

Another efficient standard to be raised up against the dancing spirit of the age is to be found in the timely and well-directed influence of parents and others who have the control and training of the youth of our land. They should not only guard them against worldly amusements in general, but they should endeavor to fortify their minds by the instillation of correct principles, especially against the honeyed and popular, but no less dangerous, amusement of social dancing. Try to convince them how deleterious it is to all sober reflection on the subject of religion; how destructive to every religious desire and feeling; how it draws the mind away from God, and hardens the heart; and how universally it leads professors of religion to apostasy who indulge in it. Let these wholesome lessons be enforced by appropriate evidences of deep concern for their safety and salvation, and many a heedless youth will be preserved from entering this vortex of fashionable amusement which has drowned so many in destruction and perdition.

Finally, all of our ministers and Church members who desire the continued purity and prosperity of the Church should unitedly endeavor to keep social dancing out of its pale, and, by all means consistent with Christian character, to discourage it everywhere as much as possible. If any of the members of the Church should be led to participate in it, either directly or indirectly, no time should be lost in administering brotherly reproof and admonition, and if there should not be an acknowledgment of the fault and a manifest purpose to amend, they should be excluded from Christian fellowship for a willful violation of Church order and discipline. We would rejoice to increase the membership of the Church indefinitely by the addition of such as will "live godly in Christ Jesus," but a love for the purity and prosperity of the Church constrains us to say that we want no worldly

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dancing members in her communion, either rich or poor, learned or illiterate; and if people must indulge in this fashionable but decidedly irreligious dissipation, which has beguiled so many from the “narrow way that leadeth unto life,” we will consider the Church favored if they will keep out of her pale.

CHAPTER X.

“Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners.”—1 Cor. xv. 33.

We have not written against social dancing as practiced in our country because we believe it to be the worst form of dissipation and vice; nor because we believe its patrons to be “sinners above all men,” for we believe neither. There are other forms of irreligion and immorality from which we shrink with disgust and horror, and which are not only denounced as of ruinous tendency in the Word of God, but reprobated by all good society. But here is a vice destructive to 60 all the buds and blossoms of a religious life, only the more dangerous to all the interests of the soul because it is popular, and numbers among its patrons many belonging to the wealthy, refined and elevated classes of society. Like the young prophet's “wild gourds,” it has the appearance of healthy and nutritious food, but verily “there is death in the pot.” Many a heedless youth of both sexes, by entering this fascinating labyrinth of folly and sin, have effectually shut themselves out of heaven and connected hopeless despair and unavailing sorrow with the eternal future of their existence.

Believing this to be the case, we can not conclude this last chapter without an earnest exhortation to all concerned to keep away from this dangerous and soul-destroying maelstrom. Why should you go to the ballroom to seek pleasure when you can find it in so many other ways, where your imagination will not be polluted and your moral sensibilities perverted? Why seek happiness in a way that leaves a sting in your heart and strews thorns in your future path? Why co-operate, in this way, with the natural proclivities of your unrenewed and wicked heart, to blunt all your moral feelings and 61 dissipate all your

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desires for holiness and heaven? Why grasp at the mere name and shadow of happiness in the exciting dance, when you can acquire the reality in a more rational and religious way? Will a rational man heap up trash when he can with equal ease and a purer conscience heap up substantial gold? And why should you frequent the giddy dance for the sake of company? There is plenty of good, intellectual, moral and religious society to which you may easily gain access, and in which you may cultivate your manners, mind and morals, and thereby prepare yourself for future usefulness and permanent happiness. Do not suffer yourself to be deluded with the idea that consistent Christians lead a life of gloom and melancholy because they are self-exiled from the evanescent pleasures of the ball-room and other kindred worldly amusements. In attention to their religious duties, in the approbation of a good conscience, in the sweet communion of saints, and, above all, in the approving smiles of God, they enjoy more real happiness in one brief hour than the aggregate of sinful pleasures could give them in a life-time.

But, again, in this giddy round of fashionable and able amusement, you are doing worse than merely throwing away your precious time—you are murdering it, and your soul with it! And, taking into account the great work you have to do on earth in order to escape hell and acquire a preparation for heaven, you have no time to lose. Perhaps at this very hour you have but little time left you in which to prepare for the vast range of eternal years. Some fell disease, some fatal accident, or the assassin's hand may suddenly and unexpectedly terminate your probation on earth and hurry you to your final doom. In that event how will you attempt to justify your misspent days on earth? A fashionable young man, who was spending his time in gayety and mirth, was admonished of the great wrong he was doing himself by a pious friend. He jeeringly replied, "I am only sowing my wild oats!" In a few brief weeks this same friend was called to see him on his death-bed. On entering the room the young man despondingly turned to him and said, "I am done sowing my wild oats, and now I am going to reap my harvest in hell!" How soon this may be the case with you, none can tell. Then why risk so much for so little? 63 Why jeopardize your eternal interests for the transient and empty pleasures of the ballroom? You are too much addicted already to

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gaudy dress and vain show; and frequent attendance on dancing parties will only increase your devotion to the goddess of fashion. This, of itself, will be a heavy drain on your time and purse, and will, in a great measure, deprive you of the means of being useful to others, perhaps of paying your honest debts when due, and in the same ratio will harden your heart against the cry of the needy and the tears of the orphan.

But, again, you should keep away from the ball-room, because it greatly endangers your virtuous sensibility, and places female modesty, which is at once the ornament and safeguard of the sex, in constant peril. Almost everything you hear and see and do in such places has this tendency. Persevere in your devotion to the ball-room, and the richest gems of female character may become in this country what they have long been in Italy, Spain and France.

If you are a student in any literary institution, or a student of any art or profession by which you expect to earn a living hereafter or become useful to mankind, keep away from the gilded paraphernalia and voluptuous festivities of the common dance. Attendance on such places will enervate both body and mind, waste your time and dissipate your thoughts, give you an overweening fondness for what is showy and passionate, and a corresponding disrelish for what is real and substantial in the literary and scientific world; and the strong probability will be that you will never attain to a respectable mediocrity in scholarship or in any honorable profession.

There is yet another very weighty reason why many of you should keep away from the ball-room. Your parents are consistently pious, and they feel the heaven-originated obligations they are under to bring up you, their beloved offspring, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." After a prayerful review of the whole subject, and, perhaps, after some bitter experience in their irreligious days, they are conscientiously opposed to your attendance on such places of worldly amusement. They believe it may become the entering wedge of your temporal and eternal ruin, and hence they admonish you against it. Now, you should bear in mind the much to be dreaded consequences to which you

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expose yourselves by willfully disobeying 65 the well-intended and godly admonitions of your parents in any matter of this sort. The Fifth Commandment in the Decalogue is thus re-announced by Divine Authority in the New Testament: Eph. vi. 2, 3: "Honor thy Father and thy Mother, which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Now, if you dishonor your parents by disrespecting and disobeying their godly authority and admonitions in matters of this kind, you may not only embitter the evening of their lives and bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, but it will be ill with you, and your days on earth will be abridged. For, as in case you honor your parents, it shall be well with you, and your days will be prolonged on earth; so, if you dishonor them the reverse will be your heaven-ordained doom. Finally, if you let all we have said pass by unheeded, and still persist in this world-styled "innocent amusement," we can foretell, with almost prophetic certainty, what will be the ruinous consequences. It will give a distate for the Bible, a dislike for self-examination, and an aversion to prayer. The Gospel of Christ Jesus will have no attractions for you; even the touching scenes 66 of Calvary will appear tame and insipid, and both the public and private worship of God will be dry and uninteresting. The holy Sabbath, with all its hallowing associations, will afford you no delight, and the earnest calls to repentance will pass unheeded by. The momentous subjects of' death and judgment, heaven and hell, with all their thrilling associations, will be forgotten. Your heart will grow hard until it is past feeling, your conscience become seared as with a hot iron, and you will passionately love and pursue the follies of life unrestrained until your soul is ruined forever; and your day of gayety and voluptuous pleasure will be succeeded by a dark and stormy night of unmitigated sorrow and hopeless despair.

We have endeavored to present the subject discussed in the preceding chapters in an honest and candid light. Our task is now done, and upon it we humbly invoke the blessing of God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen !