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ARTICLE I.

## MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN MYSTICS.

1. *Ullman's Reformers before the Reformation.* Translated by Rev. ROBERT MENZIES. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
2. *The History and Life of the Rev. Dr. John Tauler,* with twenty-five of his Sermons. Translated by SUSANNA WINKWORTH; Preface by Rev. CHARLES KINGSLEY; Introduction by Rev. ROSWELL D. HITCHCOCK, D. D., Washburn Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the Union Theological Seminary (New York). New York: Wiley & Halsted.
3. *Madame Guyon and Fenelon.* By THOS. C. UPHAM, Professor in Bowdoin College. Harper & Bros., New York.

### WHAT MYSTICISM IS.

Difficult indeed would be the task of defining the undefinable. Mysticism is not like the sun, the moon, the planets, all which give the telescopic observer a sharp-edged disk; not even like the fixed stars which present glittering points, or at least approximations thereto; but like the zodiacal light stretching back from the sun just after nightfall in long vagueness of splendor; or the nebula in Andromeda shining yonder from age to age, an undefined luminosity. Like the nebula, it is, however, a reality; it has a central aggregation from which on all sides it passes away gradually into utter faintness.

## ARTICLE VI.

THE QUESTION OF DANCING FROM ANOTHER  
POINT OF VIEW.

This is and ever has been a free journal. From its beginning, some thirty years since, there has never been amongst even its editors a complete agreement of opinion on all subjects. And so its correspondents and contributors have frequently differed in the sentiments expressed by them. Indeed, our Church is by no means at one upon a variety of questions which, though not fundamental, are yet frequently of great practical importance. Hence the necessity and the value of free discussion. This journal claims that during its whole course it has furnished opportunity to thoughtful men for setting forth without reserve their varying opinions.

In this very number we are furnishing an illustration of the catholic spirit of this REVIEW. One of our most learned theologians, who is at the same time of our editorial corps, utters freely and forcibly his opinions on an important practical question which is dividing our Church at the present moment. He may well be reckoned to have made the strongest, fullest, and most impressive exhibition possible of that side of the question which he has espoused. If he has not established the doctrine which he advocates, it may be taken for granted that it cannot be established. Having no such claims as his to the attention or respect of the Church for what we have to offer, nevertheless we shall essay to dispute some of his positions, being much impressed with the opinion that there is danger both to the purity, the liberty, and the peace of our ecclesiastical household from some of the views which he has advanced.

There are two positions maintained: the one that dancing is sinful, the other that it is an offence to be formally disciplined. On the first point, as well as on the second, the argument is full, positive, and elaborate; and the ground taken makes every form of this amusement to be morally wrong. There is a distinction drawn between some forms and other forms of it, so that the sin-

fulness is greater in some cases than in others; but it will not be denied that the first position maintained is condemnatory in general of all dancing as sinful.

Now we are not and never have been patrons of your "dancing disciples." We are not and never have been friends, admirers, or apologists of the amusement of dancing in any of its forms. But this is not because we are able to accept the first position taken, which makes all dancing sinful. We are on record as expressing very strong disapprobation of all forms of dancing between the sexes, and we still hold the same opinions on that subject. But the proposition, that dancing, considered generally, is sinful, followed as it is and must be by the other proposition, viz., that it must be formally disciplined, presents the subject in a very different light. Our ground is, that this is just one of those many things which are to be condemned and dissuaded from, but not made matters of technical discipline. But it is attempted to shew (page 323) that one has no right to disapprove unless one is so clearly convinced that God's word is against that which is disapproved, as to be prepared to demand its discipline by the Church. Now, we admit that the word is our rule in morals as in faith. But the distinction is clear and warrantable between disapprobation or condemnation, and formal church discipline based on judicial proceedings. An individual Christian may speak or write against what is in his opinion dangerous, and a pastor may from the pulpit reason and exhort, and a Session may warn or remonstrate, respecting whatever in the general aspects of the word seems to be improper or injurious. But when that court comes to acts of technical discipline, the warrant of the word is reasonably and rightfully required to be much more explicit. This distinction is made in chapter first of our present Book of Discipline, and is expressly admitted on page 303 of the argument we criticise. And it has been acknowledged necessary and just by all authorities on ecclesiastical discipline.

The distinction is also clear and warrantable between those actions themselves that are to be disapproved on general grounds of Scripture as many persons believe, and other actions whose condemnation is either express in Scripture or else necessarily de-

ducible therefrom. We call these latter sinful. The former are only questionable, and different minds will and may view them differently. There is card-playing, and theatre-going, and novel-reading, and tobacco-chewing or smoking, and all use, even the most moderate, of any kind of stimulating drink, and dinner parties, and big suppers, and fashionable dress and equipage, and the wearing of a gold watch, diamond ring, or other jewelry—yes, and we may go further and say life insurance, and the marriage of first cousins; and proceeding another step, the use of instrumental music in public worship in God's house, and of church fairs with their many bad accompaniments; and going a little further, the use of stated supplies for a long period instead of settled pastors; and still further, the establishment of theological seminaries; and still one step more, the Pan-Presbyterian Alliance itself—all these, and a score or two more of other like things, are questionable with many, and they have been and are occasions of earnest differences of opinion amongst honest, conscientious, intelligent Christians, who have nevertheless all alike adopted the word as their only rule. And some of these things have seemed to many to be fully as objectionable as any form of dancing. Novel reading, for example, as practised amongst us, is probably in every aspect quite as great an evil as dancing. It has lately been said on high authority that "no one systematically reads the average novelette of the day and keeps either integrity or virtue; and that there are a million of men and women in the United States to-day reading themselves into hell." And then the use of tobacco: who can calculate the evils of that practice to health and to morals both? These evils are so manifest, and they press so heavily on the consciences of many, that some Churches in these States have been ready to make either chewing or smoking a disciplinable offence. For ourselves, we have a thousand times wished that we had a scourge of small cords put into our hands with authority to go and cleanse our ministry, and our membership too, from all this abominable filth. But where are we to find Scripture for making the use of either tobacco or novels a disciplinable offence?

Now, the whole argument to prove that dancing is sinful ap-

pears to us to be a signal failure, while, nevertheless, it is a very successful demonstration that dancing, like the other matters just named, is questionable, and may fairly be held in disapprobation by a conscientious Bible believer.

What is the line of argument to prove dancing to be sinful? The *first* point made is, that classical antiquity eschewed it. Surely the heathen Greeks and Romans are hardly to be held up as authority with us Christians as to what our church courts shall condemn as sinful. Surely all things were not wicked which they held to be such. The *second* proof is drawn from the condemnation of Christian antiquity; where again it is just the opinions of men that are quoted. Then, *thirdly*, we are told of modern Christian judgment and legislation, where Calvin, and the Westminster Assembly, and the Scotch Kirk, and the American Assemblies (including our own), and John Wesley, and Adam Clarke, and the General Conference of the Methodist Church, and a number of Episcopal bishops of the highest character, and various Diocesan Conventions of the Episcopal Church, and certain Papal bodies and bishops in America are quoted.

Now let it be observed, that in Calvin's day, at Geneva, there were enormous excesses practised under the guise of popular amusements. Bungener, in his "Life of Calvin," says:

"It must not be forgotten what, at that period, certain things were, which the refinement of manners has more or less modified. Every custom, and therefore, much more, every kind of disorder, retained the impress of preceding centuries; hence the passions easily degenerated into a brutish and uncouth cynicism. Drunkenness and revelling are now among the very lowest of the inferior classes just what they were then to many of the higher ranks. There were scarcely any innocent pleasures. The dances, for instance—do those who reproach Calvin for having so strictly forbidden them, know what they were? They may learn it from these same registers, which shew us that the said dances were forbidden long before Calvin's time; they may learn it also from the registers of our courts of justice; for they not seldom degenerated into outrages on decency which no respectable government will ever tolerate." (P. 110.)

So, too, Guizot, in his "Saint Louis and Calvin" (p. 274), quotes from the "Pièces Justificatives by Gaberel" (p. 249) as follows: "A memoir still exists which gives a detailed account of

these extraordinary amusements, and from this terrible record it appears that the dances then performed in private houses would not be tolerated at the present day in the height of the most disorderly carnival." This memorial, addressed to the king of Navarre by Dancau, is in the library of Geneva.

And let it also be understood, that no man has expressed himself more scripturally, kindly, moderately, and wisely than Calvin on the subject of disciplining offenders by the Church. He knew, like his great teacher Augustin, how to point out "the inconsiderate zeal for righteousness of even good men," and how to condemn their "excessive moroseness" and their too "rigorous severity." He could quote from Augustin how "the pious and placid should mercifully correct what they can in the Church, but bear patiently what they cannot correct, in love lamenting and mourning until God either reform and correct, or at the harvest root up the tares and scatter the chaff." He could say in his own words: "Let all the godly study to provide themselves with these weapons, lest, while they deem themselves strenuous and ardent defenders of righteousness, they revolt from the kingdom of heaven, which is the only kingdom of righteousness." Yes, Calvin strongly sympathised with Augustin when he said that "if the contagion of sin has seized the multitude, mercy must accompany living discipline." And so when Augustin, speaking of "drunkenness, which is so severely condemned in Scripture, but was prevalent in Africa with impunity," called for a council to provide a remedy, Calvin heartily approves his declaring, nevertheless, "In my opinion such things are not removed by rough, harsh, and imperious measures, but more by teaching than commanding, more by admonishing than threatening. For it is thus we are to act with the multitude of offenders. Severity is to be exercised against only the sins of the few."

Calvin, therefore, is not to be pleaded as insisting on disciplining the dances at Geneva without explanation as to the character of the amusement then and there. And the Reformer must be understood as objecting with Augustin to any use whatever of formal discipline with a whole demoralised church or community. Formal discipline is not to be used where the public sentiment

does not sustain it as wise and good; and this, of course, cannot be where any abuse is generally practised. In cases of that sort, preaching is the remedy, according to Augustin and to Calvin; not commanding and not threatening, but teaching and admonishing must be relied on. It is only where an offence is the sin of the few that they recommend formal discipline. And we may add, that even then it should not be resorted to hastily. It is a dangerous remedy in unskilful hands. One single case of it mismanaged may split a flourishing church into fragments.

Then, as to the Westminster Assembly, let it be observed that it qualifies the dancing it pronounces sinful with the term "lascivious."

And then the testimony of our Southern Church does not seem to us quite so strong as represented. In 1865, for example, the Assembly denied distinctly the right of any church court to make new rules of membership different from those contained in the Constitution, but allowed that each has power to declare or affirm *its sense* of what is an offence; signifying, of course, that *an appeal might always be taken* from its judgment on that point. And that Assembly said that the "lascivious dances" named in the Larger Catechism are not, in its belief, those usual in our best society; also, that it would not say that all these worldly amusements are, in their own nature, sinful. Yet it is correctly stated that that Assembly did call on Sessions to "separate from the church those who love the world and conformity thereto rather than the law of Christ." The same was done by the Assembly of 1869; but that body qualified the dances to be disciplined by the term "promiscuous." Then in 1877 the Presbytery of Atlanta asked the Assembly to explain whether *all* dancing, or only *promiscuous* dancing, is forbidden. And that Assembly answers that all forms of the dance, whether round or square, and whether in public balls or private parlors, tend to evil, are evil, and should be discountenanced. It was very clear as to the teaching and admonishing, but less so as to the commanding and threatening. For that Assembly very wisely said that the extent of the evil depends on circumstances, and that Sessions are the only courts competent to judge what remedy to apply; and it also

recommended great patience on the part of Sessions with offenders in the matter of dancing.

This language is interpreted to mean that the Assembly "clothes the Session with the power of judicial discipline." We submit, that if the Session did not possess the power of judicial discipline before, it could not be clothed with it by any Assembly. No Assembly can clothe a Session with any power which it does not get from the Constitution of our Church. This representation of the matter is repeated again and again. The Assembly, it is said, "authorises the Sessions to judge what remedy to apply." We know that the New Orleans Assembly expressed the opinion that only the court most immediately connected with the people can judge how best to deal with such occurrences amongst them; but we submit, that that was not by any means the same as to say that Sessions must use formal discipline. The Sessions who only can know all the circumstances of each case can alone determine wisely what the remedy should be; but whatever remedy they do employ, they must exercise great patience in dealing with those who offend in this way. That is really what the New Orleans Assembly said. But we submit, that even if it had expressed the positive judgment ascribed to it, our Sessions should have now no more authority in the matter than they had before the Assembly met at New Orleans. It is from the Book, and not from the Assembly, they get all their authority. Moreover, it is to our mind quite clear that the Assembly at New Orleans was not thinking at all of any such undertaking as "clothing the Sessions," nor yet of bestowing on them, the grant of any new "authority." On the contrary, what it was aiming at was just to free itself from any supposed power or obligation to deal with such cases, seeing that, as has been well said in the article we are considering, the act in question must be considered in the concrete with its circumstances and adjuncts. The Assembly said that the church Session is the only court competent to judge what remedy to apply; in other words, the supreme judicatory cannot determine any such cases except as they may come up from the courts below in one or other of the four constitutional



ways. This, now, really is the last deliverance made by our Southern General Assembly.

But as touching Calvin's opinion and that of the Westminster and the Southern Assemblies and all the other Assemblies, and all the Bishops and Dioceses, all the Conventions and Conferences named—what of them all, singly or collectively? What do they avail in the question before us? Excellently good they certainly are, and deserving of much respect as evincing that, according to the best judgment of the most pious and the wise men, dancing is to be discountenanced as an improper and a dangerous thing. Let them be quoted again and again to frown down this amusement. Let them be used to organise a public sentiment which shall banish it from refined society. There must be something evil in dancing (as said Dr. Thornwell) when the Church in all ages has set her face against it. But (as he said again) the Church has no opinions—she has a faith. That is to say, the Church may not act on opinions held by whom they may be, in or out of her bosom; she can act only on what is indisputably revealed. Our Confession says well the whole counsel of God is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing is at any time to be added. It is thus we get every doctrine—either it is expressed in the word, or it is necessarily deducible from the word. And so our rules of discipline must be based on principles that are distinctly revealed. If the good and the wise who have been quoted, can shew that dancing is either expressly or by necessary consequence deductively prohibited in the word, let them make that plain, and there will be an end of the matter. But it is just wasting words to tell us what men have thought or believed on a subject like this, when the question regards formal discipline by the Church. Suppose the lawfulness of instrumental music in public worship were under earnest discussion, as we ourselves think it ought to be all through our Church, could those who, like ourselves, believe that not being commanded it is forbidden, claim to apply that principle so decisively as to make the use of an organ an offence to be formally disciplined, and that against the honest and earnest, though, we think, unfounded. plea

by good men that the organ is a necessity to good congregational singing? Suppose the marriage of cousins was to be earnestly protested against, on the ground that the Scripture forbids marrying any who are "near of kin." Could it be fairly maintained that the application of that prohibition in this way is clearly necessary, so as to make this kind of marriage sinful? A great deal is said, and we think can be justly said, against such marriages; logic and eloquence and zeal might fortify themselves with the testimonies of the highest medical authorities and assail this practice and seek to bring it under the formal ban of the Church; but is the deduction a clear and necessary one, such as would justify the claim that the Scriptures condemn this kind of marriage? Why, even the marriage of the wife's sister, which seems to us to be far more clearly condemned in the word, could not, we seriously apprehend, be successfully maintained to be so unquestionably forbidden in the Scriptures as to be a proper matter of discipline. That practice is getting to be common in our Church, and the subject is one that ought to be discussed amongst us by way of preventing the further spread of it, supposing that such marriages are incestuous; but is it not manifest that the formal discipline of such marriages in the present state of public opinion is a somewhat questionable remedy for any church Session to apply? Suppose, again, that a church Session should be unanimous in the opinion that life assurance is based on a wicked distrust of providence, and in fact is a species of the sin of gambling. Would it be safe or right for them to undertake to discipline a church member for making that sort of provision for his widow and orphans? And so we might ask whether the most earnest advocate of total abstinence from drink, though he can portray in melting terms the grief of broken-hearted wives and the distress of worse than fatherless children, and though he can describe justly and movingly the dishonor to religion from drunkenness in the very Church, and though he can demonstrate that no man becomes a drunkard in a day, and that the temperate use of liquor is the road to intemperance—yet, we might ask, can this pleader for *teetotalism* expect to prevail with the Church to make all use of stimulus a sin and a disciplinable offence? Let

him tell us of the tremendous array of testimony which can be produced to declare the dreadfulness of intemperance; let him also set forth the incontrovertible opinion held by hundreds and thousands of good and wise men, that if there were no moderate drinkers there could be no drunkards; let him produce (as has been done in this question of dancing) "a *concursus* of all religions, all ages, all civilisations," against drunkenness and all the causes (especially the chief cause) of it; and let him seek by all this powerful array to make some little, insignificant, obscure Presbyterian church Session declare that moderate drinking is a sin: and he will fail, and he ought to fail, because the Church must not essay to be wiser than her Lord, or better than the Bible. Let the State adopt the Maine law, which forbids all selling of liquor except by the apothecary on the physician's prescription; we would hold up both hands for it; it would be a mighty bulwark against intemperance, and in fact might be the very cure of it; and not only so, but it would be a perfectly legitimate exercise of the law-making power of the State. But the Church cannot make laws. This is the insuperable obstacle in the way of that exercise of discipline which is urged. We are not the Lord's councillors, but his servants. He makes the laws; Church rulers can only administer them. And therefore, all that is said about the "self-sufficiency and arrogance which, in its ignorance and inexperience sets itself up against what the wise and the good of the ancient and modern world" have said about dancing, or any thing else; all this falls to the ground. The plea of Christian liberty is to be asserted over and over again whenever churches or church courts essay to invade that liberty in the least degree. The Apostle says we must stand fast and be not brought under any human yoke. And so, whatever "the opinion of the virtuous of all ages" about dancing, and whether that "opinion be sound or not," the question before us simply is, whether, if the Church undertake the formal discipline of any practice not indisputably forbidden in the Scriptures, basing her action solely on the opinions of the virtuous of all ages, it does not become the duty of the humblest member in all "humility,

modesty, and docility" to protest, in the interest of the liberty and the purity and the peace of the Church.

But it is contended, touching the first point of the argument we are reviewing, that the Scriptures do condemn public dancing both "fully and expressly"—as much so, at least, "as the plan of its revelation made possible for it." The proof offered is: (1) that the Bible enjoins sobriety, and the dance is an act of pronounced levity; (2) that the Bible enjoins strict economy, but the modern dance is a wasteful and expensive amusement; (3) that the Bible requires modesty of female dress, but the dance usually an opposite mode; (4) that the Scriptures expressly forbid the modern dance, in that they enjoin the strictest purity in the intercourse of the sexes. There is a fifth statement of proof, but let us look for a moment at the argument as thus far presented.

The first remark we have to offer is, that we have under these four heads a statement of the writer's views touching the bearing of certain Scriptures on the dance. There are very many who agree with him. In many of the positions he takes, we agree with him ourselves. But there are many, very many, perhaps, not in his circle or sphere of life or ours, but certainly many in other spheres, who differ with him entirely as to the justness of his application of the Scriptures quoted. A great deal, of course, depends on our training. Many things seem to country people extravagant which city folks consider moderate. Persons of the middle class, educated at home and brought up with simple tastes, cannot take the same views which obtain in the highest ranks of life. There must be allowed a considerable latitude for these necessary differences of taste and habits and feeling. The Church must not undertake sumptuary regulations. She cannot construct her rules of discipline to suit any one class, whether the highest or the lowest or the middling. They must be such as will easily and naturally apply to the different situations in which her members are found. Her rules of discipline, it is true, must not be made of gum-elastic; but, on the other hand, they must not be iron-works which cannot bend without breaking.

The second observation we make is, that the acknowledgments quoted from many advocates of the round dance are such as we

have ourselves heard denied by honest and fair witnesses. Here, again, much depends on training and character, and both those testimonies we have received and those quoted on the other side may be equally true. But this much is certain: there are men of such vicious disposition and such immoral training and character that every circumstance is to them a temptation and an inducement. For such men, not the dance merely, but every other form and mode of social life excites evil inclinations. Moreover, if because of the abuse of it by some very badly disposed persons, we are to discipline dancing, it will be necessary, for the same reason, to make an offence out of all the amusements which young people can ever have, however innocently, together. There is no possible coming together of the sexes in social intercourse which will not be liable to the objection of tempting bad men to evil.

The third remark which occurs to us is, that the Scripture injunction to *sobriety*, as here interpreted and understood, would apply full as well to the playfulness of our youth; and that what is said about the requirement of *economy* would call for the discipline of rich church members who ride in fine carriages and dwell in brown stone fronts.

A fourth suggestion is, that our Creator has made the sexes to incline towards one another, and it is right that they should. And every attempt that is made to bar against these constitutional tendencies must not only fail, but react and work evil. A good deal of what has been said upon this whole topic appears to us preposterous; for example, the idea that young men and young women in society are required by the Apostle Paul to regard each other with only such feelings as belong properly to brothers and sisters. We cannot make Shakers of our young people, and must not try to do it.

Once more: the weakness of all this argument from Scripture, so far, is, that the deduction is not of good and necessary consequence. The application made is not such as will bear calm and fair examination, or as will commend itself to the impartial judgment of intelligent observers of human life and manners. Discipline would break down under any attempt of this sort to make out its justification.

But let us recur to an expression quoted already as to the Bible's condemning dancing "as expressly as the plan of its revelation made possible for it." With deference, we suggest that this language is objectionable—it seems to signify (what we know was not designed) that the word is not as complete and perfect a rule as might be desired. It would seem to have been forgotten for the moment that not only what is expressly written, but what is necessarily deducible therefrom, is revealed—the latter full as completely as the former. And some will be in danger of receiving the idea from what is said that from the very nature of the case, however sinful dancing may be, the revelation made long before it was invented could not possibly prohibit it in a perfectly clear and distinct way by anticipation, which position, of course, is not tenable any more than it is honorable to the word. Nor does it appear to us that there is as felicitous a statement as our author usually makes when he sets forth what is the plan adopted by the Author of the Bible, as follows: "This plan was so to prohibit sins which were current in those generations, as to furnish all honest minds parallels and precedents which would safely guide them in classing the sins of later invention." It is not "parallels and precedents" so much as *principles* which the Author of revelation has given us for the guidance of our minds and our ways. Accordingly, it seems to us that no Session called on to discipline a man for wantonly cutting a telegraph wire or displacing a railroad bar in front of a passenger train, would any more go to the Bible for a parallel or a precedent than for an express prohibition of these particular forms of sin. Our standards would make the former of these offences, in several different forms of expression, a clear and indisputable violation of the Eighth Commandment, which requires justice between man and man; and they would make the second also, clearly and indisputably, a violation of the Sixth Commandment. There were no telegraph wires or railroads when the Decalogue was given, but the Sixth and the Eighth Commandments have unquestionably anticipated the sins mentioned, and no session could pretend that there is any lack of clear Scripture condemnation of these sins. So of all sins: the Bible condemns

all possible offences against God or man, and whatever it does not condemn, either expressly or deductively by good consequence, is no offence, and must not be made by man to be an offence. And the difficulty which Sessions find as to dancing, and which the Westminster Assembly also found, was that it cannot be made out to be indisputably certain that all dancing can be held to be in violation of the Seventh Commandment; so that the Assembly of Divines were obliged to insert that qualifying term, "lascivious."

But, fifth, it is said that Scripture virtually includes the modern dance in an express prohibition in three places, viz., Rom. xiii. 13, Gal. v. 21, and 1 Peter iv. 3. The first passage condemns rioting, and the other two revellings. And it is added that the Sixth Commandment prohibits suicide, but dancing destroys both mental and bodily health, which makes it doubly suicidal. This completes the argument from Scripture to prove dancing sinful.

We have only to remark, with deference, that this appears to us to be a thorough *break down* in the appeal to the word. That portion of the argument which relates to suicide is just a mere general inference not to be relied on for a moment as a basis of judicial discipline. But what of the three texts? Clearly they forbid rioting and revelling. And these offences may accompany dancing; but is it safe to affirm that they always do accompany it? Can we reason from rioting and revelling, which are clearly forbidden, to all dancing—to even all round dancing? On page 326 we read: "We believe that round dancing at least is a sin of a very grave character and a flagrant breach of morals;" and again, on page 334, that round dances are always "unlawful and disciplinable in Christ's Church; for they are never *per se* indifferent, but essentially contrary to the permanent precepts of Scripture, as has been shown." Now, if any texts of Scripture have been adduced to show that round dancing is essentially sinful, it can only be these three; and to affirm that these do so teach is to affirm that "round dancing" and "rioting and revelling" are synonymous terms. Surely this will be acknowledged by all to be going too far.

So much for the first position maintained—viz., that dancing

is sinful. Let us pass to the other: that it is an offence to be formally disciplined. Of course, however, this cannot stand if there has really been, as we suppose, a failure to make good the first position. If this be so, then all falls to the ground which is said about some forms of dancing having "every mark by which disciplinable sins are discriminated from the undisciplinable; they are public sins; their commission is overt; the acts may be clearly defined; they are notoriously attended by scandal; they have regular tendencies to other sins" (page 326). Indeed, how could it possibly be true that some forms of dancing are as here described, and yet some other forms of the same amusement be innocent? Admit that it is the circumstances which make the criminality, and then you may discriminate between dancing and dancing. But if certain forms of dancing are, as is declared, "never *per se* indifferent, but essentially contrary to the permanent precepts of Scripture" (page 334), then it passes our comprehension how there can be any innocent forms of the same act. There may be innocent forms of killing, but not of murder, nor of stealing, nor of lying, nor of adultery, nor of any other act which is essentially sinful.

We are, therefore, not a little surprised to meet at the outset of the second part of this discussion the admission distinctly made (page 323), that "there are forms of dancing which are innocent." So far as observed, this has not been admitted till now. All along we have understood it to be held that the modern dance—that is, the dancing of the sexes together in any form—is always sinful, though more or less so, according to circumstances.

The first point made under this second head of the discussion, is, that there is no reason to deny that dancing is a disciplinable offence from the fact that there are gradations in dancing—some kinds being admitted to be innocent, and the sinful kinds shading off nicely from the other; and the further fact, that the Bible has not drawn the line between the tolerated and the disciplinable forms of the practice; because the lesser and the greater breaches of all the commandments shade off into each other, and because such a plea for not disciplining certain dances would prove that no breach of any commandment is disciplinable.



Now, the first remark we have to offer is, that we do not know of any greater breaches of any of the commandments which do so shade off into lesser breaches as that these latter become innocent. There are some sins greater than others, but no breaches of any commandment are innocent.

And our second observation is, that the gradation plea is one we would not think of making. A far more obvious as well as stronger plea is, that the Bible does not, so far as proved, make any form of dancing sinful; and therefore the Church can only warn and cannot discipline. If rioting and revelling, or any other sinful thing, be mixed up with any dance, that may of course be disciplined. But the simple dancing, whether round or square, we have not had demonstrated to be condemned either expressly or by good and necessary consequence in the Bible. It is not, therefore, in itself a disciplinable offence. And yet, in every age, the Church has looked upon it as a questionable and dangerous thing, and therefore has remonstrated and exhorted against it, and to these warnings and remonstrances all right-minded church members should pay great respect. What is so well urged about its being a dividing line, in the apprehension of many, between the penitent and the ungodly, deserves the highest consideration. For our own part, we cordially accept the statement that it is frontier ground between the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan. There is, and as has been well said, there always must be, a belt of territory between rival kingdoms, and so between the Church and the world, which is "the debateable land." And this is always, as is well said, a region full of perils, and the man or the woman who desires to pay proper regard to his or her own safety will not dwell very near this dangerous boundary, even though it may be honestly believed that it belongs to the King. The actual peril of this contested territory is well nigh as great as of the enemy's acknowledged soil. And the Christian who is successfully assaulted by Satan will usually be, as is well urged, the very one who causelessly ventures near his boundary line. It is true, as is insisted on, that usually men do not backslide by suddenly falling into some monstrous crime. Satan does not attempt to rend a soul from Christ by inserting

first the blunt edge of his wedge between them, but its thin edge, and that because it is thin. And for this reason Christians ought to guard themselves most against the smaller sins lying next to the debateable zone; and for this reason, those who watch for souls are bound to be most wakeful and strict at the same points.

All this is exactly to our mind, only the strict watchfulness of pastors and Sessions must not take the form of technical discipline, but that of parental, loving, affectionate oversight and care. We do not believe that the testimony of pastors and elders, who are thus tenderly watchful, will be found to be, as is said on page 326, that "the milder measures of instruction and remonstrance fail to restrain" our youthful church members. Certainly we have had contrary testimony. At New Orleans, two pastors, one of Richmond, Virginia, the other of St. Louis, each having in charge a large church in a rich and gay community, told us they never had any difficulty on this subject. They found the power and influence of a loving pastorate amply sufficient in every case, and they held formal discipline for dancing to be incongruous and needless.

The next point which we deem it necessary to take up is, whether rights of conscience can be involved in this question. It appears to be considered quite doubtful. There is a statement made of the grounds on which such an idea may be entertained, but we do not consider the statement altogether adequate. Some, it is stated, hold that nothing can be justly disciplined except what is expressly condemned by God; others, only what are *mala per se*; and yet others, that whenever a church court exceeds these two restrictions, the individual who so thinks about its action is not only at liberty to assert, but bound to assert, his freedom of conscience by doing just what such court forbids. Now, as to the first of these points, surely nobody would say that the express prohibition is necessary where the thing is forbidden deductively. And as to the second, surely nobody would say that a church court may not judicially discipline where an act, not *malum per se*, becomes unquestionably sinful through the circumstances of its commission. Then as to the third point, clearly it involves a very nice and difficult question, and nobody

could be so foolish as to lay down the imperative rule stated. Wisdom is profitable to direct. It may be one's duty under such circumstances quietly to submit. It may be his duty to refuse submission to the court of first resort in the way of appealing to a higher court until a decision is reached in the highest court. And should the decision be then adverse to his conscientious convictions of what Scripture and our Constitution maintain, as might be the case, perhaps he would be bound (see Confession, Chap. XX., § 2) to hold his membership or his ministerial position and agitate—of course, however, in a constitutional and Christian way—for the reform of what he may justly consider corruption and abuse; for “all synods or councils since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and may have erred,” and “to obey” their commandments is sometimes “to betray true liberty of conscience.”

Now we do not think it can be justly maintained that any professed believer who entered our communion when we became a separate Presbyterian Church, whether member or office-bearer, found any such rule as made dancing a disciplinable offence. There was no such term of communion amongst us then, and there is no such term of communion now. The Assembly of 1865 called on Sessions to discipline such as “love the world and conformity thereto rather than the law of Christ.” The Assembly of 1869 enjoined the discipline of “promiscuous dancings.” Those who were anxious for the formal discipline of the dance pressed the Assembly in 1877 to interpret this word “promiscuous,” and say if all dancing is forbidden by our Church. And the answer probably surprised them, for the Assembly very wisely discountenanced all forms of dancing, but referred the whole business of formal discipline to the only body which can constitutionally exercise it, and recommended that body to be very patient with offenders.

It is therefore, we conceive, rather premature to urge that our Church has a rule binding Sessions to discipline all dancing, and that whoever is not able to approve that method of dealing with it must either go out of the Church or else quietly submit; as though our Church policy were settled in favor of formally dis-

ciplining the dance. If we are to have a new constitutional rule, the Presbyteries must first agree to adopt it. And it might be well for those who favor the formal discipline of dancing not to be too sure that the majority, when such a question shall come to be proposed, will certainly be found on their side. Who are to wear the name of "dissentients," it will be time enough to decide when the question really comes up for decision and is decided.

It is said that where a majority make a term of communion though not sinful yet too strict, and insist on the observance of it by the body, it cannot be alleged that there is any Popery in their proceeding so long as they do not coerce by civil pains, nor declare submission necessary to salvation. But it seems to us, with deference, that, notwithstanding what is said, there may be a grain of Popery in such a proceeding, inasmuch as "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word, or *beside* it in matters of faith or worship; so that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also." The great Assembly which wrote these words, and the many and various other Presbyterian Assemblies which have adopted them (our own included), have all considered that apart from enforcement by civil pains and from limiting salvation to obedience, it is a Popish thing to make any rule that is *beside God's word*, that is, *additional to God's word*. The whole counsel of God is either expressly set down in Scripture or deducible by necessary consequence, and we may neither take away from nor add to it. And if there be added any rule, whether to be enforced by civil or by spiritual and eternal threats, our devotion to true liberty of conscience may require us to resist and not obey, lest we become betrayers of that most precious inheritance. And here we must remember what was said above in connexion with another point about "the thin edge." If there is a thin edge of sinful compliance with worldly enticements which Satan uses to separate the disciple

from his Lord, so there is also a thin edge of human inventions in religion and in morals which the devil often introduces to corrupt the faith and the worship and to destroy the liberty, purity, and peace of the Church. The apostle bids us "stand fast and not be entangled." We do not know whereunto would grow our yielding that anything may be "considered by any judicatory a (disciplinable) offence or admitted as matter of accusation, which cannot be *proved to be such from Scripture* or from the regulations and practice of the Church *founded on Scripture*." There are, as we said in the outset, a score or two of questionable things, as many view them, which the Church may discountenance but cannot lawfully discipline, because it is not clear from Scripture to the general apprehension that they are sinful. And if we begin by allowing Sessions to discipline dancing, *as dancing*, if the thin edge is once introduced in this way, our Church liberty may be speedily destroyed, and with it will go our Church unity and also our Church purity. Because it is Popish, let what will be said to the contrary, to make any rule *beside* the Word. The Church is, as Calvin well said, closely "*astricted to the Word*."

In all free governments the ruler may not take the life nor abridge the liberty, nor even despoil the property of the subject or citizen, except in certain cases plainly provided; and the provisions which are made to protect the private individual from the unlawful exercise of governmental authority over him are very numerous, very ingenious, and of the utmost value to liberty. And so in that free Christian commonwealth which the Church of Jesus Christ constitutes, the liberty of the private Christian and of the individual office-bearer is carefully guarded. Presbyterians have always been great on liberty, and representative government finds its chief model and bulwarks in the provisions of its heaven-descended constitution. The question, then, of the formal discipline of dancing, or of any other merely questionable thing, goes down to the very foundations of our system, for that requires that every Christian be left free from doctrines and commandments of men that are beside the word. And therefore we are very strongly of opinion that whatever cannot be clearly and indisputably proved from Scripture to be forbidden by the Master,

his Church can well afford to have passed by without formal discipline. Our standards, deducing clearly from the word, say that "all provocations to uncleanness" and "all immodest apparel" and "all light behavior" are violations of the Seventh Commandment, and on the same ground they condemn as sinful all "lascivious dances." If we cannot make out to the general conviction that any particular form of amusement comes up to this description, we are necessarily estopped from formally disciplining it. What do we want to condemn in any worldly amusement except what is certainly sinful? And what can any church court touch that the word does not unquestionably condemn?

The discussion of the law of love and of the unquestionable fact that actions may under certain circumstances become truly sins is both interesting and instructive, including as it does an elaborate exposition of the proceedings of the first Presbyterian General Assembly described in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. As to the law of love, it is well said, that its obligations never can upset Christian liberty—each freeman in Christ must judge in the fear of God when he should forego any right of his for the sake of his weak brethren; and that no church court can require of him this surrender on pain of discipline, because that would be to give them power to make things sinful which God has not made so. Then as to neutral acts becoming sinful by circumstances, which undoubtedly they may in certain cases, it is also well said on the other hand, that for a Christian to claim the right to do such acts, which have thus become sinful, would be license not liberty. And so it is likewise well said that no church court can assume to declare that circumstances now make some act sinful which Christ or his apostles had left allowable. Everything which Christ and his apostles, in other words which the word, leaves allowable, may be done without guilt. Let it be here repeated by us that the perfect word of God anticipates to condemn every conceivable sin. There never can arise any new sins which that word will not be found to have prohibited. And so it is here (page 330) correctly stated: "that a Church may justly prohibit a practice as evil by reason of newly arising cir-

cumstances, it must be able to prove from Scripture (either by express declaration or good and necessary consequence) that God regards the practice thus circumstanced as evil." Hence it is added, "our Assemblies, while scripturally condemning drunkenness, have scripturally refused to make temperate drinking an offence." All this appears to us exactly true and just, and moreover quite confirmatory of our position in this argument. But the illustration here given we are not prepared to adopt. That a Presbyterian minister should ever go habitually to drink in a drinking-hell and in that way encourage drunkenness is a very un-supposable case. Some strangely powerful and sustaining reason for such a course would be necessary or it could not be taken, and this reason must needs be such as would justify the act before Presbytery. We can as easily suppose such a reason as we can suppose such an act. If the act were done without some such reason, of course it would be censurable as an evil act. But what is the thing Presbytery would censure? Not his drinking, but his setting a scandalous example by his drinking publicly. And he would be told to use his liberty of *drinking in secret*, which possibly would constitute a greater scandal in the eyes of many than what it was designed to remedy. On the whole, we are forced to say that the illustration is both very un-supposable, and also avails little if such a case could be supposed. Let us pass to what is very properly said to be "a better instance"—that which occasioned the first General Assembly at Jerusalem. We find nothing to object to, but much to admire, in the explanation of the decrees here given. It is confirmed by Calvin's exposition of the same. The great Genevan aims to prevent Romish or other councils from claiming the right from this example of the apostles and elders to make new moral laws. He meets the question: if lawful for that Assembly to do this, why not lawful for their successors as often as occasion requires? Calvin shows that the Jerusalem Council decreed nothing new whatever. For if Peter declares that God is tempted if a yoke is laid on the necks of disciples, he could not afterwards agree to the imposition of such a yoke. So then, Calvin continues: "The first thing in order and the chief thing in importance is that the

Gentiles were to retain their liberty, which was not to be disturbed; and that they were not to be annoyed by the observances of the law. And the reservation which follows touching idols and blood is not a new law enacted by the apostles, but a divine and eternal command of God against the violation of charity, which does not detract one iota from liberty." Only (he says) the Gentiles were not to abuse their liberty—in other words, they were to use "an innoxious liberty, giving no offence to the brethren." "In removing grounds of offence, the apostles would simply enforce the divine law which prohibits offence, as if they had said: The Lord hath commanded you not to hurt a weak brother; but meats offered to idols, things strangled and blood ye cannot eat without offending weak brethren; we therefore require you by the command of the Lord not to eat with offence."

We have therefore here, as is properly said, an unquestionable instance of a church court, under the plain and sure guidance of the Spirit, declaring that the moral character of a concrete act had become under circumstances and for a time at least, sinful; while yet *per se* it was indifferent.

Now how does this bear on the question we are discussing? All that has been proved is that circumstances may make a thing sinful which is *per se* indifferent. And if the thing becomes sinful, then it is a proper subject of discipline *if circumstances render it suitable and wise so to deal with it*. Liberty is a great and precious right, but charity is a great and holy duty, and liberty must not violate charity. The law of love is to be obeyed. Regard for the opinions and prejudices of others must influence our conduct *unless a greater duty override this one*. It is a grievous thing to wound the weak brother. He who does it assumes a heavy responsibility. Yet sometimes this very thing has to be done. Charity, sweet and heavenly as it is, must not be allowed to invade or overthrow liberty. When the weak brother gets so strong that he demands the sacrifice of my freedom, the time has come for me to resist him and to refuse his demand.

Now it is very difficult sometimes to decide between the conflicting claims of charity and liberty. It is given up in the article we are reviewing that Paul would not have disciplined a well-



informed believer who persisted in eating idol's meat and claimed that his liberty was not to be judged by another man's conscience. Only in case he was not defending his own liberty, but acting selfishly and mischievously of deliberate purpose, only for wantonly doing mischief, and not merely for eating, it is said could such a man be disciplined. This is distinctly admitted. So far so good. Let us go just one step farther, and say if it be not perfectly clear and certain that such a believer was deliberately and wantonly set on doing injury to his weak brother, it were evidently better not to attempt the formal discipline of him, but merely to reason with and exhort and persuade him.

The conclusion reached by this elaborate discussion of "The Dancing Question" is that our Assembly at Louisville ought categorically to order the formal discipline by our Sessions of all round dances and public and promiscuous balls. We should very much prefer that the Sessions should be left according to the New Orleans deliverance to apply the law of God in their own wisdom and faithfulness. Let Assemblies, Synods, and Presbyteries declare and expound the teachings of the word on this subject, as occasion shall require; but let our Sessions determine what remedy is suitable in each particular case as it arises, and let pastors also be left to deal tenderly and prudently but earnestly with this matter. You cannot trust the Sessions because too timid? Far better trust them to act as may be right and wise in each separate case than impose on them the sweeping order proposed, which they would not, could not, ought not to carry out, because it transcends the word. Let the Louisville Assembly deliver itself zealously but scripturally on this subject, and then let our pastors preach and teach the people. We want no preaching of a crusade against dancing. Vastly more should we confide in the preaching of Christ and the powers of the world to come, in the setting forth of our duty to the Head of his Church. The remedy of Augustin and of Calvin is the one we wish to see tried—"not rough, harsh, imperious measures, more teaching than commanding, more admonishing than threatening." But if there must be special action taken against special evils, let us at least keep our action within constitutional bounds. We may not

discipline but we may teach. Only three of our Assemblies have yet spoken. Let them utter their voice, if needful, *from year to year*, and let Synods and Presbyteries take up the testimony, and let all these bodies speak. It may be fairly said that there has been no speaking adequately yet. Let all church courts, if it be necessary, thunder against the evil in question, and let the pulpit thunder also. We have done nothing yet. The power of teaching is immense. Whatever it cannot overthrow, no human power can. Let this remedy be tried. Let there be at least a fair beginning made of trying it before we rush to our highest judicatory and weakly beg it to do what it has no authority to do. We insist upon it, the remedy is by doctrine and not by discipline; and as yet we never have indoctrinated adequately on this subject. The remedy is teaching, exhorting, persuading, by the church courts as they are clearly empowered to make deliverances of true doctrine, and by the ministers who specially are called to teach. This is the remedy for the evil, and this remedy faithfully and prudently employed we cannot doubt will be found sufficient; if not, then there is no remedy. Sure we are that what is urged to be done by the Assembly would be no remedy.

We trust we shall never see our Assembly by any such categorical order as has been proposed undertaking to deal with individual churches and persons, nor in any manner otherwise than in one of the four ways that are provided. We trust we shall never see our Assembly giving forth *in these* deliverances, nor sumptuary regulations, nor sweeping requirements touching concrete cases. Each case must needs be left to be decided by the Session concerned; for the circumstances of each case make the case. This was what the last Assembly said, which spoke of this matter; and what it said was true and wise and scriptural, and moreover was *Presbyterian*. Our system requires the formal discipline of churches and individuals to remain with courts of first resort. In extreme cases, dancing may come to rioting and revelling. In such cases our parochial presbyteries may be safely trusted to proceed to formal discipline. JOHN B. ADGER.