



Shr 798.71.5

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY



THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
OF NEW YORK

1918

0

A SERMON

CONCERNING

Theatres and Theatre-Going,

PREACHED SUNDAY EVENING, JAN. 22, 1871,

AT THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

BALTIMORE.

BY

LEONARD WOOLSEY BACON.

PRINTED WITHOUT REQUEST.

Published by "The Baltimore News Co."

BALTIMORE:
THE SUN BOOK AND JOB PRINTING OFFICE.
1871.

NOTE.

THE author of the following sermon apologizes to the public for the absence, on this page, of the customary letter from eminent citizens asking a copy of the "able and interesting discourse" for the press, and the customary reply assuring them that it was "hastily prepared without the slightest view to publication." Not having been preached with the hope that anybody would be pleased with it, it is natural enough that the sermon should have to be printed without anybody's having requested it. It was written for the purpose of administering certain richly and long-deserved rebukes to many classes of persons both inside of the church and outside; and for the same purpose it is printed. Of course it would be idle for one who volunteers for such a task to grumble if his work is not welcomed. The author will be content not to be thanked, if only he may be heeded.

I might not have thought of printing the sermon, but for the receipt by mail (from some anonymous friend with the best of intentions) of a tract on the sinfulness of play-going. It was not lively reading,—that, perhaps, is not always to be looked for in a tract—but it was instructive to me, and convincing. Its eight pages of dreary cant, unrelieved by one ray of illustration, one particle of information, one touch of discrimination, or one stroke of argument, satisfied me more than ever, that it was time for this subject to be forced to an intelligent discussion in view of the existing facts. But lest my free-spoken sermon might contain something tending to harm, I have resolved to append the tract to it, that the bane and antidote may go together.

L. W. B.

BALTIMORE, January 25, 1871.

P. S.—A word of acknowledgment is due to the printers of this pamphlet for the uncommon energy and promptitude with which they have dispatched their work in a very few hours.

S E R M O N .

ROMANS, XIV., 5. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

A recent incident in the city of New York, occasioned by the funeral of an aged actor, has given rise to a great deal of talk in all parts of the country, and made a certain "little church around the corner" of Twenty-Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, New York, famous in all the newspapers.

The incident is chiefly interesting to us as bringing into court again that old case of the Pulpit *vs.* the Stage,—the Church against the Theatre, which has been litigated now for nearly eighteen hundred years, and does not seem, even yet, to have been fully adjudicated. And here, having taken advantage of an incident of no lasting interest to introduce a subject of constant and general importance, we might be content to say nothing of the merits of the incident. But if any are interested to hear an opinion of them, it is soon given. The friends of an aged actor, deceased, against whom I hear nothing alleged but that he *was* an actor, applied to the rector of a certain church to conduct funeral services for the old man, at the church. He declined on the sole ground, as I understand, of the dead man's profession, and referred the applicants to the rector of a "little church around the corner," by whom, and at whose church, the funeral was attended. The consequence is, that the minister who shirked his duty is thoroughly roasted in all the newspapers, at which I am very glad; and the minister who did not shirk his duty is made the object of testimonials in all the theatres, to which I certainly have not any objection—if he has not. He is said to be so

good and faithful a man that one can't think of grudging him overpraise and overpay, for a duty so obvious and simple that it is almost incredible that any Christian minister could have refused it. As for the unfortunate person in the pillory, there seems nothing to be said in mitigation of the public judgment against him—that is, supposing the facts to be as represented. He appears before the public as one perfectly willing that the scandal against the church (if it be one) should be enacted, provided it is done by his brother around the corner, and *his* name does not get mixed up with it. He stands, not only as one “judging another's servant,” but as enforcing against an individual a sweeping condemnation which he has passed in his own mind, upon a profession which he would not dare deliberately to say was *necessarily* a criminal one. He seems to shut out from his church a solemn religious service, on the ground that it will be attended by a throng of ungodly and unbelieving people—as if he had come to call the righteous to repentance. If he feels some burden of warning and reproof for the people who seek his ministrations, why, in God's name, does'nt he speak it out to them, like a man, and like a good, kind, loving man, instead of running away like Jonah? If he pleads that he is shut up by the rules of his denomination, to a burial service which he cannot conscientiously use except over the graves of the truly penitent and believing, that is a matter for him to see to as promptly as may be; but meanwhile, it were better he should practice his scruples on his own pewholders, whose sins he knows about, before putting them in force in the case of an old man not well befriended within the church, and belonging to a profession whom it is easy and safe for a clergyman to dislike. Let him deny the full honors of Christian burial, if he has the courage, to those who patronize and sustain, for their sheer amusement, that profession in which he cannot endure that others should labor toilsomely, even for their daily bread. And withal, it were not amiss that he should consider with

what grace this little spurt of zeal for God's house comes from a clergy which is so constantly and assiduously, and without one word of protest, courting recognition and fellowship from a National Church whose "sole head under Christ" is the public and official patroness of the theatre; whose cathedrals are paved with the grave-stones of actors, and whose Westminster Abbey insults or corrupts the moral sense of successive generations by displaying among its saints and heroes, the monument of one of the filthiest of the filthy dramatists of the Restoration, with a eulogy upon his virtues (forsooth!) which should make the very marble on which it is carved to blush!

So, if you want my opinion on this reported transaction, I do not at all undertake to decide on the truth of the report, neither do I judge the motives of the parties involved, but separating the act from the actor, it seems to me a disgusting piece of Pharisaism—what Frederick Robertson was wont to stigmatize as "the dastardly condemnation of the weak for sins that are venial in the strong;" what a greater than Robertson—his Master and mine—used to denounce with woe upon woe; and what, as I would be faithful to my Lord's example, I hope to strike at with such strength as I have, as often as it shall come within striking distance.

To come back now to my main subject—the duty of the church and of Christian people with reference to the theatre—this text, "let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," is the very text that fits the case. For on this question of duty, people are the furthest possible from being clearly convinced in their own reason. Whether the course of action commonly agreed upon be right or wrong, it is true that most of us do not see the right and wrong of it. The church is living in this matter on certain traditions of the elders, and just in proportion as it is inwardly conscious how much its canons of duty lack authority, it proceeds to enforce obedience to them by mutual censoriousness—a sort of government of Mrs.

Grundy. In exactly the same proportion, it grows Phari-
 saic, its members themselves evading the traditionary
 canons, in the authority of which they only half believe,
 and combining to bind heavy burdens for other men's
 shoulders, which they themselves will not touch with one
 of their fingers. These transgressions of the conventional
 rule of church-memberly virtue are not talked of much
 among the brotherhood; they are held to be of very
 doubtful propriety themselves, but on one point there is
 felt to be no doubt, and that is, that it is eminently
 desirable to keep the facts hushed up, so that the salutary
 but somewhat vague impression in the religious commu-
 nity that going to theatres is wicked may be kept up to
 the utmost. The whole subject is in the worst possible
 position. It is just in the position in which men are
 most apt to be tempted into doing doubtful things, in the
 doing of which they are condemned before God and their
 own consciences, because they do them doubting. I do not
 believe the theatre could be one half so demoralizing, at its
 worst estate, if all men were going to it without thought
 of scruple, as it is now when men are only half deterred
 from it by a doubtful scruple, founded on the tradition of
 the elders, into the right or wrong of which few persons
 trouble themselves deliberately to inquire, and then con-
 scientiously to determine, and frankly, openly, manfully
 to act. Set this down at the outset as one point settled by
 the word of God beyond all reopening or appeal—that
 however the general question may be settled, *your* theatre-
 going, my Christian brother, which you only do now and
 then when you are away from home, and which you would
 be very sorry indeed to have talked about, is a sin against
 God, and you ought to be ashamed of it, and I have no
 doubt you are.

I propose that we shall know our own reasons in this
 matter, by re-examining the grounds of the traditionary
 argument under which the church at large are professing
 to act.

1. We must acknowledge in the first place that some of the objections to the theatre which prevailed two generations, or even one generation ago, are now in some cases either entirely done away or very much modified. The abominable accessories of the theatre which old writers, and recent writers who depend on the old for their ideas, inveigh against as inseparable from the theatre itself, *have been* separated from it. I mean the solicitations to drunkenness on the premises of the theatre, the deliberate provision for the admission of lewd women to certain parts of the house, the arrangement of the building to encourage and facilitate vice; all these have been done away, at least in many cases. Dr. Vaughan, a recent eminent English traveller in the United States, remarks on the difference of construction of an American theatre in this respect from an English one. A veteran officer of the New York police, who had known the theatres of that city before and behind the scenes from his boyhood, assured me of the marked change that had taken place in the administration of theatres in his own day, and that in almost all, if not in all, of the theatres of that city it was as difficult for improper characters to gain admission as in any places of amusement whatever.

The universally infamous character of the plays represented, and of the actors representing them, was one of the counts in the old indictment against the stage; and it was one on which it was impossible to help convicting. Down almost till within the memory of men now living, the collection of the stock acting plays of the English stage was an absolute dung-hill of filth and wickedness. If you would get some idea of it, consult Sir Walter Scott's *History of the Drama*,* or Lord Macauley's criticism of the dramatists of the Restoration, or his remarks on the polite literature of that period in the second volume of the *History of England*. But, no! you can get no idea of it from description. You would have to turn over the reeking

* *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s. v. *Drama*.

pages of some series of volumes labelled "Old Plays," and the knowledge you would get would not pay you for the defiling of your hands. And this, with some mitigations in favor—I will not say of virtue, but of conventional decency—has continued to be the prevailing tone of stage literature down, almost, to our own day. But is there any justice in applying to the acting drama of our day the epithets which were perfectly just so lately as when William Wilberforce wrote his "Practical View?" Have we no language but that of denunciation and contempt for a literature to which Sir Edward Lytton has contributed his superb historical picture of Richelieu, and that great scholar, the late Dean Milman, of St. Paul's Cathedral, his drama of the Italian Wife, and which, by translation or adaptation, has been enriched from the master-pieces of Schiller and Dickens and Charles Reade? By personal knowledge I know almost nothing—less perhaps, than, as a public instructor, I ought to know—of the stage. But, for ten years past, I have been a pretty constant observer of theatrical advertisements and dramatic criticisms in the New York press, and I recognize, with thankful satisfaction, that, alongside of another tendency, which I will speak of by-and-by, there has been a growing tendency to the production of a class of plays of domestic interest and faultless purity—like those derived from the stories of Charles Dickens. How far these may be deformed by bad acting, I have no knowledge; but it must take a very ingeniously vicious player to make the representation of "Little Nell" and the "Cricket on the Hearth" anything but wholesome and humanizing—and Christianizing.

I have shown that some of the traditional objections to the theatre are either obsolete or very much modified.

2. I propose now to show that some of the traditional arguments concerning the theatre are fallacious.

Some of these it is well to touch lightly, as being too frail to bear severer handling. The argument, for instance, that the drama is intrinsically unfitted to please a superior

mind, is best advanced by those who have never known of such earnest, admirers of the stage as (for example) Walter Scott and Sergeant Talfourd. The complaint that the general run of acting is sad ranting and fustian is as true now as ever, I am afraid—and is likely to continue so. The common run of any sort of human work will always be very poor as compared with the best. And it is to be feared that the best acting will never be the most popular with the crowd. It is so in literature. Mr. Everett had no sort of success in the “*Ledger*” compared with Mr. Cobb. And some of us preachers, whose congregations are not large, have been known to comfort ourselves with the thought that it is somewhat thus with preaching, too, and that the best preacher does not always have the largest audience. It is obvious enough that these little side-arguments have no force at all. Let us come at once to the main argument in the case, as it is earnestly pressed on the consciences of the Christian public by some of the best and worthiest writers on Christian morality. It stands in this wise: theatrical amusements are apt to do great harm, and they are not necessary to us; therefore, we ought totally to abstain from them. Now, there is no doubt that, at the time when good men first put forth this argument, the *conclusion* was perfectly just—the only conclusion to which any decent Christian man in those times could possibly have come. But it concerns us a good deal, when the same argument is presented to us in other circumstances, to look, not only at the conclusion, but at the process by which it is reached. Now, will anybody coolly make himself responsible to maintain the major premise implied in this argument—to wit: that it is an invariable duty to abstain from every unnecessary act that has a tendency to do harm? Is it never right to ask whether my abstinence will or will not tend to avert the harm? or whether the abstaining may not do more harm than the act would have done? There is danger in any course of action that one may follow, about anything. The Son of

man came eating bread and drinking wine. Why could he not have abstained? It was not necessary to him; and see what harm it did! Men said: "Behold! a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber." But John the Baptist practiced total abstinence, and men said: "He hath a devil."

It is obvious that we are in the presence of a different set of facts from our grandfathers, and that we need a more accurate logic in dealing with them.

What, then, is the present situation?

We find ourselves confronted with a wide-spread institution, singularly tenacious of life, and intrenched in vested interests as well as in the universal public taste, which has come down to us burdened with an infamy which, in former times, at least, was most richly deserved. It must be admitted, furthermore, that its antecedents continue to infect its character. The *New York Tribune*, within a very few years, complained that there was not a stage in all that city from which the actors did not insult the audience by gratuitous and supererogatory profaneness. An old stigma, as old as the Roman civilization, rests upon the profession of the stage-player; and notwithstanding many very honorable examples of character, it remains true to this day that the profession, as a whole, has failed to recover the public respect, through the prevailing faults of so many of its members.

But then, on the other hand, we are bound in the merest justice, to acknowledge a rapidly increasing tendency to improvement in the whole conduct of the stage and theatre, and in the character of the theatrical profession. There was a time when to take the name of actress as a synonym for infamy was a most sad necessity. To-day, the man who makes such a presumption as that against a lady devoted to this trying and perilous profession, is guilty of a wicked calumny. The profession is indeed most perilous and trying to the virtue of those who enter it. But for that very cause, there are those in it whose fidelity to duty

shines the more brightly. And there are certain traits of most excellent virtue—a generous overflow of kindness towards the unfortunate, a quick sympathy with noble acts and public causes, which we can hardly look to find more honorably exemplified than in the guild of actors. We haven't all the virtues in the church; they cannot claim a monopoly of sins in the green room. A very little while ago, my attention was called as a pastor to an aged and suffering woman, found by one of our city missionaries in Brooklyn, alone and almost friendless in a garret, suffering for lack of fire, in the cold of a northern winter. It seemed a case of strange and unnatural cruelty, for she had nourished and brought up children, and they had neglected her. She was a member of a Presbyterian church in New York, which I could name. Her sons, in various places, were members in good and regular standing of Evangelical churches; one of them, doing a thrifty business as a photographer in that very city of Brooklyn, was a Sunday School Superintendent. But out of all her children, one only shewed her some natural affection; crossing the ferry from time to time to bring her such relief as she could spare out of her scanty salary—and *she* was an actress in the Bowery Theatre. And when I learned this story, I concluded that I would not be in a great hurry to denounce the sins of the theatre, until I had first done my duty by the sins of the church.

Alongside of this tendency to improve, we must observe, if we would take in the whole situation, another movement in the opposite direction. There has been what looks almost like a concerted reaction towards the worst days of dramatic corruption. When the ballet was first introduced into New York, less than forty years ago, it shocked the nerves of that not too fastidious and puritanical city, and called forth a protest from the secular press in the name of morality and decency. Now, the ballet is, I will not say an incidental attraction, it seems to be the grand attraction which swallows up all others in most theatres of New York

and other cities, so that actors who have studied their profession as an art, complain bitterly that they are crowded from the stage and out of their living by be vies of nude and shameless women, whose livelihood is in their immodesty. Alongside of the pure and blameless dramatizations of Dickens, and Mrs. Stowe, and Washington Irving, one sees announced the scoundrelly plays of the French Opera—as much more corrupting than the ribaldry of the old comedies as their indecency is less gross and nauseating—plays which the respectable secular press of the metropolis denounced unanimously for their wickedness, and to which the more they were denounced, the more the “very best society” flocked to see them.

Such, with this double tendency, is the present position of the theatre.

What is the attitude of society with reference to it? It may be defined in these three particulars:

1. Indiscriminate condemnation of the theatre as a whole.
2. By an inevitable consequence, indiscriminate vindication of the theatre as a whole.
3. Indiscriminate evasion of traditionary formulas of duty, half believed and half mistrusted; acts of doubtful and therefore guilty consciences; and the furtive and cowardly attendance upon all sorts of theatrical entertainments, the best and the vilest, by people who hypocritically profess to be governed by principles which forbid it.

Ah! Let me repeat and emphasize this, for it is the plainest thing in the word of God concerning this whole business. Whatever may be the abstract right or wrong of theatre-going, *you*, who have your scruples and doubts about the matter, who think it had better be done very quietly and so as not to excite remark, you are verily guilty before God in every act. Don't affect to defend yourselves, when you are brought to book for your transgression of rules which you affect to approve, by citing the respectability of *some* theatres and the excellence of *some* plays. It is the very nature of this evasive transgression

that it sticks at no such distinction ; it has not dared to look its conscience in the face long enough to apprehend such distinctions. I do not believe there is any playgoing more unprincipled and indiscriminating than your Evangelical Christian playgoing. No, no, my dear Christian brother or sister, it is all very well for you to talk about the innocence of Mr. Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle* and the beauty of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, but these are not what you went to see the last time you were in New York ! You went to be delighted with the chaste elegance of the latest and nudest ballet ! You spent half the night in rapture over the charms of the scurrilous *opera bouffe*. Decent, upright men of the world have some standards of distinction here, some principles of right and wrong. My friend, Mr. De Cordova, who would thank no one for calling him a Christian, spoke to me of *Barbe Bleue* as an innocent blameless play, but said " I would as soon spit in the face of a lady as ask her to see *Genevieve de Brabant*." Your pious playgoer, who slips into the theatre when he won't be noticed, who goes with a friend from the country, or who has a visitor who has set his heart upon going, and who must not be allowed to go without protection, knows no such distinctions. A theatre is a theatre. His scruples about going, instead of being the conviction of an enlightened conscience, are a tradition of the elders, and when he breaks over them he may as well die for a sheep as for a lamb. O, my devout friends, think what you do—if ever you do think at all—when, by your presence and patronage, you encourage the ballet. You vaunt the superior virtue and tenderness of our Christian civilization, when you hear with a shudder of fair women and gay gentlemen, in the days of the Roman empire, looking down from the seats in the Coliseum at the dying agonies of struggling gladiators or of martyred Christians,

" Butchered to make a Roman holiday."

Know then that Christendom has found out a cruelty

more exquisite. The master of the Roman sports when he had slain the body had no more that he could do. Christian civilization has armed itself with the awful fact of the immortality of the soul. It has cunningly contrived a sport so destructive to the modesty, so depraving to the womanly virtue of those who are employed in it, that for one of them to escape perdition of body and soul is accepted as a miracle or commonly scouted as incredible; and Christian men and women suffer themselves to be enticed to the exquisite pleasure of seeing their sister, for whom Christ died, suffering, not the brief anguish of bodily death, but making night by night the sure perdition of her soul. O shame! Shame upon you! Woe unto you, Pharisees, hypocrites!

No, no! If any timid, cautious brother appeals to me not to deal so freely with this subject, and asks me if I am not afraid of doing more harm than good by disturbing people's established opinions, I tell him No. The state of this question now is just the worst possible, the most demoralizing, the most destructive to the conscience both of church and of society. You cannot make it worse by stirring it.

But what course, then, shall we recommend with reference to this greatly important question of duty?

I would sum up my answer mainly in this one word, **DISCRIMINATION**,—a word most irksome and disagreeable to the ordinary rough-and-ready reformer, who always loves to do his condemning and his approving in the bulk instead of in particular. It is so much easier and more slashing when one has seen the mischiefs of excessive frivolity and dissipation and lewd dances, to levy a sweeping edict against dancing, instead of showing distinctly what you do object to. It is so much more easy and compendious to denounce games of chance, and especially to get up a prejudice against playing-cards, than to sit down patiently and show intelligently wherein consists the sinfulness of gambling—that it is obtaining another's pro-

perty without rendering him an equivalent. This sort of slapdash, hit-or-miss denunciation is the pest and hinderance of every healthy reform; it was the one fault that hindered the anti-slavery agitation from being a moral success. It has been a perpetual drag upon the wheels of the temperance reformation. It is the fatal defect in all this crusade against the corruptions of the stage.

Let us see if we cannot, in this business, lay aside this easily besetting sin of moral reformers; let us learn, in all our strictures on that which is so defencelessly open to stricture, to say just what we mean, and mean just what we say. Let us find exactly what those things are which we object to, and then deal with them explicitly—faithfully—and we shall not deal with them the less effectively if we abstain from including in the same censure, perfectly innocent things with which they are associated. If we object that there are multitudes of bad men and women in the profession of the stage, let us learn how to spare those who, for that very reason, are the more honorably and illustriously virtuous, while we smite the guilty. If we condemn bad theatres, why should we find any advantage in bringing here and there the good theatres, if there be such, under the same condemnation? If you abhor and denounce corrupt plays, why should you pretend to denounce dramatic literature, the evil and the good together? Why should you not say what you mean? and if you will not say what you mean, can you very reasonably complain if, by and by, people begin to doubt whether you mean what you say?

I know there are honest people here that are trembling at the peril involved in admitting such distinctions. "What! would you have my son get the idea that it is not wicked to go to the theatre? Think of the danger!" My dear sir, or madam, I have thought of it, earnestly. Have not I sons to care for as well as you? It will be safer for your sons and mine to know the whole right and wrong of this matter, with the facts and the reasons, than

to trust them, for their protection against the unquestionable temptations and corruptions attending on theatrical entertainments, to the vain defense of an irrational, traditional prejudice, which they will break through when they are come to years of liberty and discretion, almost as certainly as the chicken chips the egg-shell. I will not rest the morals of my children on any such broken reed. I will not take any such venture as to trust for their security from the blinding, captivating sin of gambling, to a mere vague feeling of dislike to playing-cards and billiard-tables; nor for their safety from drunkenness to the witchcraft of a children's temperance pledge sworn to by a Sunday-School in bulk. I desire that they may feel from their earliest days the great sanction of all Christian duty in the love of their Saviour, and that they may know the warrant of all particular duties in reason and the word of God. It is just *because* I know what the peril of a young man is, under the practice of indiscriminate and unintelligent denunciation of certain attractive forms of amusement, that I seek to put this whole department of casuistry on a higher and firmer ground.

Is there, then, any hope for the elevation of the theatre from its depressed moral and social position? Two thousand years of history present, it must be confessed, a formidable discouragement to all such expectations. But we cannot willingly despair of reform; we look with interest towards every door of hope, and observe every token of improvement, not with churlish contempt and suspicion, as if it were a mere mask for new temptations, but with sincere satisfaction.

1. The theatrical profession have the whole matter in their own hands. There is no disguising the fact—their own complaints are sufficient proof of it—the profession are under the disfavor of society, even of worldly society. It is in their own power to change all this, and to be respected, by being respectable. I know no one class of society so much interested in the reform of the theatre as the profes-

sion of the stage. Why should they not reform it? The manager who should feel that he could "afford to keep a conscience" in his business might find, in the long run, that it *pays* to keep a conscience, especially to one who does not keep it for the sake of pay. The manager who should say: "Such and such pieces would undoubtedly run through the whole season, and draw the house full every night, but they are corrupting and demoralizing in their influence, and they cannot come upon my boards;" the actor who should take the position: "In such a part I could win applause and reputation and money; if I decline it I forfeit my engagement; but it is vile and debasing to the public, and, come what may, I will not appear in it;" the community of actors who should resolutely refuse to be associated with persons of known infamous character; such as these could do more for the reforming and ennobling of the stage than all the preachers in Christendom. But, how often do we hear of such managers and such players? There have been those, in every generation since David Garrick, whose private character has done something towards redeeming the character of the profession. There are more such to-day, doubtless, than ever before since the beginning of history. To speak only of the lyric stage—towards which my tastes have more particularly directed my attention—what whisper of disrespect was ever breathed against such names as those of Miss Kellogg and Madame Parepa-Rosa? O that some one of these great artists would have the bravery to resist the bad traditions of her art! The whole world of criticism must acknowledge that Don Giovanni is the very master-piece of the lyric drama. Such affluence of melody, such largeness of dramatic conception and treatment, such mastery of the resources of the orchestra—in one word, such worthiness of the great Mozart—set it clear of rivalry. Have courage, now, and self-denial, for virtue's sake and God's, and say: "I will not sing in Don Giovanni, for it is licentious and foul!" Ah! if actors and singers had but the courage and virtue for such

acts as this, they would not have to ask permission of churches and ministers and tract societies, to be esteemed ; they would hold the respect of the public in their own right, despite all gainsayers. But, so long as they freely choose the other course, let us hear no more whimpering from them about the ban of society which they thereby incur.

2. I have no more than time to hint at the help that might be given to such a reform by the discriminating, faithful criticisms of the newspaper press. How faithful the best of the great New York dailies have lately been, in criticising the moral tone as well as the literary and artistic character of the metropolitan theatres, those who habitually read them know. How much this has helped the efforts of those who are honestly laboring, from behind the scenes, for the improvement of the theatre, cannot be estimated. Doubtless, the best men of the theatrical profession here would be the most eager to welcome an advance of the press of this city, to a higher and more faithful sort of criticism than the country-newspaper style of measuring out his finger's length of "first-rate notice" to whoever sends to the office an advertisement and a complimentary ticket.

3. But have the Christian public anything to do with reference to possible reform in the theatre—with reference to the actual diverging tendencies now visible in the progress of theatrical events? Have we anything to do, except look on, until the question is decided? Can we innocently enjoy the good and refuse the evil? Can we usefully give countenance to the better party against the worse?

I only ask these questions ; I do not mean to answer them. They are questions for every man to answer for himself. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

It is no ordinance of God that men should get all their open questions of duty answered for them by others ; but

rather that they should be pressed, urged, perplexed, even, by doubts for the right decision of which they must answer at the judgment. Is not this a nobler discipline for Christian manhood than any mill of formulas—"touch not, taste not, handle not, which perish in the using"—such as the grandly liberal mind of Paul rejected with scorn, such as Christian society often attempts to substitute for the broad principles of the gospel and the responsible liberty of the individual conscience!

"Each man in *his own* mind." If ever there is to be a true and wholesome public sentiment, it will come, not by the servile deference of the individual to what he guesses to be the opinion of the rest, but by every man freely determining and frankly acting out his own conviction. Is it not a small matter to be judged of man's judgment? God is your judge, not man.

But remember God *is* your judge; and for all your dealing with questions like these you must give account to Him!

APPENDIX.

IN order that my readers may see all sides of the question at once, I append here, entire, the copy of a tract sent to me the day after my sermon was preached, by some unknown friend.

SOME REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT GO TO BALLS, THEATRES AND OPERAS, OR FOLLOW THE FASHIONS AND PLEASURES OF THE WORLD.

Hope is unquestionably the most tenacious friend of man in his pilgrimage through this vale of tears. It seizes upon him in early youth, and only leaves him at the verge of eternity. It matters not what his position in life is, or the character of its surroundings, be they ever so gloomy and unpromising for the future, yet hope points him onward to happier and brighter days. And this is common to all men, even without reference to their special relation to God and eternity. The worldlying hopes for riches, honor, fame, power, or pleasure, and, if he is wise in his day and generation, as he generally is, he will put forth every means, strain every nerve, and redeem every moment of time, either directly or indirectly, for the accomplishment of his cherished aims and desires. Disappointment indeed may come, and misfortunes follow each other in quick succession, yet hope, his tenacious and valued friend, clings close to his side, and bids him try and try again. The goal must be reached, the prize must be obtained, the honor must be secured.

Such are the hopes, the decisions, the determinations, and the efforts of the man of this world. His energy is indomitable, his strivings unaltering. Sickness alone may for a season throw him out of the conflict, and death alone palsy all his labors. He agrees, if not in word, at least in action, to accept what he can get of the riches, honors and pleasures of earth, as his portion for time and eternity. He discards God and his claims from his thoughts and actions. He would fain, it is true, secure both God and the world; the latter, so long as it can subservise his pride and carnal longings; and the former, in his last and gloomy extremity, when earth, with all its magic views and panoramic scenes, is fast dissolving and fading away, in the darkness and mist of eternity, where the frowns and curses of a neglected and offended God, shall settle down upon the unregenerated soul, like a deep, dark pall of eternity, lit up alone by the fire of his wrath, which shall never be quenched, and from which there shall be no escape.

Many indeed of this class, in these latter days, would have us believe that they are on the Lord's side, as their names upon the church books will show, and their communionings will testify, but their outward acts prove that they are either deceiving themselves, or are being deceived by the common enemy of God and man. They are dead while they live, they are but a mass of empty show, their righteousness yields them not a covering, as beneath the thin gauze of formalities, their festering rottenness is plainly seen. They are fast ripening for the pit, and the worm that never, never dies, is already hatched within their souls. These have a fashionable belief in God's word, and fear his threatenings, yet their longings belie their profession, and their proclivities are a falsehood upon truth. They in fact declare that His word

is a myth, His teaching a fable, and that He neither cares for, nor regards the open or the secret actions of men

But the hope of the Christian is not in this world, though beyond all question it is commanded to yield him a support from its legitimate resources. He casts not forth his anchor to take root in its shoals and shifting sands; his calling is to eternal life beyond the grave, through the mercy and love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; and this hope is to us a substance, a thing though not seen, yet fully believed in, and in order that we may have the full fruition of this hope in this world, and its realization in the next, we are commanded to come out from the world, to separate ourselves from its pleasures, gaieties and desires. We are commanded to deny ourselves, and take up the cross, and follow the Master whithersoever he goes, and that through evil as well as through good report. We are taught that this is not our abiding place, not our continuing city, but that we are to seek our citizenship in a country beyond the skies, in a city that hath a solid foundation, even the "Rock of Ages"

Man must have an object to love, and in his natural or unregenerate state he loves this world, with all, or much of its peculiar paraphernalia. But when, upon repentance and faith in Christ, his sins have been forgiven, he is expected truly to love God, he is expected to respond to the new nature that has been planted within him, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, by fervent and constant prayer, by strivings and strugglings against the tendencies of the old nature; and thus he grows in grace daily, through the victories which he achieves over the world, the flesh and the devil, death, hell and the grave

But if the Christian fails thus diligently to act, the Spirit gradually withdraws, and there remains a void which Satan fails not promptly to fill, and again the soul is led captive by the enemy of our Lord. The Holy Spirit being now absent in his comforting and sanctifying character, the soul takes little or no pleasure in the things that belong to Christ and turns again to the world for an object to love, for pleasures and enjoyments to fill this aching void.

Are there any Christians who suppose for one moment that Satan is not a real power, or that he has lost or abated his beguiling influence? If so, let them be at once undeceived. The same subtleties which led our first parents to depart from the command of God, are to this day resorted to by our old enemy, in order to mislead and entrap unstable souls into his net; and in these latter days, he avails himself to a great extent of the theatre, opera, ball-room, and the fashions of the world. The temptation does not probably come at once to violate in a direct manner the provisions of the ten commandments, because such would lay bare the iniquitous design to ruin the soul, and thus stimulate the Christian to nerve himself for the combat; but to the younger ones, these worldly pleasures are exhibited as little and innocent amusements that cannot work harm; and to the older soldier of the cross, or prominent church member, or deacon, or elder, who has charge of Christ's flock, to give them their meat in due season. Satan quotes Scripture as of old, suggesting that he is a bright and shining light and must be careful to let his light shine; and how can he do that if he retires from the world; and indeed, that he owes it to his exalted position, to mix with the people, and not to hide his light under a bushel; and as balls, theatres, operas, and fashions, are altogether innocent and harmless amusements, and indeed serving in many cases as a school of morals, he may with much propriety go to them, and thus, not only exhibit the liberality of his principles, and by his presence, help to elevate their tone and respectability, but that he may there come in contact with some whom he does not elsewhere meet, and thereby have an opportunity of testifying in some quiet way, either by act or word, for the Great Master. Therefore in some such manner as this, Satan leads the Christian, almost emptied of Christ, into these gay and fashionable circles of worldly pleasure and amusement; and when there, if the thought occurs of honoring the Lord in any substantial way, the enemy is again

ready with his suggestions, namely, that this is not the place for religious conversation, because pearls must not be cast before swine. And thus it is that fashionable and worldly-minded Christians throw themselves into the clutches of the devil, and suffer him to lead them further and further from God and duty; denying the Master who purchased them with His blood, placing a stumbling block in the way of others, and preventing some from entering into the kingdom, who otherwise probably would. For the men of the world are not slow to justify their conduct, by pointing to the Christian man and woman who accompany them in their fashionable amusements. Now, does not every Christian who has visited these places of worldly pleasure, know full well, from personal and practical experience, that there is no growth in grace there, that there can be no advancement made in the divine life in a ball-room, or at a theatrical or operatic performance? Nay, on the contrary, has not experience fully demonstrated that every such visit only stamps its slumbering and deadening influence upon the soul, that the Spirit of eternal truth stamps God's displeasure upon it; and when quiet thought and reflection can enter the heart, the conscience will testify to the displeasure, first in tones of thunder, and if the course be persisted in, by a still small voice; or else through the hammer of God's judgments brought down upon the health, property, or family of the erring one, who has thus strayed from the path of love and duty. Therefore if these things are so, why should we persist in this rebellious and ruinous course?

These remarks apply to those who are truly born of God, who have really passed from death unto life, as only such can appreciate fully God's loving and tender drawings upon the soul that is departing from its first love; such alone can feel and appreciate the aching void that is left in the heart, after the love of God has been displaced by the love of the world and its pleasures. As for those who feel no such compunctions of conscience, it may well be doubted whether they are not really tares in God's wheat field; at least, let them examine themselves carefully before Him who knows the secrets of all hearts, and agonize before His throne day and night for light, knowledge, and wisdom, to see and know their duty to Him and their neighbor, which if they do, they will doubtless receive from Him who giveth freely and upbraided not. Let them resolve for the future to come out from the world, to separate themselves from sinners, shoulder the cross in the strength of the Master, and follow Him whithersoever He goeth.

There are those beyond doubt who will be ready to allege that this is a gloomy picture of the Christian life and duty, but it is not so. The child of God is not expected to seek his pleasures here below, except such as flow direct from God, as the result of obedience to His will in Christ. And it is admitted, that the closer we live to Him, the more will we be dead to the world and its pleasures, and the greater will be our delight in Him and His ways. We cannot draw the world closer to God by stopping to compromise with it, nay, we only thereby give to hypocrites and worldly-minded and fashionable Christians, a cloak for their hypocrisy and backslidings. But instead of so doing, let all true-hearted Christians draw distinctly the line of demarcation, let them draw the sword and throw away the scabbard, and thus fight the good fight of faith in the name and strength of the Master; and so continue until called to the blessed land of the hereafter, where the wicked shall cease from troubling, and where the weary shall be at rest.

It is not pretended that balls, theatres, operas, and fashions, are got up with any reference whatever to the glory of God, or in any way looking to the eternal welfare of man. They are purely worldly and sensual in their very conception and unfoldings, they have relation alone to the gratification of the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, with which Christian men and women should have no voluntary fellowship. The desire after the enjoyment of these things is but a bitter murmuring against God, a refusal to feed and fatten upon the true manna sent down from heaven, and a hungering and lusting after the miserable flesh-pots of Egypt. True it is that Miriam danced, David danced, and the young men and maidens of Israel

danced, but all these danced not the dance of death. And the Christian nowadays would have no more right to adduce these pious examples with the view to justify his union with the world, in its present extravagant pleasures and amusements, than he would have right to call forth the worshipping of Baal, to sanction a departure from the worship of the living God.

It is not absolutely contended that the mere exercise of dancing, or the fact of listening to a theatrical performance, or the wearing of a bonnet that happens to be in the fashion, constitutes the damage to the soul; but it is the tendencies and surroundings that help to lead others down to death, and by our presence and close imitations, we give sanction and encouragement to these evil tendencies, and therefore become accessories to the sins of others, and to an extent chargeable with their final ruin; and besides, as a consequence, our souls suffer spiritual unconcern and barrenness; in short, darkness of soul and hardness of heart seize upon us, and if not aroused by the strivings of the Spirit of God, we too shall enter the abode of death, and be eternally banished from the presence of our God, and the glory of His power.

The serious damage to bodily health, resulting from heated ball-rooms, currents of cold air directed upon thinly dressed ladies, disturbed and irregular sleep, and the serious damage to the pockets and fortunes of many honest and hard-working fathers, in their efforts to respond to the clamorous demands of fashionable mothers, sons, and daughters, it is not the intention of these pages to set forth in detail; as they relate more directly and immediately to the body, which must perish, and not to the spirit, which must live throughout the countless ages of the future. If invalids and others of weak and delicate constitutions, will rush into heated ball-rooms, filled with a vitiated and poisonous atmosphere, undergo violent exercise, eat late dinners, and late and heavy suppers, thereby lighting up unquenchable fires within them, which speedily consume out their lives, and reduce their bodies to the ashes of a premature grave, they should only be regarded as suicidal maniacs, whose epitaphs should be, *died from madness, folly, and fashion*. Satan may beguile them into his gaudily baited trap, and doctors may choose to pander to their crazy whims and fancies, rather than hazard loss, from an honest and candid, though unwelcome opinion, but the fact is, such are in many cases self-murderers. They lay violent hands upon their own lives, and the instrument used is of the devil's making, namely, the love and pleasures of this world.

There can be no neutral ground in this grave question. Christians, when in a ball-room, or theatre, or opera, or following the extreme fashions of the world, are either serving God or mammon; and if their purpose is to serve God, then, are they really performing well their functions in that path of conduct? Do they there testify for Christ? Do they witness for the truth? Nay, on the contrary, it may be most truly said, that their testimony is rather for the enemy of their souls, and in favor of the world's folly and infidelity. If the followers of Christ would use such occasions to give forth a loving testimony for Him, they would soon find the same treatment He received in the days of His flesh; be cast out as base intruders, and disturbers of the peace of society; their names would be cast out as evil, and they would be separated from the company of the men of this world, as unfit for association. But it will be said, that in the midst of such assemblies, is not the place to obtrude the subject of religion. Granted, but we are not asked to do so; we are rather called upon to separate ourselves from them, to avoid the very appearance of evil, to refuse to be partakers in other men's sins, and thus witness a good profession, and show forth a living, active faith in Christ, which, by the influence of the Spirit, will condemn the world of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come. Let us not go where we cannot have the Lord with us. Let us not go where we would fear to die, for where God is not, and that to bless, death can bring no joy or consolation.

When we look, in our calm, reflecting moments, it may be in the dark and solemn hours of night, when all surrounding nature is hushed in slumber, and the Spirit of God is moving upon the conscience, at the vastness of the eternal future, with its deep sea of joy or misery, and compare it with the

fleeting days of this life, which, even if they could be lengthened out to threescore years and ten, are not even equal to one drop in the great ocean of eternity—when we reflect upon the purity, and great and unspeakable love of God, and then upon our own vileness, shortcomings and eminent unworthiness—when we reflect that life has been given to us in order to prepare for this great eternity—and when we thus behold how great and awful are the issues of this life, which must determine our lot in that boundless future, ought we, dear reader, to find, or allow room for the gaities and emptiness of the ball-room, or the theatre, or the delusive fashions of the world? Surely not; all these vanities must be excluded; there is no time, there is no place for them. Therefore let us strive, by the help of God, to hold fast to the hope of our calling, which is eternal life in Christ our Lord. To that end, let us be careful to seek the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit, and in compliance with His dictates, come out from the world, laboring to do the will of God in all things, forgetting not that many shall say, “Lord, Lord,” that shall not be able to enter into the kingdom, and many shall seek to enter in that shall not be able. But to the faithful and wise servant who shall patiently wait with his hand upon the door-latch for the coming of the Master, be that soon or late, an abundant entrance will be given into eternal glory. Death to such a servant will have no terrors. The bridge that spans Jordan’s troubled and swelling floods, and the dark valley and shadow of death, will have no bars, no pitfalls, but the beams of heavenly light will shine brightly forth from the Sun of Righteousness, lighting up the whole length and breadth thereof, so that the soul will pass safely and quickly over, and up the celestial hills beyond, through the pearly gates into the eternal city; and striking hands with the loved ones gone before, will join in the song of Moses and the Lamb and thus be safely housed in the kingdom of eternal rest, and swallowed up in the great ocean of God’s redeeming love.

This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred
by retaining it beyond the specified
time.

Please return promptly.

