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## ARTICLE I.

### MEDIEVAL 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.

Apocalypse; (b) The Cherubim represents not man only, but the creation; and symbolises the redemption not of man only, but of the creation; (c) This redeemed creation as the dwelling-place of the risen and glorified Son of Man; (d) The glory of God as shrined in and flowing out from this redeemed creation.

Or, stated in another form: The Cherubim is a symbol—1st. Of the redeemed creation; 2d. Of this redeemed creation as God's dwelling-place; 3d. Of this dwelling-place as the seat of God's greatest glory.

Or, stated in one sentence: It is Christ, from his dwelling-place in his new and redeemed creation, manifesting to the universe the glory of God.

In this impressive symbol, God has revealed to believers, in every dispensation of the covenant of grace, the truth, that for man, the earth, and creature there was redemption; that God himself would dwell with his redeemed; and that here his glory would be most signally manifested; and these three truths are necessary to the full exposition of the symbol.

A. W. PITZER.



#### ARTICLE V.

### THE DANCING QUESTION.

Modern society, while condemning sternly many things which the ancients tolerated or even applauded, countenances some things which they utterly rejected. It is very pleasant and natural for us quietly to assume that ours is the advanced and civilised age. But when men reason thus, "A given usage cannot be improper because Christian opinion and society allow it among us," they reason in a circle. If the propriety of the usage is in question, then there are two hypotheses to be examined, of which one is, "Ours is a pure state, and therefore what we tolerate must be pure;" but the other is, "This tolerated usage being impure, it proves our state corrupt." Now the decision between the two

hypotheses cannot be made by a self-sufficient assumption. Oriental, Greek, and Papal Christianity justifies many things which we think excessive corruptions, by just such an assumption; it is no more valid in our case than in theirs. Indeed, the very tendency to such self-sufficiency is, according to the Bible, one of the strongest symptoms of corruption. The matter must be settled by a fair appeal to Bible-morals. These remarks are made because many relaxed Christians now virtually settle the dancing question by this short and easy sophism. They see numerous persons who claim Christian character tolerate or advocate dancing. They assume that all these are a very proper kind of Christians. Thus they "jump to the conclusion" that in spite of the opinions of the "old fogies" dancing must be a very proper thing. Now, in opposition, no charge is here made as to the character of our fashionable Christianity, but this obvious thesis is asserted, that should the dancing usages of fashionable Christian society be found in fact corrupt, then their easy tolerance among us is a sign, not of their innocence, but of a fearful and unsuspected corruption of our state.

Circumstances now give this matter a peculiar importance. The discussion involves not only the wrong or right of dancing, but many other vital questions, such as the extent of Church power, the nature of the Church's didactic function, Christian liberty, with its "metes and bounds," the obligation of Christian charity to avoid causeless offence, and the social morality proper for God's people. These all-important questions need exposition and reassertion from time to time. It is evident that such a need now exists.

It is expressly admitted in the outset that there are acts which are sinful, and yet are not such offences as are properly reached by church discipline. (Book of Discipline, Ch. I., §5.) Hence the proof that dancing is sinful would not suffice to demonstrate that it is disciplinable, and each proposition requires a separate discussion.

On the question whether dancing is an innocent recreation for Christians, it must be remarked that the act must be considered in the concrete, with its usual circumstances, adjuncts, and con-

sequences. Practically, these determine the question of moral propriety. No one affirms that there is sin *per se* merely in the rhythmical motion of human members to music. Just as some killing is the sin of murder and some is not, some beating is the sin of assault and battery and some is not, so the attendant circumstances give the moral character to this form of motion. It is proposed first to state the judgment of past ages. The classic heathens of antiquity ever regarded dancing for amusement, even of a male *solus*, or of males with males, as contemptible in a free-born adult, and inconsistent with manly dignity and self-respect. In a religious ceremonial, the *afflatus* of the divinity was supposed to authorise this extravagance of motion and make it excusable at least, if not compatible with a freeman's dignity. The dancing of females with males for social amusement would have been regarded as an act so inconsistent with decency that an instance can scarcely be heard of in reputable society. Greek and Roman gentlemen, whose amusements in their *symposia* and *cœnæ* (with no lady present) were certainly far from strict, found much interest in the evolutions and pantomimes of professional dancers, male and female. But the actors were usually slaves, and the profession was regarded as worse than menial. Such is a fair digest of the testimony of antiquity. The earliest witness cited is that of Herodotus, the "Father of History." In Book VI., 139, he relates that Kleisthenes, the chief magistrate of Sicyon, having a marriageable daughter, collected many of the chief men of Greece as her suitors. Among these the favored suitor was Hippocleides, son of Tisandros, from Athens. At a male entertainment, after the drinking had proceeded far, this young man, calling on the *auletes* to play for him, danced first some Laconian and then some Attic figures. Herodotus proceeds: "Kleisthenes, while he was dancing these, though loathing the thought of having Hippocleides as his son-in-law, by reason of his dancing and indecency, still constrained himself, not wishing to break out on him. But when he saw him gesturing with his legs he was no longer able to hold in, but said: "Well, son of Tisandros, thou hast danced away thy bride." The daughter was given to another.

The eminent and accurate Greek scholar, Becker, in his *Chari-cles*, says (p. 103): "Though the art of dancing was so highly prized, though it served to give *éclat* to the festivals and shows, and though the guests of the *symposia* delighted to see the feats of a skilful *artist*; still, in private life it was little practised, and there seems to have arisen almost a prejudice against it. . . . it seems to have been considered incompatible with the dignity of a man. . . . Indeed, it was usually looked upon as a preliminary symptom of intoxication."

As to the opinion of the Romans, Dr. Wm. Smith (*Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, p. 852), concludes thus: "Dancing, however, was not performed by any Roman citizens except in connexion with religion; and it is only *in reference to such dancing* that we are to understand the statements that the ancient Romans did not consider dancing disgraceful, and that not only freemen, but the sons of senators and noble matrons practised it. In the later times of the republic we know that it was considered highly disgraceful for a freeman to dance; Cicero reproaches Cato for calling Muræna a 'dancer.'" Dr. Smith then quotes a part of the famous passage in the *Oratio pro Muræna*, c. 6: "Saltatorem appellat L. Murænam Cato. Maledictum est, si vere objicitur, vehementis accusatoris; sin falso, maledici conviciatoris . . . Non debes . . . temere consulem populi Romani saltatorem vocare; sed conspicere quibus præterea vitiis affectum esse necesse sit eum, cui vere istud objici possit. Nemo fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit, neque in solitudine, neque in convivio moderato," etc. "Tu mihi arripis *id, quod necesse est omnium vitiorum esse extremum.*" The *Oratio in Pisonem*, c. 10, 22, may be compared. Forcellini and Facciolati, in their *Latin Thesaurus*, define thus: *Saltator: mollis artifex et probrosus.* To one who knows antiquity this statement will appear perfectly moderate and reasonable: that had the daughter, not only of a rigid Cato, but of a flexible Cicero or Julius, done precisely the thing which is currently done by Christian females at modern dancing parties, Roman opinion would have such a sense of the disgrace that on the following morning the father would have consulted the leading parents of his "Gens," and, with their

full moral support, would have exerted his autocratic domestic authority to consign the disgrace of his house to an imprisonment, which she would have not a little reason to submit to thankfully, as the alternative of a capital penalty. Roman opinion was not an infallible ethical standard? No. But it gives us the estimate of one civilised age. And if Roman morals were in many points deplorably relaxed, and yet judged this amusement thus, there is yet room for the question, whether a sounder standard of morals might not condemn it even more clearly.

But let us now look at the verdict of Christian antiquity. Chrysostom (court preacher at Byzantium), expounding the history of Herodias's daughter in Matthew, says: "Where dancing is, there is the devil. For God did not give us our feet for this end, that we might demean ourselves indecently; but that we might walk decently, not prance like a parcel of camels; but that we may exult with the angels. If even the body is disgraced, which perpetrates this indecency, much more the soul. . . . Dancing is the devil's invention."

The councils of the early Church frequently condemned the practice. The fifty-third Canon of the Synod of Laodicea enacts, "Christians when coming to weddings must not caper or dance; but dine or sup decently as becomes Christian people." The same Synod forbids clergymen when attending marriages even to witness dancing exhibitions. The Synod of Agatho says (A. D. 450): "Dancings to songs or music of an amatory or loose character are absolutely inhibited to all Christians." So enacts the council of Illerda, A. D. 515. The eighth universal council of the Church (*in Trullo*) (A. D. 692) enacts: "We also forbid and expel all public dances of women, as producing much injury and ruin."

We now hasten to modern Christian judgment and legislation. Presbyterianism has uttered no uncertain sound. Calvin insisted on the discipline of dancing in Geneva. The Westminster Assembly Larger Catechism, Question 139, declares "lascivious dancing and stage-plays" breaches of the Seventh Commandment. The Scotch Assembly of 1649, "finding the scandal and abuse that arises through *promiscuous dancing*, do therefore *inhibit and discharge the same*, and do refer *the censure thereof* to the several

presbyteries," etc. So the Scotch Assembly of 1701, "do revive the acts of the General Assembly of 1648, discharging promiscuous dancing," etc. If recent use has allowed these acts to fall into such desuetude as to justify the assertion that Scotch Presbyterianism does not now discipline for dancing, the comment made on the neglect, by its manifest influence on the morals of the Scotch peasantry, is the best demonstration of error.

Let us now hear the testimony of American Presbyterianism. The Assembly of 1818 pronounced dancing in "its highest extremes" as admitted by all to be of "fatal consequences." (Round dances were then unknown in America.) The Assembly "apprehends danger from its incipient stages;" and requires church members to "heed on this subject the admonitions of those whom you have chosen to watch for your souls." The Assembly of 1827 virtually repeats this action. In 1789 the Synod of North Carolina, in reply to an overture, requires that persons guilty of dancing, horse-racing, etc., must be "dealt with by their spiritual rulers." This action, being allowed tacitly by the Assemblies which reviewed the Synod's proceedings, becomes of authority as expounding the law.

The existence, and consequently the action on this subject of our Southern Assembly, are recent, and should be familiar to us. Hence only the main points are recalled. In 1865, our Assembly decided, 1st. That while no church court "has a right to make any new rules of church membership, different from those contained in the constitution," all courts, including church sessions, have the undoubted right "to make deliverances *affirming their sense of what is* 'an offence' in the meaning of the Book of Discipline, Ch. I., §3." 2d. That our church courts have hitherto "probably been too tolerant of dancing," etc. 3d. That "it is the duty of every judicatory to enforce the teachings of our standards on this and other fashionable amusements." Those teachings "repeatedly" uttered by the supreme judicatory and now reaffirmed at large, are that dancing is "in direct opposition to the Scriptures and our standards," is indisputably a "worldly conformity," and is liable to "excesses." What species of "enforcement" this Assembly enjoins the church courts to employ

is thus explained at the end of the enactment: "Instruction from the pulpit," prudent "admonition"; but when all other means fail, then such methods of discipline *as shall separate from the church those who love the world and whose practices conform thereto.*"

In 1869, the Assembly "heartily responds" to a similar question by "*earnestly and solemnly enjoining upon all sessions and presbyteries under its care the absolute necessity of enforcing discipline . . . against offences; under the word offences including . . . theatrical exhibitions and performances and promiscuous dancings.*"

In 1877, the Presbytery of Atlanta asked the Assembly to interpret the law of the Church, as set forth in 1865 and 1869, as to these points: whether it forbade dancing, or only "promiscuous dancing." And if the latter, to what accident of the dance the word "promiscuous" referred. The answer of the Assembly is in these words:

1. "The Assembly has uniformly discouraged and condemned the modern dance, in all its forms, as tending to evil, whether practised in public balls or in private parlors.

2. "Some forms of this amusement are more mischievous than others—the round dance than the square, the public ball than the private parlor; but all are evil and should be discountenanced.

3. "The extent of the mischief done depends largely upon circumstances. The church session is therefore the only court competent to judge what remedy to apply; but the Assembly, being persuaded that in most cases it is the result of thoughtlessness or ignorance, recommends great patience in dealing with those who offend in this way."

When this is viewed in connexion with the previous enactments (which are not repealed here but virtually reaffirmed), its meaning is obvious: that while all dancing is against the law of the Church, yet, as some forms are more mischievous than others, and attendant circumstances largely qualify the mischiefs, church sessions should use great patience in dealing with offenders. But the law of the Church clothes the sessions with discretion as to "what remedy" should be applied, mere remonstrance or judicial discipline. That the Assembly, notwithstanding its tenderness towards offenders, clothes the sessions with the power of



judicial discipline and designs its exercise in all the worse cases, is manifest. Why else do they authorise sessions to "judge what remedy to apply," and speak of their "dealing" with offenders? Again, the body clothed by the Assembly with the discretionary power is not the didactic agency, the pastor, nor even the individual elder, but *the judicial body, the session*. The Assembly indisputably authorises judicial action in all such cases as are "mischievous" and cannot be curbed by didactic means, and that at the discretion of sessions.

The views and law of the great Wesleyan body may be gathered, first, from Wesley's own words. In his Works, Vol. VII., p. 224, he says of square dances (round dances were then unknown in England): "It seems God himself has already decided the question concerning dancing. If dancing be not evil in itself, yet it leads young women to numberless evils." So in Vol. II., p. 271, Sermon on "The More Excellent Way." "So (evil tendencies) undoubtedly have all public dancings. And the same tendency they must have, unless the same caution obtained among Christians which was observed among the ancient heathens. With them men and women never danced together, but always in separate rooms. This was always observed in ancient Greece and for several ages at Rome, where a woman dancing in company with men would have been at once set down as a ——." Wesley's classical attainments authorised him to speak of the ancient usage and opinion. So Adam Clarke: "Let them plead for it who will; I know it to be evil and that only." Let the enactment of the "Methodist Church South" be taken as a specimen of Methodist law on this subject. The General Conference of 1874 added to their Book of Discipline, as an appendix, the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops. This, speaking of worldly amusements, says:

"Their multiplied and insidious forms are a source of perpetual temptation and damage, and are denounced by the word of God and by that part of our general rules which forbids 'the taking of such diversions as cannot be used in the name of Jesus.' This denunciation is explicit and comprehensive. 'The name of the Lord Jesus' in this connection is a decisive test; and we are content to leave the issue to its sovereign arbitrament. Amongst those indulgences which cannot stand this solemn

rest is the modern dance, both in its private and public exhibitions, as utterly opposed to the genius of Christianity as taught by us. When persisted in, *it is a justifiable ground of judicial action by the church authorities.*"

The Protestant Episcopal Church has been sometimes unjustly called a "Dancing Church." But the tenor of its verdict against dancing may be seen in the following:

Bishop Hopkins, speaking only of square dances, "No ingenuity can make it consistent with the covenant of baptism." Bishop Meade: "Social dancing *is not among the neutral things* which, within certain limits, we may do at pleasure, and it is not even among the things lawful but not expedient; but it is *in itself wrong*, improper, and of bad effect." This Bishop Meade spoke of "social dancing": what would he have said of round dances? The latter, Bishop Cox pronounces "enormities," and "lascivious." Bishop Johns calls round dances "lascivious" and a "demoralising dissipation." "This scandal is not to be tolerated in the Church of Christ." "If all such efforts (as remonstrances and instructions) prove unavailing, . . . and it becomes necessary to resort to the exercise of decided discipline, it must be done."

It may be said that these opinions, though the views of bishops, are not Episcopal law. Let us then to the law. The general canons of the "General Convention," enjoining discipline for irregular living, in the hands of the minister, subject to an appeal to the bishop, remits the providing of detailed rules to the different diocesan conventions. (*Digest of Canons, 1878.*) The canons of the Virginia Diocese may be taken as a fair specimen. Canon nineteenth, after authorising the minister of the parish to repel from the Lord's table any professed Christian "conducting himself in a manner unworthy of a Christian," adds: "And gaming, attendance on horse-racing or theatrical amusements, witnessing immodest and licentious exhibitions of shows, attending public balls, etc., . . . are offences for which discipline should be exercised."

But Bishop Whittle of Virginia, wishing for still more stringent and imperative legislation against round dancing, speaks of it thus: "I adopt his" (Bishop Johns') "language as my own." Round dancing is a "dreadful evil." "Judging the tree by its fruit,

our wisest and best people, ministers and laymen, have become alarmed lest its effect shall not only be to injure pure and undefiled religion in the Church, *but even to sap the very foundations of all social virtue and morality.* I will not discuss its character and consequences. For while St. Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus that it was a shame even to speak of those things which were done by some *in secret*, I should feel ashamed even to speak, as the truth would require, of this thing which is done *openly before all.*"

The Council of 1878, in response to the bishop's request, unanimously resolved that it is the "solemn duty of every communicant to abstain from round dancing; and that every minister be requested to use every effort to arrest the practice of round dancing *by admonition AND DISCIPLINE.*" Legislation, rendering this absolute by an additional "canon," is now on foot and referred to the next Council.

The Papal body has not had the character of being at all a strict guardian of morals. But even American popery cannot away with the abuse. The Pastoral Letter of the Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops in Council in Baltimore in 1866 speaks thus: They consider it "their duty to warn their people, . . . especially against the fashionable dances, which, as at present carried on, *are revolting to every feeling of delicacy and propriety, and are fraught with the greatest danger to morals.*"

The same Council adopted the following Canon C. *Choreæ dictæ "round dances"* in *scholis nec tolerandæ nec docendæ.*

Cum PP. Conc. Balt. Plenarii II. in Literis Pastoralibus ad Populum, omnino improbarint choreas, quæ vulgo nomine 'Waltzes' et 'round dances' veniunt: statuimus illas non esse docendas et ne tolerandas quidem, in Collegiis, Academiis, et Scholis hujus Diocœseos, etiamsi recreationis tantum causa inter personas ejusdem sexus habeantur.

And the archbishop, with a nerve which shames the timidity of many a Protestant, ordered the parochial clergy to withhold absolution from all such as refused to forsake these amusements.

It may be rejoined, that all the witnesses cited are human, and therefore none of them is Lord of the Christian's conscience.

Let this be granted. But what shall be the presumptive estimate of the humility, modesty, and docility of that temper, which sets itself up arrogantly against this *concursum* of all religions, all ages, all civilisations, to decide, in its ignorance and inexperience, in favor of what the wise and good of the ancient and modern world have condemned? In the face of this array, the charge that the condemnation of dancing is only puritanical or self-righteous is simply silly. Whether this opinion of the virtuous of all ages be sound or not, it is clear that the self-sufficiency and arrogance of mind which rejects it under the plea of asserting its Christian liberty, is the farthest possible from that righteous and reverent, God-fearing, and humble temper which should animate the champion of the holy rights of conscience, especially when constrained to contend against God's own Church.

But it is by no means conceded that this condemnation of public dancing is without scriptural warrant, and sustained only by ecclesiastical opinion. Few practices, which have become current since Bible days, are so fully and expressly condemned by the Bible as is this. No competent archæologist will risk his credit by denying the following facts: that modern dancing, *i. e.*, the dancing of free males and females together for amusement, was unknown in the decent society of the Jews (as of the ancient heathen); that the only dancing mentioned with allowance in the Bible was religious, choral movements, in which the sexes always danced alone, and that the dancing of females for amusement in a male presence, like that of Herodias' daughter, was uniformly recognised as too notoriously indecent to need any new condemnation. Hence all attempted use of the Bible cases as precedents for modern dancing are simply preposterous. And that the canon of Scripture should close without any additional prohibition, in express words, of our modern dancing, is exactly according to that plan by which God has legislated for his Church in all other points of modern sin. Why is it that no church session, if called to discipline a man for the trespass of wantonly cutting a telegraph wire, or the crime of displacing a railroad bar in front of a passenger train, would expect to find a prohibition in express words against these forms of sin? Every child knows the answer:

Because telegraphs and railroads had not then been invented, and God's uniform plan is not to place on the page of the Bible, in Bible times, precepts which must be wholly unintelligible to the generation to which the Bible was given. But his 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. The position here assumed is, that *the Bible has condemned the modern dance* as expressly as the plan of its revelation made possible for it. For—

1. The Bible enjoins on Christians sobriety: the dance is an act of pronounced levity. The Bible morality is not ascetic, but it is distinctly sedate. It summons us to regard ourselves and our fellow-men as invested with the dignity of immortality; as engaged in a momentous struggle for our own salvation and for the rescue of a perishing generation of fellow-men; as bought for God with divine blood; as at strife with spiritual adversaries of mighty power; as waging this warfare in the presence of a world of men, of angels, and of God. The Bible commends cheerfulness, but forbids frivolity and levity. It allows recreations, but it limits them to such bounds as refit the powers for the serious duties of life, or such as are compatible with the solemn warfare we wage. Let any obedient mind from this point of view compare the numerous places where this *σωφροσύνη* is positively enjoined.\* To appreciate the meaning which the Spirit meant to put into this precept, we must consider the meaning which the usage of the age attached to the quality. According to that usage, all such levities as the dancing of a virtuous free-born man for amusement, were outrages on that *αἰδώς*, that sense of dignity and decency of person, the absence of which was a shame and disgrace.

2. The Bible enjoins on Christians strict economy. They are stewards of their riches for God. They must use their superfluity to do good, in the spirit of that Redeemer, "who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor."† But the modern dance is a wasteful and expensive amusement, wasteful of time,

\*1 Tim. ii. 9, 15; iii. 2; 2 Tim. i. 7; Titus ii. 12; 1 Peter iv. 7.

†Luke xi. 41; xii. 33; 2 Cor. viii. 7; ix. 6; 1 Tim. vi. 17. 18.

of money, of dress, of equipage and furniture, and most mischievously hindering industrial pursuits. Is it said that modern Christian society indulges in many other expensive amusements besides the ball? This is deplorably true; but the answer is that "two wrongs do not make a right." All of those expensive amusements are unscriptural and unchristian; God calls for the retrenchment of all. But it would be a sorry method to pursue that important result by sanctioning one of the most obtrusive and fruitful sources of this sinful waste. He who looks around and comprehends the vast destitutions appealing to Christian charity, he who sees our young missionaries detained from the open doors God has set before them among the perishing heathen, he who hears the imploring but vain appeals of our Committees for aid, and then sees God's money, in the hands of his stewards, lavished on the mischievous prodigalities of balls and other fashionable pomps, can appreciate somewhat the greatness of this element of sin. It is as expressly anti-scriptural as the word of God can make it.

3. It has been already remarked that a practice must be viewed in the concrete and with its usual adjuncts in order to make a just moral appraisal of it. The modern dance is antiscritural again, because it dictates usually a mode of dress in females which the Word condemns. Paul\* expressly requires Christian females to "adorn themselves in modest apparel" (*ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ*). How much this meant, this raiment seemly and decent for woman, must be learned from a proper understanding of the meaning which virtuous opinion in Paul's day attached to the words. The unlearned Bible reader may see what this was from 1 Cor. xi. 4-10. We there see that, according to that standard which is enjoined on the Christian female, she who appeared in public unveiled—not to say with parts of her person exposed which delicacy should have most jealousy guarded—disparaged the honor of her sex by an unnatural transgression.

4. The Scriptures expressly forbid the modern dance, in that they enjoin the strictest purity in the intercourse of the sexes.† Here we approach very delicate ground. But as our citations

\*1 Tim. ii. 9; 1 Peter iii. 3-5. †1 Tim. v. 2.

showed, it is one which the Church and its pastors have always and everywhere felt constrained by duty to assume in resisting the sin. Its defenders not seldom resent this objection to their practice as an indelicate and libellous assault. They endeavor to cry shame upon the construction which experience places on their indulgences. But one thing is clear: if the candid and plain description of the adjuncts of the modern dance would demand words whose utterance would be an outrage to the decencies of debate, then this is the strongest possible proof that *the doing* is still more an outrage upon the decencies of Christian morals. We have seen above a Christian, as pure as he is brave, confess that the personal modesty he cherished as a man disqualified him for expressing in words the adjuncts of the fashionable dances. He could have selected no words which implied so severe and just a censure of them. The Christian physician is sometimes obliged to uncover a fatal ulcer in order to excise it. But he may do it with a hand as chaste as that which lays his benediction on an infant's brow. So the spiritual surgeon may be under obligation to probe, and in probing expose, the moral impurity which his sanctity would fain hide. But the duty may be performed with sanctity. It may be modestly claimed that if any place is suitable for such exposure, it is especially the page of a professional journal which is designed for the teachers and rulers of the Church, and not for the popular assemblage of families.

The attempt has been often made to break the force of the precedents cited from sacred and secular antiquity, by saying that the usages of those days were dictated by that jealous seclusion of women which Christianity has banished as a remnant of barbarism. And we are reminded that, as there is a legitimate union of the sexes, there may be a legitimate scope in social intercourse for the disclosure of the emotions which approximate them to each other. Such is the intimated plea. Now it is conceded that Christianity has elevated woman, in freeing her from that ancient state in which she was, while unmarried, half a slave and half a prisoner. It is conceded that the intercourse of the sexes in domestic society refines both, as long as it is retained within

scriptural bounds; and that it is necessary to found Christian marriage in the mutual knowledge, respect, and friendship of the parties. It is admitted that God, in his laws, always assigns somewhere a legitimate scope to those affections which, in his creative handiwork, he made constitutive of our nature. But since man's fall he teaches us that every one of these affections must be restrained. Now it is the clear teaching of Scripture that the special emotions which approximate the sexes can have no innocent or lawful existence, except between those who desire to be united by them in that sacred union which makes of the twain one flesh. That union is the institution ordained by God in paradise as the means of "seeking a godly seed," consecrated to the high and holy purpose of surrounding young immortals with the safeguards which will fit them for heaven. It is the selected type of the eternal union of Christ to his ransomed Church. Hence its affections must remain unique, and must be sacredly directed towards or confined to the enclosure of the consecrated type. Anything else than this is pollution. From this scriptural position it follows, that in the common social intercourse of the unmarried everything is to be retrenched which has a regular tendency to develop, promiscuously, sentiments which can have lawfully but one single direction. Clear as this deduction is, we are not left to deduction, but have the sure word of Scripture. The rule enjoined on Timothy, 1 Epistle v. 2, is: "Treat the younger women as sisters, with all purity." Now, first, while it is conceded that a breach of propriety by a young minister would carry heavier aggravations of guilt, it is false and absurd to allow to the young layman a different rule of morals. The rule then is, that young Christian males and females are, in their general social intercourse, *to exclude all the peculiar sentiments of the sexes, just as completely as they are excluded between virtuous brothers and sisters.* The apostle teaches us the stimulation of those sentiments towards the common female acquaintance is, while less criminal, as distinctly unlawful. See also for confirmation, Prov. v. 17-18, 1 Tim. ii. 9; 1 Pet. iii. 2-5; Matt. v. 28.

Does any one exclaim that our Christian society is exceeding



far below this standard in many other things besides dancing: in modes of dress, in manners and intercourse? And that therefore we cannot justly condemn dancing while we allow the other departures? If the statement is true, then it proves, not that we are to legitimate dancing, but that we are to reform all the other licenses along with it. Our Saviour's word concerning such reform of a prominent abuse is clear: "This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone." Again, should the averment be true, then the state of facts proves, not that the standard laid down above from the Scriptures is unreasonable, but perhaps it may prove that we are, indeed, far gone from that high Christian state on which it is so pleasant to plume ourselves, and that we may be, in God's eyes, in a deplorable state of decadence and corruption. What way is there for safely settling this question except a comparison of our ways with God's word?

The impulses of human acts are usually complex. To the less objectionable dances of a former generation, young people may have been prompted in part by the mere animal love of motion which leads the lamb to skip and the school-boy to leap. Some found another impulse in the love of music. Many were impelled by the tyranny of fashion, by the fear of being taunted as "wall flowers," or of being reproached as Puritans. Many moved under a love of excitement which they did not stop to analyse. In some at least, less innocent emotions prompted the exercise. In the modern dances it is simple folly to deny the presence of a stronger tendency towards the evil elements of attraction. Now, the complexity of the impulse could not but deceive, especially the inconsiderate and inexperienced dancer, as to the nature of his own emotions. He felt, but did not analyse. This admission may on the one hand greatly palliate the error of the inconsiderate dancer, and may give us the pleasing ability to exculpate him personally from conscious corruption. But on the other hand, *it only places the practice in a more objectionable light by so much as it shows it deceitful and treacherous as a stimulus of evil.* From this point of view, one easily sees how futile it is to quote the declarations of a few inexperienced dancers as to their innocency of evil sensations, in proof of the lawfulness of the amusement.

Over against this partial testimony must be placed a fearful array. It is notorious that the introduction of the waltz, less objectionable than the more recent round dances, excited in England and America the general condemnation of the world and the universal reprehension of the Church. To those who are old enough to remember the verdict of the healthier sentiment, it is self-evident that any change in that verdict since is due to the sophisticating of the general conscience by the tolerance in society of the evil. Those whose experience is more recent may see a fair picture of the earlier and healthier disapprobation in Byron's poem, "The Waltz." It is replete with his keenest and bitterest satire. The amusement is by innuendo charged with the worst possible tendencies. He intimates that nothing but the deplorable relaxation in the fashionable world, resulting from the example of the fourth George when Prince Regent, and the force of his personal example, could have made it possible to domesticate the abominable innovation in British society. In his view the waltzer had tarnished all the purity and delicacy which make woman attractive :

"At once love's most enduring thought resign,  
To press the hand so pressed by none but thine :  
To gaze upon that eye which never met  
Another's ardent look without regret.  
Approach the lip which all, without restraint,  
Come near enough—if not to touch—to taint!  
If such thou lovest, love her then no more."

Byron, it is well known, was far from a saint. If even his gross mind was thus impressed by the new amusement, what is the judgment which Christian purity must pass upon it? And if we may receive these verses of Goethe as an expression of German sentiment, the waltz was no more justified in the land of its origin than here :

"What? The girl of my heart by another embraced?  
What? The balm of her lips shall another man taste?  
What? Touched in the whirl by another man's knee?  
What? Panting recline on another than me?  
Sir, she is yours: from the plum you have brushed the soft blue:  
From the rose you have shaken its tremulous dew—  
What you touched you may take; pretty waltzer, adieu!"

He must be verdant indeed, who can defend the round dance from the charge of impurity, after he is made aware of the feelings avowed by its unblushing male votaries. Let the participants of the other sex be as innocent as a vestal of the infection, that innocency does not remove the loathing which the delicate mind should feel for the unconscious association. Nor, in view of the fact that God forbids our making ourselves unnecessarily the occasions of sin to others, does it remove the guilt. Again, it is well known that men who join in these dances with females for whom they care nothing, usually express the greatest repugnance to seeing their own sisters imitate their example. Why is this? Because these men know the true nature of the amusement. The argument is trite but just, that the real secret source of the excitement is disclosed by the fact that round dances of men with men, and women with women, possess no attraction. In view of these stubborn facts, and the fearful testimony of the police of our large cities as to the sources whence the denizens of the house of her whose "feet go down to death and whose steps take hold on hell" are recruited; the denial of evil tendency in this practice can appear as only the blindness of prejudice and folly. Should any reputable father detect a man, who had no other rights than those of a stranger or at most of a common acquaintance, in such relations to the person of his daughter in the parlor as attend the round dance, he would unquestionably regard it as an outrage upon the honor of his house, which, if Christian forbearance did not hold his hand, would be washed out in blood.

But now we ask, first, how does publicity modify an indecent act except by aggravating it? Second, can such an act, intrinsically immoral, be changed in its character by the attachment of any frivolous adjunct? Would a judge at law, for instance, in a commonwealth which made duelling by its laws a crime, dream of justifying the duellist because the perpetration of his murder was accompanied with a graceful Pyrrhic dance? With what scorn would the righteous magistrate dismiss so impudent a plea! Why then shall the Christian moralist modify his reprobation of that which, when done without accessories, would be condemned by all as unchaste; because, forsooth, tyrannical fashion has at-

tached to it her frivolous adjuncts of music and rhythmical motion? The demand is an insolence.

It is therefore without a shadow of ground that a lack of express law for applying the corrective of discipline is asserted either of the Bible or of our Constitution. Let any church session bring charges, not against the music and motion, but against *the postures* of the round dance, and they would find express authority in the Larger Catechism, Question 138, 139. The impropriety which would be admitted by all, if perpetrated without those adjuncts, cannot be excused by them. Hence if the court should, in tenderness to the offender, refrain from stating its charge in terms fully equal to the grossness of the real act, and speak of it as "round dancing," it is hard to see how a culprit otherwise clearly condemned by our law, can acquire any rights of justification from this undeserved forbearance.

5. The Scripture has virtually included the modern dance in an express prohibition in three places, Rom. xiii. 13, Gal. v. 21, 1 Peter iv. 3, where it sternly inhibits the *κῶμοι* of the heathen. In the first text it is rendered "rioting," and in the other two "revellings." These words now fail to convey to the English reader the real nature of the sin. "Rioting" suggests some such violent insurrection against law as is put down by reading the riot act, or by an armed police; while "revelling" suggests lavish and intemperate amounts of eating. The *κῶμος* of the Greeks was wholly another matter: the *comissatio* of the Latins. This was a general frolic or jollification, following the *δειπνον* or *cæna*, usually pursued within the house of the host. Its spirit and nature may be inferred from the "walking honestly," *εὐσχημόνως*, of Rom. xiii. 13, with which the *κῶμος* is contrasted. *Εὐσχημοσύνη* was that sedate dignity and seemliness which the gospel requires of the Lord's freedmen, the same dignity, exalted and spiritualised, which the Greek ethics exacted of the free-born citizen. The *κῶμος* was condemned, partly because it was in contrast with this dignity. Cicero, in the place cited, describes the *comissatio* as an excess considerably short of dancing, and a milder preliminary usually preceding, before dissolute people got to the dancing pitch. His defence of *Muræna* against the infamous charge of

being a dancer is that Cato could not catch him in any of these previous excesses, which alone could lead a freeman down to the final shame of dancing for social amusement. "Tu mihi arripis id, quod neesse est omnium vitiorum esse postremum: relinquis illa, quibus remotis hoc vitium omnino esse non potest. Nullum turpe convivium, non amor, non *comissatio*, non libido, non sump-tus ostenditur." Now if Paul and Peter sternly inhibit the *κῶμος* or *comissatio*, *a priori* they inhibited the dancing which contemporary opinion regarded as still more unworthy. No female was usually present in these jollities. But their presence and participation, had it occurred, would unquestionably have made the condemnation of the apostles just so much the sterner, because it would have outraged their moral sense in another point. But add to the ancient *comissatio* the presence of women participating as agents in the frolic, and we have precisely the modern ball, as it appears in its full fledged dissipation. The conclusion of the whole is, that in forbidding *κῶμοι*, the Scriptures did still more forbid the modern dance.

None will be so hardy as to deny that the light of experience may properly be invoked in interpreting the preceptive principles of Scripture and applying them to existing practices. For instance, it is agreed that the Sixth Commandment forbids suicide as truly as the murder of a fellow-man; and that therefore practices destructive of mental and bodily health are criminal. (Larger Catechism, Question 136.) But now the modern drug "chloral" is introduced, and it is found to be a fascinating sedative and nervine. May we then indulge in it causelessly—when not really necessary as an anæsthetic—for our gratification? *It is said*, that when habitually used it fatally impairs the brain-tissue, tending to induce mental imbecility and premature death. *If this be true*, its causeless, habitual use is clearly a sin under the Sixth Commandment. What is to settle the question? Now, every one will say in this case, *the light of experience must settle it*: and the experience must be chiefly that of medical observation. Now, should some caviller in this case object: "No; for that would be to clothe the doctors with power over my conscience, which is a species of popery;" it would cost no person of common

sense any trouble to explode the cavil by saying: *God's word has decided the principle* of the duty of abstinence; the doctors are merely referred to as to a question of fact. And if what they state is a fact, then the rash fool who persists in saying, against the light of a sufficient experience, "I don't believe that any amount of chloral will hurt me—these doctors shall not make my conscience for me," must even bear the penalty of his own sinful obstinacy. This parallel receives an easy application. There is no question but experience proves the tendencies of modern dancing to be, not in every case, but in ordinary cases, unhealthy for body and soul. Medical experience has lately been cited, from the over-pampered and luxurious society of one of our cities, to testify that it was not unhealthy. Of such subjects this may be relatively true, that is, even so ill-judged an exercise as that of the ball-room may be found not as bad for the health as the pampered indolence in which such people would otherwise exist. But this admission does not at all detract from the truth that the practice is of unhealthy tendency. Other and more trustworthy medical authority testifies that modern dancing is most deleterious. Unseasonable hours, an atmosphere over-heated and vitiated, the glare of lights, the imprudent and unseasonable raiment, the unhealthy food, the excessive social excitement prompting over-exertion, all indisputably concur to make it anything but a safe recreation. An old physician, looking on a gay dance, said: "This will be worth — dollars to me." The prediction was exactly verified, with the addition of the death of two young people from pneumonia. It is a vain attempt, in the presence of experiences like these, for thoughtlessness to dismiss the warning of prudence.

Experience proves the tendency of the modern dance to be yet more unhealthy for the soul. Is one and another "dancing Christian" obtruded as an instance of lively religious zeal? The answer is: "One swallow does not make a summer." These facts are well known: that it is not usually the spiritual-minded people who are the dancing members; that a dancing minister would shock even the most worldly sentiment; that at the approach of a revival dancing always ceases; that the world claims the amusement as its own. What is the meaning of these facts? The

familiar association with the ungodly on their own ground, the levity, the intoxicating excitement, the bustle and glare, cannot but quench the holy and silent motions of God's Spirit and exhale the dew of his graces.

It has been conceded that all evil acts are not properly disciplinable by the visible Church. Advantage is taken of this admission to argue that dancing should be disapproved, reasoned against, and admonished, but not disciplined. One plea for this untenable position is, that it is admitted that there are forms of dancing which are innocent, and since the different kinds shade off into each other by nice gradations, and since the Bible has not drawn a line between the tolerated and the disciplinable forms of the practice, all the Church can rightfully do is to remonstrate and instruct. The answer is, that by the same logic one might prove that no breach of any commandment is disciplinable. The lesser and greater breaches of all of them shade off into each other. Who doubts that a plain breach of the Third Commandment by cursing or swearing should be disciplined? But there are expletives and exclamations heedlessly uttered by truly good people, which are against the spirit of that Commandment in that they depart from our Saviour's law: "Let your yea be yea, and your nay nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Breaches of the Ninth Commandment are certainly disciplinable. But a Christian youth might, in a thoughtless moment, utter a quiz. Now to make these faults grounds of judicial censure, without other provocation, might be neither wise nor just. Shall we argue thence that the rod of discipline cannot reach lying and profanity? No one claims this. Then the existence of such gradations in dancing cannot prove that the grosser forms of the practice may not be disciplined.

The reader has a right to ask this objector, who says he wholly disapproves dancing but does not deem it disciplinable, how he found out that it is to be disapproved. May not a church session ascertain its evil in the same valid way in which he has? He stickles much for the principle that none but God can make an act a sin. How then did the objector convince himself so clearly that dancing is to be disapproved? Has he committed the error

which he is so jealous of in the church court, that of judging his fellow-creature's conduct by some merely human standard?

When men plead that there are other sinful amusements than this, and that a pharisaic professor may not dance, and yet may commit much greater sin by tattling, censoriousness, covetousness, the answer is too plain to need restatement. The conscientious Christian should forsake dancing and also these other forms of evil. If it be charged that church courts are partial, even though dancing be conceded to be evil, in directing their discipline so exclusively against this, while much greater sins go unwhipped of justice, then all that can be inferred is, not that the court erred in exerting its authority in the one case, but that it erred in failing to exert it in the many other cases. It needs to go, not backward, but forward; not to begin conniving at this one form of evil, but to cease conniving at all the other forms.

But there is a truth usually overlooked which justifies special watchfulness and jealousy touching these worldly and sinful conformities. It is that they practically lie so near the dividing line between the penitent and the ungodly. When two rival kingdoms touch each other geographically, the boundary line is but a mark. A portion of the territory of the one, although as really foreign soil to the other as though it were in the centre of its own realm, must be within a single inch of the line, and so within an inch of the other's ground. However sharply the boundary may be defined and established, this remains true. One result is that the king of either side takes much more pains to defend his frontier than his interior: his fortresses are built and his guards paraded almost exclusively along the outer edge, next his foreign and hostile neighbor's territory. By the same reason, it is unavoidable and right that in Christ's kingdom the frontier ground which borders upon the territory of Satan's kingdom, the sinful world, should be more jealously guarded. Practically, that is the region where the citizens of the spiritual kingdom suffer incursions and are exposed to danger. The officers of that kingdom would be derelict to their duty if they did not bestow special watch at these points. Thoughtless people suppose that the noise made by presbyters of the Church against cards and dancing is



prompted by nothing but their puritanical prejudice; that being determined from censoriousness and pride to be "righteous over-much," they pitch on these practices as their "pet horrors." But that this is entirely short-sighted appears from the simple view just given. Since the rival kingdoms are both together in this one world, this nearness of the conterminous domains must always exist, it matters not what may be the practices prevalent. It must be so in all ages and states of manners. Were the world to agree so utterly to desert cards and dancing that its votaries and worldly Christians should both forget them, the general truth would recur. The contest would inevitably revive about other questionable worldly practices, and the same jealousy and watch would become obligatory upon the guardians of the Church.

Another truth follows from this view: that however sharply the boundary line may be drawn between the hostile kingdoms, practically, the belt of land next the frontier must be "debatable land" as to its perils. Hence the man who desires to pay a righteous regard to his own safety will avoid occupying the space very near the boundary, even though he may believe that it belongs to his own king. His actual peril is about as great as though he were over the line. Let us suppose that a western cattle farmer should insist that he knew exactly where the line between the territories of the United States and Mexico ran, even to an inch; that he was legally entitled to "preëempt" any United States lands; and that therefore he should claim his rights and place his farm-house within an inch of the Mexican line. All this might be very true; and yet when the lawless Comanches harried his home, he would become convinced that he had been very foolish and criminal. The analogy is just. The Christian who is successfully assaulted by Satan is the one who causelessly ventures near his boundary line. Usually men do not backslide by suddenly falling into some large and clearly acknowledged crime. *Nemo repente turpissimus.* To change the figure—Satan does not attempt to rend a soul away from Christ by inserting the blunt of his wedge between them first. The thin edge is insinuated. It is *because it is thin*, because the crevice first made by its introduction is very narrow, that it is adapted to do its

deadly work. Because this is generally true, Christians are morally bound to guard themselves most against the smaller sins lying next the debateable zone; and those who watch for souls are bound to be most wakeful and strict in the same points.

This conclusive argument would hold thoroughly upon the ground asserted by the palliators of dancing, that it is a slight sin. But that ground is by no means admitted, as to all forms of the practice. We believe that round dancing, at least, is a sin of a very grave character, and a flagrant breach of morals, such as cannot but rapidly debauch the conscience and choke the spiritual life.

The reasonable inquirer will now be ready to concede that if some forms of dancing have been proved sinful by the former part of this discussion, then such dancings are clearly disciplinable offences. They have 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. Above all, if the testimony of pastors and elders may be believed, the milder measures of instruction and remonstrance fail to restrain the irregularity of many. In such a state of the case, when the purity and authority of the Church are wantonly provoked and defied by the continuance of *a practice confessedly needless* and non-obligatory, in spite of her solemn and tender entreaties, the claim, that the offenders may not be touched with the rod of discipline, savors more of sinful audacity than of righteous zeal for freedom of conscience. Our Assemblies, in 1869 and 1877, have distinctly declared that some forms of dancing are not only reprehensible, but disciplinable. We have seen that the authorities of all the other denominations, even those farthest from Puritanism, treat the practice as disciplinable.

It has been argued that a Session may not discipline any form of dancing, no matter how gross, because the records of our Church courts contain *no precedents* of such cases. Is it demonstrated that they do not? When the statute law exists, as in the decisions of 1869 and 1877, no precedents are necessary. The demand for a precedent is absurd. The first precedent could

only arise by the legitimate exercise, by some church court, of the power to discipline in some first case. But this preposterous argument would require a precedent before the first precedent to justify the use of the power! Let us suppose that when railroads were first constructed, our Assemblies had seen a stolidity and perversity of conscience among the people, such as required a declarative enactment to this effect, viz., that the displacement of a rail for the purpose of throwing a passenger train off the track is a breach of the Sixth Commandment, and must be disciplined as such. According to this notable argument, this most clear and righteous rule must remain a dead letter until after a precedent had arisen, which, on the terms of the argument, could never arise. Should it then prove the case, that the declarative enactments of Assemblies have made gross forms of dancing disciplinable? that such forms do prevail, and yet no precedent of their discipline exists? the only reasonable inference is, that our church courts have been too long derelict to solemn duty; and that they should reform their delinquency at once.

It has been supposed that the rights of conscience are involved in this discipline. Some have taken the ground that nothing can be justly disciplined, except what is expressly condemned by God; others, assuming a less extravagant ground, say, that the interpretative powers of church courts can never inhibit any practice, under any circumstances, which cannot be proved by Scripture to be forever and under all circumstances *malum per se*. And it is further claimed, that whenever an individual judges that his own church courts have in any thing exceeded these restrictions, it is his right and duty to assert his freedom of conscience by doing the thing inhibited. To separate the error mingled with the truth here, let this series of statements be considered, which all Presbyterians will accept without cavil:

“God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrine and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship.”

“All church power . . . is only ministerial and declarative; . . . and all decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God.” Gov., Ch. 1, §§ I. and VII.

“The whole counsel of God concerning . . . man’s salvation, faith and

life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence* may be deduced from Scripture." Con. of Faith, Ch. I., § VI.

"Every Christian Church is entitled to declare the terms of admission to its own communion," etc. "In the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion too lax or too narrow; yet even *in this case they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but ONLY MAKE AN IMPROPER USE OF THEIR OWN.*"

If the erroneous term of communion forbids a positive permanent duty, or commands an act which is sin *per se*, then the conscientious dissentient has no discretion: he must resist it at once and utterly. But if the act in question is only "beside" and not "against Scripture," then his course is to be modified by circumstances.

The adult member seeking admission to a Christian Church is responsible for informing himself as to that understanding of scriptural terms of communion on which its previous members have expressly agreed among themselves as their known constitution; and he is justly presumed, when he voluntarily applies for membership, therein to have approved those terms, and to covenant with his brethren to keep them. He is therefore bound, as for himself, by his own act to keep all those rules, unless he afterwards discovers any of them to be unscriptural in such sense that he may not righteously comply with them. But in this case also, his voluntary covenant binds him to vindicate his conscience, not by remaining in the communion and disobeying its agreed rules, but by peacefully withdrawing to some other church, whose terms he believes scriptural. Should he wish to exercise his right of seeking, inside the church of his first choice, the amendment of the rule which he once covenanted to observe, but now finds to be unscriptural, common honesty requires him to promote that amendment, not by the breach of the rule while it yet subsists, which is factious and of bad faith, but by moving and arguing for the change in the ways provided by the church constitution. If the dissentient is an officer in the church, such factious conduct is a still more indecent breach of faith.

Each man must be his own judge, in the fear of God, on every question, whether a church rule is scriptural or not; and on that question the courts of the Church must not come between his

conscience and God by assuming to decide for him that the rule is scriptural.

But neither has this dissentient a right to come between the consciences of the majority and God, when they decide that the rule he regards as unscriptural is scriptural, and that it shall therefore remain the rule of their communion. He has his inalienable right of withdrawal; but he has no more right to dictate his judgment to them, against their conscientious judgment, than they have to punish his conscientious dissent with fine or imprisonment. In this case, even if it be conceded for illustration's sake, that he is right and the majority wrong, "they have not infringed upon" his rights, "but only made an improper use of their own."

In such case, where the majority make a term of communion, though not sinful yet too strict, and insist on its observance by those who voluntarily join them, they do not commit the sin of popery, neither do they make a papal assault on liberty of conscience. This appears from two differences: they do not claim any right to coerce acquiescence in what they judge according to the mind of God, by civil pains and penalties; neither do they declare submission to and communion with them essential to salvation. The nature of their error is only this: that they blunder in their interpretation of God's will on the point involved in their rule, and impair causelessly the comfort or edification of their brethren who judge with and adhere to them.

Actions which the Scripture does not make *sins per se*, neither by expressly setting them down as such, nor by good and necessary consequence, may, by reason of circumstances, be not for edification. Then the law of love should prompt every Christian to forego those actions for his weak brethren's sake. But of the duty of foregoing these acts, or of the call uttered by the law of love, each one must judge, in the fear of God, in his own Christian liberty. For, were the church court to usurp that decision, and enforce their view of it by church discipline, as a universal obligatory rule on their members, they would thus indirectly attain that power of making a thing to be sin which God did not make sin; which Christ has inhibited to all human authorities.

But once more: the maxim, that "circumstances alter cases," has an ethical application. That is, actions which, under certain circumstances, were morally neutral, may, by a change of circumstances, become truly sins. Seth's marriage to his own sister must have been allowable. In the days of Moses the changed conditions of the human race made such a marriage the sin of incest. Under the Mosaic manners, a "bill of divorcement" to a newly espoused wife was in a certain case allowable; in our Saviour's and our times, it would be the sin of adultery. If this is so, then for a Christian to claim his liberty of conscience to continue that act, now become actually sinful, would be license and not spiritual liberty.

May a Church then, after the completion of the canon of Scripture, assume to declare that circumstances have now made some act sinful in itself which Christ or his Apostles had left allowable? No; this would be a violation of spiritual liberty, and a claim of an uninspired and fallible body to change his infallible legislation. That a Church may justly prohibit a practice as evil by reason of newly arising circumstances, 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. An instance in point may be imagined. Our Assemblies, while scripturally condemning drunkenness, have scripturally refused to make temperate drinking an offence. Hence, no Presbytery may enforce total abstinence on its ministers, by the plea that their temperate drinking *may become* a temptation to excess to others. But here is a town, in which is a drinking-hell that is proved to be a regular occasion of drunkenness to many. A Presbyterian minister residing in that town habitually exercises his right of temperate drinking in public in that drinking-hell; and it is duly proved that this his example does occasion the fall of unwary persons into the sin of drunkenness, and the name of Christ into scandal. Can the Presbytery restrain that minister by its ecclesiastical authority? Every man's common sense answers at once that it can. By what rule? Not by enacting that temperate drinking, which Christ had left allowable, has now become sin; but by enforcing Christ's own rule,

that Christians must not "let their good be evil spoken of." The Presbytery would leave him his Christian liberty of temperate drinking under other circumstances, but it would teach him to distinguish between this right and the sin of causelessly misleading souls. See Con. of Faith, Chap. XX., § 4.

But the Scripture furnishes us with a better instance. About the fifty-second year of Christ, Jewish Christians felt themselves scandalised by several things which were seen among some Gentile converts to Christ. One was, that they entered the Church without circumcision; another, that they ate articles of food which had before been offered to idols; another was, that they ate flesh with the blood, as things strangled; and another, that some continued to practise unchastities which pagan morals had long justified. The apostles and elders met to settle the dispute. See Acts xv., xvi. 4; Rom. xiv. 2, 17; 1 Cor. viii. 8, x. 25; Titus i. 15. They decided, with the authority of the Holy Ghost (Acts xv. 28), that circumcision was not incumbent on the Gentile believers; that all forms of fornication must be jealously avoided; and that two practices, in themselves indifferent (see Rom. xiv. 14; 1 Cor. viii. 4, x. 25)—eating things which had been before offered to false gods, and eating the flesh with the blood—must be temporarily forbidden and forborne. The propriety of this latter part of the rule is grounded on these circumstances (see Acts xv. 21): that Gentiles were almost everywhere united in Christian communion with believing Jews; that these Jewish Christians were still observing the Mosaic ritual and synagogue worship of the seventh day, just as they had for ages; that during the transition stage from the Old to the New Dispensation this was legitimate for Jewish believers (see Acts xxi. 20-24); that according to the Mosaic point of view, blood was sacredly set apart from all common uses to the sacrificial, and whoever "ate of a sacrifice (1 Cor. x. 18) was partaker of the altar;" whence the indulgence of Gentile brethren in these must unavoidably scandalise Hebrew Christians, and break the peace of the Church. For this reason it was necessary to enforce the two prohibitions temporarily, so long as the transition stage lasted.

It has been attempted to argue, that these two points were not

enjoined by apostolic and presbyterial authority, but only recommended. The plea is, that Paul, notwithstanding the decision, circumcised Timothy; and that in the Epistles he gave the Gentile converts full liberty to eat if they saw fit. Of the latter, we shall enquire anon. To the former, it is a sufficient reply to distinguish between enforcing circumcision on Gentiles and permitting the circumcision of one who was half a Jew by blood, and who had been reared as an orthodox member of the old dispensation in all else than circumcision. When Pharisaic men *demand* the circumcision of Titus, a Gentile—the very thing forbidden by the Synod at Jerusalem—Paul had scrupulously anticipated the Synod's subsequent decree, and refused the exaction. But to grant circumcision to Timothy, from prudential reasons, was not a transgression of the Synod's decree. They had only forbidden the exacting of it of Gentiles. The attentive reader of the history will hardly doubt but that these other points of duty were positively enjoined. The Apostle James says (Acts xv. 19): "My sentence is" (*ἐγὼ κρίνω*); 28: "It seemed good (*έδοξεν*) to the Holy Ghost and to us *to lay upon you*" this "*burden.*" The burden is "these *necessary* things." Acts xvi. 4: Paul himself "delivered them" (the Gentiles) "the decrees *for to keep*, that were ordained of the Apostles and elders" (*τὰ δόγματα τὰ κεκριμένα*). Acts xxi. 25, the Apostles remind Paul (after the Epistles to the Romans and First Corinthians had been written, in A. D. 60): "As touching the Gentiles which believe, *we have written and concluded,*" etc. (*ἡμεῖς ἐπεστείλαμεν κρίναντες*, etc.) How could more authoritative terms be used? It is incredible that Paul should have set himself to infringe a rule which was thus legislated by the Apostles, in his presence, with his concurrence, and to meet a state of facts reported by himself as brought about chiefly by his own labors. Hence the exegesis of the Epistles must be erroneous which represents him as authorising his converts to disregard a *δόγμα κεκρίμενον*, a "necessary" obligation "laid on them" by God's Holy Spirit, with his own concurrence.

From the historical point of view, the true exposition of those passages is very obvious. It is not necessary to detain the reader with citations and verbal criticisms; he can compare the three



passages (Rom. xiv., 1 Cor. viii. and x.) for himself. He will see that the Apostle, in thorough consistency with the Synod of Jerusalem and with himself, asserts all along these points: That the Jewish law of meats being positive and ritual, any food was, *per se*, indifferent; that idols, being nonentities, no real effect could be wrought on the flesh which had been on their altars, so that to the believer who understood this fact, it was, *per se*, as any other meat; that yet, if a man indulged his appetite, while himself doubtful of the lawfulness of his indulgence, it would be sin to him; not because the meat was defiled, but because his act was a tampering with possible sin according to his own judgment; that if the man's own mind were clear, and no scandal arose, such eating would be lawful. But if such eating were attended with scandal, then it became unlawful; not because the food was defiled, or the act sin, *per se*, but because self-indulgence in a needless gratification was preferred to a brother's safety and salvation. On this last point Paul dwells. It is evidently the turning point of the duty of abstinence. It is evidently on this point that he justifies the Synod of Jerusalem (whose "dogma" he had himself given to the churches "to keep"), in forbidding, under certain circumstances, what they admitted to be indifferent. Rom. xiv. 20. "But *it is evil* to that man who eateth with offence" (κακόν). 1 Cor. viii. 12. "But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, *ye sin against Christ.*" X. 32. "Give none offence." It is the *πρόσκομμα* attending the act, otherwise indifferent, which makes it sinful. It should be observed that the "offence" arose in this way: the "weak brother" who witnessed the eating, not comprehending the eater's more enlightened view, really regarded him as in the act doing homage to an idol. Had the "weak brother" understood that the eater only considered himself as doing the allowable act of satisfying hunger, the former could not have seen in it a just occasion of offence. When that result is experimentally ascertained, the precept is as positively, "Eat not," as any other Christian precept. But this scandal is precisely the ground assigned by the Apostle James for his vote in the Synod.

We thus have an unquestionable instance of a church court which, under the teachings of the Holy Spirit, declared that the moral character of a concrete act, the form of which might be, *per se*, indifferent, may be changed, at least for a time, by circumstances. It may be said: The canon was not then closed; and they had the infallible guidance of inspiration in thus declaring. The just reply is, that a supreme church court still has the infallible guidance of the Bible principle ("It is evil to that man who doeth the indifferent act with offence") to direct it in parallel declarations; and unless that principle clearly sustains it, it should not venture on them.

But, supposing a well-informed believer had persisted in eating, and had declared that he did so regarding an idol "as nothing," and had urged the question: "Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" Would Paul have disciplined him for this act alone? We suppose not; the man would have been left to his own conscience, with the warning: "Now walkest thou not charitably." He is clearly sinning; but there are clear sins which yet are not proper subjects for human discipline. Should that man prosecute his selfish act under circumstances which proved demonstrably that he was not defending his conscience, but acting selfishly and mischievously of deliberate purpose, then he would come under discipline, not merely for eating, but for wantonly doing mischief.

The establishment of these views is not really necessary to prove round dances 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. But it was judged best to settle these points of exposition, because the misconception of them has tempted some to push the claim of Christian liberty much farther than Scripture allows.

To one who places himself in the point of view of the Westminster Assembly, and of the American General Assembly which adopted our constitution, there is no doubt whatever, but that they would have included the modern round dances under the forbidden term "lascivious dances." But "the meaning of the law is the law." In their day, the society which these holy men

considered worldly and unchristian had not gone farther than minuets, reels, and quadrilles. When the round dances were at last introduced, in our generation, the estimate of a worldly opinion even, was, that they were lascivious. If the decent part of the world now wavers in that judgment, it is only because the abuse "unwhipped of justice," and weakly connived at by Christian tribunals, has already had such disastrous power to debauch public opinion. The claim that these dances shall be acquitted of prurient tendency on the testimony of some females that they do indulge without any such consciousness, is preposterous. For, in the first place, we have shown that when the impulse is so complex, consciousness will probably fail, amidst the haste and excitement, to detect the prurient element. And second, such ambiguous testimony is fatally counterpoised by the candid declaration of the coarser sex, avowing the prurient excitement as the prime attraction to them. There is no offence against decency, save the most extreme, which might not be cleared of blame by so absurd a plea, because it is supposable that a rash and reckless person might still aver, without conscious falsehood, that in his own case his mind was preoccupied in the perpetration of it, by the fun, or the novelty, or some accessory excitement. No; Church courts are both entitled and bound to judge practices by their overt forms, and by the tendencies which experience shows usually inhering in them. Tried in this way, round dancing certainly falls under the ban, both of the principles of Scripture and the express words of our constitution, by which we have all voluntarily covenanted to walk.

Seeing that the practice of our Sessions is still timid, we are persuaded that it would be well for our next Assembly to speak out still more explicitly, and *order categorically the discipline* of all church members who are found contumacious in round dancing as practised between men and women, or who dance in public and promiscuous balls, after any fashion of the mixture of the sexes. The latter prohibition should rest on the facts that, as the world now goes, round dances do prevail at all public balls; and also, that the free access to them of persons disreputable, profane, intemperate, or utterly frivolous, renders them *sinful places for*

*Christians*; unless, like their Saviour, they go thither to carry the warnings of the gospel. And this declarative legislation the Assembly should rest squarely on the words of our Catechism, and the principles of the Bible. As to the milder forms of domestic and social dancing, we would have the presbyters of the Church rely, for the present at least, on dissuasions and instructions.

No man is fit to be a presbyter in Christ's Church who is capable of being intimidated from the performance of covenanted judicial duties by the strength and rampancy of an abuse. No presbyter should need to be reminded that, as a question of mere policy, it is far wiser to have a small church expurgated of worldly corruptions, and clad in the beauty of holiness, than a large one weakened and crippled by dead members. But there is, we fear, reason that we should all have "searchings of heart" for our moral cowardice, in the presence of the worldly conformities which now so deface our Zion.

It is justly remarked, that a merely repressive policy, where no innocent substitute for vicious amusements is offered, may more probably repel than reform the youth of our Church. There is a trait of human nature which the wise pastor should study. We usually speak of man as "a social being." The mass of human beings scarcely deserve so elevated a description, and should rather be termed gregarious. The gregarious instinct in them is potent. They shun solitude, and earnestly crave the *presence* of their kind; but not *conversæ* with their kind. For, in fact, ordinary people have not intellectual resources enough to furnish anything that deserves the name of conversation, except for a small fraction of the hours they crave to spend together. To be compelled to keep up intelligible conversation the whole time would be to them more irksome than the solitude from which they flee. Here is the true source—so far as the impulse is not vicious—of all the non-intellectual amusements. People need something which does not tax their ill-furnished minds, *which they may do together*, so as to provide for the instinct of gregariousness. This solution is verified in the case of the old housewives, who spend a long summer's day in each other's presence, with little social communion save the community of their occupation

of knitting. It was verified around the planter's fireside, in former days, when children and servants pleasantly spent the long winter evening in the common task of "picking cotton." It is verified in the long *sederunts* of whist-playing old ladies and gentlemen. The communion in the mild excitement of their game gives play to the gregarious appetency, without taxing their vacant minds for any other contribution to the mutual intercourse. The same solution accounts for a large part of the interest in the more decent dances of our fathers. Often have we seen young fellows, at social gatherings, with minds too unfurnished for sustained converse, detained in the parlors in part by good manners, and in part by the unsatisfied gregarious instinct, yet insufferably "bored." But at last the music enters, and they are immediately revived. Here now is something which they can *do in common*; a social occupation which brings them into a gregarious union, to which their heels are competent, if their heads were not.

The problem for the wise parent then should be, not overlooking this trait, to find social occupations which may satisfy it, and yet may be innocent; and instead of aggravating the incapacity, and leading downwards like the dance, to deeper mental vacuity and positively vicious sentiments, may instruct while they please and unite. Might not a holy ingenuity find a sufficient variety of such gregarious occupations? One suggestion is that of parlor vocal music, both social and sacred. Another is the time-honored usage of reading aloud. Let the selections vary from "grave to gay," while never coarse or demoralising; and let "them who are strong bear the infirmities of the weak," by yielding their attention in turn to the simple matter which may interest without fatiguing even the juvenile and the vacant mind. Thus the temptation to less safe amusements may be obviated, and the social hours of the young be made enjoyable, without being made dangerous.

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