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# THE AVERAGE THEATRE

BY THE

REV. J. DE WITT TALMAGE

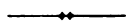
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WITH

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, EDINBURGH



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# INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY

REV. WILLIAM ARNOT.

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STAIN, sober, British readers of these discourses must penetrate through two successive crusts ere they reach and enjoy the solid and nutritive kernel which they contain. First, some allowance must be made for whatever is American in the style and the allusions, as distinguished from the forms that coincide with prevailing tastes in an older and more conservative community : next, there are peculiarities, not to say eccentricities in the form, rapid transitions and startling statements, which distinguish the methods of this particular preacher from those of his nation generally. But when the reader, in the exercise of a very little magnanimity, has passed over whatever seems somewhat brusque in style, he will find the matter sound, clear, discriminating, and charitable. The author is generous in his concessions; and on that account, all the more effective become the indictment, the proof, and the condemnation in his hands.

In our own country at the present day, a warning on this subject is eminently opportune. In point of fact, the theatre is a great instrument of evil. Alike from its nature and its history, it may be proved that it has no power to purify or elevate. The Gospel has an inherent power, independent of human tastes and passions, that can conquer and subdue them. It is like a ship lying on the water that can move up the stream in virtue of a breath out of heaven filling its sails; whereas the theatre is a mere hull that must needs float with the stream, in whatever direction it may be flowing. The corrupt tastes of the more corrupt strata in a community get hold of the theatre and carry it down, and individuals are

drawn with it to doom. Every effort to make the drama mould the tastes of the people in a good sense, fails. The tastes that are depraved sustain it: and they successfully insist on moulding it to suit themselves.

In point of fact, its influence goes to undermine society at its foundations. Young men taste its pleasures, and the appetite grows by what it feeds on. It must be gratified at all risks. Late hours follow, pilfering from parents or employers, the searing of conscience, the disregard of truth. The incline is like the lubricated ways on which a ship is launched: when a momentum has been acquired, the course cannot be arrested.

The side of these discourses which pleads for positive provision of recreation and social amusements for the young, although strongly stated, is both true and timely. When we check a great stream in one channel, because, flowing there, it does mischief, it will be the worse for ourselves if we do not see to it that another and safer channel is open to receive its volume. There is much room for advance in this direction. For example, public-houses without intoxicating drinks, and shelters with refreshments for cab-drivers are imperatively demanded in our climate and in our community. At the same moment that they check demoralizing resorts by every means in their power, society should, at an outlay not hitherto dreamed of, make provision for the natural and innocent wants of the toiling millions, on whom the well-being and even the being of the nation depends. Especially, consecration and effort are demanded of Christians, broader in spirit as well as greater in amount. Nor is this for them a hard lot. Their own brightness of heart and blitheness of countenance grow with the increase of self-denying effort. The enjoyment of a blessed hope is, in the Scriptures, specially connected with *deeds*, as distinguished from sentiments.

It is written, "Do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil. iv. 9).

W. A.

EDINBURGH, 2d April 1875.

# THE AVERAGE THEATRE

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## FIRST SERMON

“For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit ; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit.”—LUKE vi. 43, 44.

THERE is an easy way of discovering whether any institution is good or bad. Abstract discussions will throw only a little light. Gather together a number of men who have been under the influence of any institution for a number of years, and you may learn from their character whether the institution which has influenced them is good or bad. There are two ways of finding out about an evil : one is to go to the Tract House, or to the Sunday-school Union, or to *The Christian Almanac*, and find a discussion upon the subject : the other way is to go out into the community and watch practical results. Just as there are two ways of finding out the difference between harvest apples and choke pears. You may either take a pomological journal, and read about the difference, or you may take a club and go out and knock down some of the harvest apples, and some of the choke pears. The latter way will be the most positive and effective.

I have received several letters asking me about the influence of the *theatre*. There are certain principles to be laid down which will help every man to decide these questions for himself. We must all come to a decision upon this subject. Every father, every mother, every young man, and every young woman must meet it. The theatre is a tremendous engine for good or for evil. If it be good, we want to help it, and take our families to enjoy its advantages. If it be bad, let there be no lack of emphasis in denunciation.

The histrionic art arose in Greece. It was invented in the attempt to make great occasions of entertainments and idolatry more entertaining and impressive. Although Sophocles, and Euripides, and other Greek writers, dramatised in elegant and pure style, yet the chief theatrical spectacles of those days were scenes of the most disgusting impurities. As the nations plunged into excesses, theatres flourished, and dramatists were honoured. The proud days of Grecian strength and courage suggested by Salamis and Marathon had gone, and the land that had produced a great army of orators, dramatists, artists, and architects, despised the restraints of Solon and Draco, and went into the shadow of death.

In the days of Roman prosperity, the theatre was prohibited, and not until the seven hundredth year of the great capital did this institution get a foothold. But once established, it ran a mighty career of cruelty and licentiousness, from the record of which common decency veils its face. The theatre of Marcus Æmilius Scaurus would hold eighty thousand people. At Nero's command, the theatres



were covered with gold. Some of the buildings were so large that they enclosed trees, and statues, and fountains; and in order to cool and refresh the multitude of people assembled in the play, a mixture of water, wine, and Sicilian saffron was prepared, and this was led through pipes to the highest seats, and from thence it distilled in fine rain that purified and cooled the air throughout the theatre.

The drama came on down through the ages, supported by the pens and the genius of some of the greatest writers and actors that the world has ever known. Dramatic exhibitions were first made in France, by the pilgrims who had come back from the Holy Land. Here were recited the scenes through which they had passed. Scriptural scenes were afterwards enacted in a building in which were three scaffoldings above each other. The highest scaffolding was arranged so as to represent Heaven, the next the World, and the lowest to depict Hell. Although this was called a religious ceremony, the debauchery connected therewith caused Parliament to forbid it by a special enactment. But the drama arose in other garb, and won the sanction of the Government. In 1832, the French Chamber of Deputies voted one million three hundred thousand francs for the support of theatres, and to-day the most brilliant assemblages gathered in Paris are in theatres.

In England, the first exhibitions of this art were planned and conducted by the clergy, and were the Miracle Plays, or scenes in the life of the apostles, or the burning of the martyrs. The blasphemy of the thing arose to such a height that God

was represented as acting on the stage ; and, lest the play should be too serious, Satan and his imps were introduced to excite the mirthfulness of the audience. When England could no longer endure these outrages, the moralities were enacted in a series of plays in which the virtues were allegorized. Faith, Hope, Charity, and Prudence, came upon the boards. At one of these plays, enacted before the king, the actors became intoxicated, and Hope, Faith, Charity, and Peace staggered across the stage and fell, and were carried behind the scenes dead drunk. These scenes were sanctioned by the king and by many of the clergy. A book containing an account of the various sports of the people was ordered to be read in the churches.

But the time in English history has come when the drama is to be extended to other shores. The manager of Goodman's Fields is to be sold out; but having displayed thorough honesty in all his dealings, his creditors allow him enough of a theatrical outfit to start again. With a troop of adventurers, he puts out for the wilds of America in 1752. The quarter-deck of a vessel was used as a stage for frequent rehearsals. After six weeks' voyage, they landed at Yorktown, Virginia ; and in Williamsburgh, then the capital of Virginia, they hired an old store, and transformed it into the first American theatre. So wild was the surrounding region that, standing at the back door of the building, the proprietor shot game flying past. Before the best people of that ancient town the dramatic entertainment was spread. One man with his harpsichord composed the orchestra ; and, amid rapt attention,

the *Merchant of Venice* was played. From thence to Annapolis and New York these adventurers went. The whole country heard of their fame, and praised and condemned. In 1754, Philadelphia first saw the drama. The Quakers petitioned the authorities against its admission, but Governor Hamilton finally gave permission that twenty-four plays might be offered, provided nothing indecent or immoral should appear, and the manager should give security for the debts contracted by the company. On the first alley above Pine Street the first theatre of Philadelphia was opened to a great audience that rushed in, gathered by the novelties of the scene and the great excitement that had been raised. Since then, many theatres have risen in honour of the drama; and the foot of every great actor in our day has trod the Philadelphia and New York stages.

At this hour the drama wields a tremendous influence in this country; and although it comes down to us unexhausted by the march of many hundred years, and wearing garlands that many hands in all ages have entwined, we are not presumptuous when to-night we arraign it for trial, and, in the name of God, read the indictment, and demand of it, *guilty or not guilty*.

You say that the dramatic writings of the world contain some of the best poetry, the finest sentiment, the most elevated morality, and Titanic strength of style, and the piling up by the giants of mountain on top of mountain, until on them they have scaled the heavens. I admit it. You say that the theatre has marshalled in its service some of the best

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poetry, music, eloquence, and painting. I admit it. You say that some of the purest of men have catered for the dramatic tastes of the world. I admit it. Witness Milton, and Dr Young, and Hannah More, and Addison, and Walter Scott. You say that some of the dramatic writings of the world have had decidedly a religious tendency. I admit it. You say that some of the most astonishing talent that the world has ever seen has made its chief exhibition in the play-house. I admit it. Witness Conway, and Hackett, and Siddons, and Malibran, and Kean, and Foote, and Garrick. You say that theatres have done many noble charities. I know it. Witness the hospitals that have been founded, the destitute families that have received their benefits, and the wonderful charities that flowed from them just after the Chicago fire. You say that some people have gone frequently to the theatre without suffering any depreciation of morals. No doubt of it. You say that vast multitudes of people have, through the theatre, become acquainted with literature that otherwise they would never have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with. I admit it. Witness the plays of Shakespeare, that are in the mouths of people who can neither read nor write. You ask, would not a theatre with virtuous actors, and an audience of perfect correctness in behaviour, and where everything was conducted in a Christian manner, be highly beneficial to a Christian community? No doubt of it. Such an institution would be an auxiliary to the Church. You say that you know theatres which answer exactly this description. Then I exclude such from anything that I shall say to-night, for I

come not for wholesale denunciation, but to do justice. A lie told against a theatre or a gambling-house is just as bad as any other lie. You say that some theatres are much more degraded than anything I describe. Probably so. But I take all the theatres of this country, of whatever character, and strike the average. I have but one object in this sermon, and from that I shall not swerve. It is the discussion of the question,—should a Christian man favour the theatre as it now is? I say NOT.

First, because of its *deleterious effects upon the retainers and employés of the stage*. There have been connected with theatres high-minded and pure-hearted men, and I have no doubt that from this employment men have gone at last to heaven. But that the majority of the people employed in our theatres are of a most undesirable character will be, in general, admitted. How many of you would like to have your sons and daughters grow up and launch out in the association of play-actors? Would it be an agreeable prospect if you thought that your daughter would become one of the ballet-dancers who revolve so gracefully, and manage their feet in such a modest and unobtrusive manner? W. B. Wood, the actor, in a book written in defence of the stage, speaking of his association with people of his profession, says:—"How different is a theatre from our preconceived notions of one. A few weeks have shown me the vileness of envy and jealousy, and the pangs of disappointed hope and ambition. No one do I see of either sex even moderately contented. The greater proportion, particularly the comic

department, are positively miserable." So much for the testimony of a man who knows all about it. Indeed, how could you expect a man who is, night after night, impersonating a miser, a highwayman, a libertine, a knave, or a murderer, to remain content, or pure, or honest? The man who so often assumes a bad character, after awhile becomes that which he represents. The associations of the green-room are blasting. It is a terrific ordeal, through which but few can pass unscathed. The whole land ever and anon rings with some outcry of shame or cruelty that shows that many of the theatrical troupe are not strangers to the dram-shop and the brothel. The most prominent actors in the country have not suffered or lost their popularity by the discovery of their licentiousness. The crimes which wither other men seem to excite no astonishment when performed by these so-called "educators of public taste." Rousseau, who was never charged with any love for Puritanic notions, or Christian sobriety, writes: "I observe in general that the situation of an actor is a state of licentiousness and bad morals; that the men are abandoned to low practices; that the women lead a scandalous life." Why is it that in England, and America, and Italy, and France, and Spain, and throughout the whole civilized world, this profession excites suspicion? No unfounded prejudice could excite such universal disapprobation. Why does such a suspicion exist everywhere? Let parents, watchful of their children's associations, and sisters proud of their brothers, and men, intelligent, reputable, and Christian, answer.

Again, a Christian man should discountenance the theatre as it is, because of *its adjuncts of evil*. Find a theatre, and not many steps off you find the haunts of drunkenness and impurity. In the same building is a place where you may take a drink: and all around and about the place are solicitations to lust and wine. In almost every case, when a theatre is constructed, the property all round about it depreciates. The popularity and prosperity of the theatre cannot be kept up in ordinary cases without these adjuncts of evil. Two of the largest theatres in London resolved to have no bar where intoxicating liquors could be purchased, and the abandoned were to be kept out as much as possible. The theatres went down, so that one was turned into a menagerie and the other into a juggler's entertainment. The managers of the old Tremont Theatre in Boston took out no licence for the sale of intoxicating liquors, and passed a regulation that every female not accompanied by a gentleman should be prohibited entrance. The consequence was that the theatre went down—the manager in his report stating that the theatre would not have an audience under such regulations, even though the admission were free. Aye, the theatre would have died long ago but for the surrounding evils that keep adding fuel to these wasting fires of hell.

Again, a Christian man cannot countenance the theatre as it now is, because of *the character of the majority of the people who regularly attend it*. There are many persons every night at these entertainments who are of spotless virtue. Some of them go because they want to see for themselves. Some go

as critics. Some go as ardent admirers of tragedy. Some have an unbounded appreciation of the ludicrous, and they go to see the farce. Some, judging from the fact that they themselves have been uninjured, take their families. The splendid acting draws forth their applause, and they are unabashed by the indecencies that shine through the play or throw up their heels in the dance. But are the great audiences of the theatres made up chiefly of this sort? No, no. Husbands who have lost all love for home go there. Horse-jockeys go there. Thieves go there. The lecherous go there. Spendthrifts go there. Drunkards go there. Lost women go there. The offscourings of society go there by scores and by hundreds. They block up the doorway. They hang over the gallery, and ogle, and smirk, and shout aloud in the applause that greets a brilliant passage, or one that caricatures religion, or sneers at virtue as prudery or over-niceness, or hints at indecency, and makes the purehearted wife or mother turn away her head and say: "God forgive us for ever coming to such a place as this." An institution that nightly draws together from the lowest haunts of vice so many of the leprous, and unwashed, and abandoned, must have in it a moral taint. Walking forth in the fields I see in the distance flocks of crows and buzzards sweeping at a corner of the field. I cannot see anything there, but I know what is there—a *carcass*, else the crows and the buzzards would not be so multitudinous in that quarter. So when, in the community, I see the unclean and the reprobate in great multitudes swarming around an institution, I say, "There is



a carcass there ; there is death there." You are a merchant—you want a confidential clerk. You go to the theatre to get him. *Jack Shephard* is being acted. You find a young man right before you, in a low theatre, entirely absorbed in the play. He evidently appreciates and approves. I think I see you, merchant, leaning over and touching him on the shoulder, and saying, "Young man, I want a confidential clerk, and you are just the man I have been looking for." I do not deny that in every audience ever assembled in a theatre, there may be the good, the honourable, the pure, the useful, the humane, the conscientious, the true, the amiable. But are not the great mass of people that pour in and out of our theatres a different class? Woe to the man who sits, night after night, and week after week, in the hot, fetid, blasted, indecent companionship of the average American theatre! Good influences will retire from his soul. Gathering round him, with joined hands, will come ruin, debauchery, and wretchedness, to hail him into their brotherhood; and at last, having rent out his heart at a stroke, they will pour his blood into the cups of their carnival, shouting, "Drink! Here is to woe! and darkness! and death! and fire!" Dumas, the famous French novelist, who has written many plays for the theatre, says, in answer to one of his critics: "You would not take your daughter to see my play? You are right. But let me say, once for all, that you must not take your daughter to the theatre. It is not merely the work that is immoral—it is the play. Whenever we paint man, there must be a grossness that cannot be placed before the eyes, and whenever

the theatre is elevated and loyal, it can live only by using all the colours of truth. The theatre being the picture or the satire of social manners, it must ever be immoral, the passion and social manners being themselves immoral." Surely *that* man ought to know whether it is safe to take your families to the theatre!

Again, a Christian will discountenance the theatre, because it *has been the acknowledged avenue to destruction for great multitudes*. How often has a condemned man on the scaffold, in his dying speech, said: "*The Theatre ruined me!*" The Bishop of Carlisle examined the records of a penitentiary, and found that the majority of the inmates were first seduced from rectitude by theatres and races. Almshouses, insane asylums, and state prisons have gathered the corrupt fruit of this corrupt tree. A young man comes from the country. He has heard a great deal about the theatre. He goes to what is called a first-class theatre for one night. The play is *The Merchant of Venice*. It does not startle him at all. But the next night, on the way home from the store, he sees a placard on the wall, announcing a different style of play, of most attractive cast, and the announcement that it is positively the last night. (When theatres are going to have a play for seven or ten nights in succession, they always put on the bills: "This is the last night.") The young man goes to his boarding-house. Everything is dull. Something says, "You had better not go to the theatre; your father and your mother would not like it." But he must get into the open air. He starts along the street—his conscience bids him halt;

but he goes up to the ticket-office of the theatre, pays the admission, and enters. At first he sits far back, with his hat on and his coat-collar up, fearful that somebody there may know him. Several nights pass on. He takes off his hat earlier, and puts his coat-collar down. The blush that first came into his cheek, when anything indecent was enacted on the stage, comes no more to his cheek. Farewell, young man! You have probably started on the long road which ends in consummate destruction. The stars of hope will go out one by one until you will be left in utter darkness. Hear you not the rush of the maelstrom, in whose outer circle your boat now dances, making merry with the whirling waters? But you are being drawn in, and the gentle motion will become terrific agitation. You cry for help. In vain! You pull at the oar to put back, but the struggle will not avail! You will be tossed, and dashed, and shipwrecked, and swallowed in the whirlpool that has already crushed in his wrath ten thousand hulks.

But I must leave until next Sabbath several important arguments against the average American theatre. Some of you will take no warning from what I say; but there are many here who will listen. The last time I spoke in this place I said:—"If there is a young man here who has in his pocket tickets to the theatre, he had better, before he goes out of the building, tear them up, lest they prove to him a ticket to perdition." At the close of the service a young man took from his pocket two theatrical tickets and tore them to pieces, and the sexton afterwards picked them up, and told me

of the circumstance. So may God send the truth home—not to one heart, but to a thousand hearts.

I stood one morning in an empty theatre in New York. I went in to satisfy my curiosity, and to look behind the scenes. Having examined the trap-doors and the side-rooms, I came and stood alone upon the stage. While standing there, there came rolling up out of the silence into my fancy the scene which, the night before, might have been enacted. Pit, and boxes, and galleries seemed filled with a motley crowd. The stamp of a thousand feet announced the impatience of the audience. Suddenly the chandelier begins to blaze, and jets of fire leap along the ceiling, and the footlights kindle their splendour amid the gorgeous scenery. A faint thrum of instruments arouses the orchestra, and lips to the brazen trumpet, bow to the viol, and fingers to the harp, and, with one magnificent burst of harmony, the audience are carried captive within the golden gates of sound. The play moves on. Princes stalk forth, and courtesans, not over-much attired, come forth from palaces, and windows are hoisted from which gay ladies elope, and the heavy scenes are interspersed with the marvellous evolutions of the dancers, and pure sentiment and splendid oration are mingled with indecent allusion. In that seat is an artist, who has come to see the rendering of some famous passage, and through his eye-glass he watches every change of countenance in the actors. In this box are a father and mother, with their sons and daughters—the parents watching the play, the sons looking out on the galleries! Happy family! They have come to cultivate

their taste, and to become better acquainted with human nature. Back yonder is a young man all caught up in the greatest enthusiasm. He laughs and cries, and chides himself that he has not before been to the theatre. He will not soon be absent again. He has started on the downward course, and what if he does go to ruin? It will be to the sound of the viol, and the step of the dance, and the enchantment of the drama. In that top-gallery see them—the hard-visaged, the ill-behaved, the boisterous, the indecent. That poor soul was born in a mountain cottage. She helped her father to watch the sheep on the hill. She used to bring up the cattle at night-fall, and well her foot knew the path to the spring in the rock. She wandered away. God pity that lost soul. No friend, no home, no hope. Fain would she breathe again, with light heart, the mountain air, and help her father to tend the sheep, and go down and take a drink at the spring in the rock.

But the scene changes. Standing on that stage, the foot-lights seem to lower, and a mist arises before my eyes, until I can hardly see or hear the assembled audience. The theatre seems widening, and, at the same time, growing more dim. The pillars, from their dingy colour, turn white, and the galleries look like a floating cloud, and the spectators that I saw, grow into vaster multitudes—yea, ten thousand times ten thousand—and the air is stirred with many wings. The ceiling rises higher and higher, and changes as into a canopy of cloud, intershot with arrows of fire, and there is before me an amphitheatre, of height and depth, and length, and

breadth, and splendour, and power such as I cannot describe; and instead of the faces that were filled with mirth, and lightness, and gaiety, I see an array of countenances filled with such earnestness as men exhibit who are on trial for their lives. In the midst of this great audience, which are like the leaves and stars for numbers, there begins to arise something that at first looks like a great cloud, then like a huge pillar; and afterwards it grows brighter and flames out in glory; and, running my eye up and down the tremendous, elevation, I find it is a *throne—a stupendous throne—a great white throne*. And there is an awful hush, and I see that the faces around are changing into deeper earnestness. Some kindle with highest rapture, and some grow pale with fear; and something says: “These are the generations of men assembled to give an account of all their deeds; and these are the parents who were faithful to their children; and these are they who corrupted their families; and these are they who plunged into earthly crimes and called them sports; and these are they who committed soul-suicide; and these are they who served their God, and found their greatest pleasure in loving him; and this—and *this is the throne—the great white throne*—THE THRONE OF JUDGMENT.”

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and the books were opened.”

*SECOND SERMON*

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”—

MATT. vi. 13.

NO man has a right unnecessarily to trust himself in the presence of temptations. It should be the prayer of every one, day and night, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

I am asked about the influence of the theatre. The usual mode of discoursing upon this subject is to represent all play-actors as debauched, and the entire audience gathered in a theatre as abandoned and reprobate. Now, what good can a man expect by such a positive misrepresentation? Nine-tenths of this audience have at some time in their life been in a theatre. You do not think yourselves abandoned and depraved. Do you not suppose that every night in some of our theatres there are men who go there for the same reason that took you? At this point I wish to disclaim any sympathy with those who charge upon dramatic literature the crimes of the theatre. Any dialogue is a drama. Solomon's Song is a drama. The Book of Job is a drama. Some of the parables of Christ are dramas. The piece in the Old New England spelling-book, which represents a youth, Christ, and Satan in conversation, is a drama. You have no right to put upon the works of Shakespeare, Addison, and Walter Scott the fooleries and outrages of the clog-dancers of the theatre. Blot out from sacred and profane literature the drama, and you have destroyed whole constellations of beauty

and purity. I love the drama, while I deplore many of the scenes into which it has been dragged. The drama is like the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves: it has been stripped and left half dead.

In my last discourse I gave you five or six reasons why a Christian man ought not to favour the theatre. I said then that I did not speak of the best theatres or the worst theatres, but placing them all beside each other, I struck the average. I add to-night that my objections to the theatre are confirmed by the united *evidence of the good and wise in all ages*. Greece and Rome, in the days of their strength, forbade it. The vast majority of the Christian people of Europe, and America, and of the whole world have condemned it. The American Congress, in the time of the Revolution, condemned it. Josiah Quincy, in 1775, says, "The stage is the nursery of vice, and disseminates the seeds far and wide, with an amazing and baneful effect." Washington and Franklin—among statesmen, Socrates, Plato, and Seneca—among philosophers, have deplored its influence. Almost the entire testimony of the philosophic and religious world has been arrayed against it. But you say, "What do I care for Socrates and Plato?" Then I ask what is the evidence of your own Christian father and mother upon the subject? They could have had no motive in advising you against this institution, if it were not a good motive. You say that the theatre never had a chance to vindicate itself—so many people have been against it. I answer, that it has had every possible opportunity to



vindicate itself. It has had thrown around it all the fascinations of genius, all the arts of poetry, and painting, and eloquence. Notwithstanding all this opportunity of gaining the affections of the good, it stands up to-day for trial; and the noblest piety, and the purest philanthropy, and the best morality of the land, sworn as jurors in the case, rise to render their verdict. Prisoner, look upon the jury. Jury, look upon the prisoner. Is it guilty or not guilty. "Guilty," is the response, and so say they all.

Again: I discountenance the theatre because it is *the polluter of public taste*. The advocates of this amusement often recommend it as an educator of public taste. But look at the character of the plays. Is *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *King Lear* a type of that which most frequently appears? No; stop on your way home to-night, and look at the placards upon the walls, and you will find a very different programme. If *Richard III.* were being enacted in one theatre, and the *Black Crook* in another, which would have the largest audience? While there are tragedies of unexceptionable caste, rendered with overwhelming power, a reference to the advertisements for nine-tenths of the theatres of this country will prove the depravity of the public taste upon this subject. You have not ink in your inkstand black enough to write down the names of scores of plays that are enacted night after night in the presence of approving gentlemen and ladies. By what law is an indecent thing any the less indecent by being on the stage? That which is improper before one person in the parlour, in a theatrical

audience of fifteen hundred people is fifteen hundred times more improper. How would you like to have at a party in your house a score of men and women appalled as you have seen them, in the last three years, trooping forth on the American stage? Great scantiness of fig-leaves. One student of the play in modern days gives as a statistic that he counted seventy thousand immoralities. 'I do not doubt the statistician; but I think he was engaged in a sorry business. I should as soon think of going out upon the commons, and devoting myself to taking census of the numbers of dead cats and dogs. Who can compute the numbers of the herd of vulgarisms, profanities, and indecencies that have, with filthy hoof, trampled across the stage? Educator of good taste! If there were nothing upon the boards of our theatres but good morals, and pure sentiments, and honest behaviour, the upright might go there; but do you suppose that there would be such crowds of the reprobate in attendance on the average American theatre, or that there would come down such thunders of applause from the gallery? The elegant sentiment, the exquisite imagery raises up a few delicate hands, but the applause is quite feeble. But the inuendo, the word that looks two ways, the emphasis that has in it a quaver of unchastity—how all the feet come down, and the hands clap, the sounds dying away, only to come up with more boisterous and overwhelming outbreak. The pure men who go to such plays are disgusted. But they are in a small minority. If you should gather together in one audience all the theatre-goers in this country and in Europe, and put to vote in that great audience whether

all the impure illusions of the play should be dropped out, a few hundred people would say "Aye!" But by hundreds of thousands of majority, the audience will cry out "No! no!" Educator of popular taste! Many of the refined, and elevated, and moral people have got along without its help. I think that there are enough innocent and ennobling amusements in this, as in all other cities, to culture good taste in the people, without the necessity of a resort to these very suspicious schools of refinement. Where the theatre has cultured one taste up to a higher standard, it has sunk a hundred lower. Educator of taste! A mighty missionary work is yet before it, for it must begin with the "green-room," and work up through parquet and boxes to the top gallery; and this last will keep it busy in Evangelical labours until the dawn of the millennium. O benign and gracious institution! Show me one father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter, that it has made a better man or a better woman. A few years ago the most popular play on the stage of New York was *The Drunkard*. It was said to be highly moral and reformatory in its influence. But what a commentary on the whole affair, that the chief actor of that play died in delirium tremens.

Again: the Christian man will discountenance the theatre, because it gives a *distorted view of life*. People defend it by saying that it gives one a knowledge of human nature. Put a young man in a dry goods store, or in a lawyer's office, and he will learn more of human nature in six months than in a lifetime of theatre-going. Besides that, it is chiefly the worst side of human nature that the average play-house sets forth.

Heroic *Portia*, and honest *Gonzalo*, and gentle *Miranda* are not types of the characters presented in most of the modern plays. What advantage is it for any one to sit down in an audience, and look upon the impersonation of knavery, of libertinism, of unrelenting revenge, that looks out from behind the curtain upon sleeping innocence, and the knife that the murderer lifts, all dripping with the blood of the victim? If you want to see knavery, go look at it in prison chains. If you want to see uncleanness, go to the hospital and look at the pile of agony and putrefaction. Do you want to see revenge? Before you get through with life, some one will take after you, abusing you, slandering you, persecuting you, even unto death, and you will find out fully what revenge is. If men want to study these things, let them not go where they are surrounded by fascination of scenery, and palatial residence, and the crime is half excused by the skilful dramatist; but let them take a police officer and go down through the dens of the metropolis, and see at midnight, vice and loathsome bestiality and festering abomination, and breathe the sickening stench that comes up from the cellar where humanity wriggles in filth, and rots alive, and rends out its heart in torture, and blasphemes God, and dies. By the time you get through life you will know more about human nature than you want to. There are multitudes of people who understand the world, its passions, its ambitions, its trickeries, its sources of power, its misfortunes, and who can touch the key of any emotion, and at will play the high notes of gladness, or the deep tones of woe, without ever having

gone to this questionable school. But remember that hundreds of men are ruined by city exploration. They go to see for themselves. A man hears that lions are very dangerous. He says, "Is that so?" He opens the cage; and the monster with one stroke fells him, and with one crunch grinds up his skull. The lion never imagined that the man had come in to study natural history. Oh! the devil is mean. He says, "Come in and see." The man goes in to look for himself: the roaring lion grabs him, and he is gone. He learns *human* nature dearly who learns it at the risk of his *immortal* nature.

Again: I charge upon the average American theatre *much of the unhealth of this country*. The man who sits night after night, until ten or eleven o'clock, in the theatre, and then takes his oysters and his ale, and crawls into his bed at twelve or one o'clock, will be a sick man. No physical constitution can endure it. The nerves shattered, the imagination excited, the strength exhausted, he will be eaten up by disease, and sink into an early grave. The American theatre has filled the land with an army of invalids. We see them dying with dyspepsia, with neuralgia, with liver complaints, and consumptions, and there is congratulation in hell that the theatre killed them. It is death to a man to be busy all day in a store, the air poisoned and corrupt, and then, as a usual thing, to spend three hours at night in a theatre, the atmosphere of which is made up of ten parts of cologne, fifty parts of tobacco, one part of oxygen, and three hundred and seventy parts of poor whisky. Oh! I

have seen the average American theatre throw upon society a great many weak, inane, and corrupt men unfit either for living or dying. I knew a man in this city who was once foremost in the Church, who came under the fascinations of the American theatre. He gave up the Sabbath. He gave up the Bible. He gave up God. He came to deny even his own existence, adopting the absurd theory that everything is imaginary. He went thirty nights in succession to see *Macbeth* in the old Broadway theatre. It blasted him body and soul.

Again : I charge upon the average theatre the fact that it is the *enemy of domestic life*. There are many places in this country where there are father and mother, and children, but no home. The children are handed over to irresponsible employes, while father and mother are out at the theatre. Wherever it offers its fascinations, children are a great nuisance. If the measles come to the little ones the week that Mrs Drew plays, Mrs Drew triumphs, and the measles go under. This institution has run its red-hot ploughshare through hundreds of domestic circles. The average theatre is the sworn, bitter, everlasting foe of the home-circle. What will that mother say when she goes up to God, and God asks : "Where are your children?" She will say : "One of them turned out to be a defrauder, and another went off from home, and was never heard of again. I did all I could for them ; that is, I gave three dollars a week to a good Irish nurse, and it was her business to take care of them."

And now I have some remarks of a more general nature.

You must have noticed last Sabbath night, and this, that I have no sympathy with ecclesiastical straight-jackets, or with the wholesale denunciation of amusements to which many churches are pledged. A book just issued says that a Christian man has a right to some amusements; for instance, if he comes home at night weary from his work, and feeling the need of recreation, puts on his slippers, and goes into his garret, and walks lively around the floor several times, there can be no harm in it. I believe the Church of God has made a tremendous mistake in trying to suppress the sportfulness of youth, and drive out from men their love of amusement. If God ever implanted anything in us, He implanted this desire. But instead of providing for this demand of our nature, the Church of God has, for the main part, ignored it. As in a riot, the mayor plants a battery at the end of the street, and has it fired off, so that everything is cut down that happens to stand in the range, the good as well as the bad, so there are men in the Church who plant their batteries of condemnation, and fire away indiscriminately. Everything is condemned. There are a great many who denounce ball-playing. They hate puzzles. They despise charades. They abhor tableaux. They say, "Away with all parlour games!" They talk as if they would like to have our youth dressed in blue uniform, like the children of an orphan asylum, and march down the path of life to the tune of the Dead March in Saul. They hate a blue sash, or a rosebud in the hair, or a tasseled gaiter, and think a man almost ready for Sing Sing who utters a conundrum. What do they prescribe for our

young people in the way of recreation? *Prayer-meetings!* Now, a young man, busy in the store from seven in the morning until six at night, sometimes wants something besides prayer-meetings. We have a physical as well as a spiritual nature, that asks a recreation. The Young Men's Christian Associations of the country are doing a glorious work. They have fine reading-rooms, and all the influences are of the best kind. I believe the time is coming when these Associations will also supply physical recreations; when, added to their reading-rooms and to their prayer-meetings, there will be gymnasiums and bowling-alleys, where, without any evil surroundings, our young men may get physical as well as spiritual improvement. We are dwindling away to a narrow-chested, weak-armed, feeble-voiced race, when God calls us to a work in which He wants physical as well as spiritual athletes. I would to God that the time might soon come when in all our colleges and theological seminaries, as at Princeton, a gymnasium shall be established. We spend seven years of hard study in preparation for the ministry, and come out with bronchitis, dyspepsia, and liver complaint, and then crawl up into the pulpit, and the people say, "Don't he look heavenly!" because he looks sickly. Let the Church of God direct, rather than attempt to suppress, the desire for amusement. The best men that the world ever knew have had their sports. William Wilberforce trundled hoop with his children. Martin Luther helped to dress the Christmas-tree. Ministers have pitched quoits. Philanthropists have gone a-skating. Prime Ministers have played at ball.



The church to-night is filled with men and women who have in their souls unmeasured resources of sportfulness and frolic. Show me a man who never lights up with sportfulness, and has no sympathy with the recreations of others, and I will show you a man who is a stumbling-block in the way to the kingdom of God. Such men are caricatures of religion. They lead young people to think that a man is good in proportion as he groans and frowns and looks sallow, and that the height of a man's Christian stature is in proportion to the length of his face. I would trade off five hundred such men for one bright-faced, radiant Christian on whose face you may see the words, "Rejoice! evermore." Between here and Fulton Ferry, every morning by his cheerful face he preaches fifty sermons. I will go further, and say that I have no confidence in a man who makes a religion of his gloomy looks. That kind of a man always turns out badly. I would not want him for the treasurer of an orphan asylum. The orphans would suffer. Among forty people whom I received into the church at one communion, there was only one applicant of whose piety I was suspicious. He had the longest story to tell; had seen the most visions, and gave an experience so rapturous and profound that all the other applicants were discouraged. I was not surprised, in a year after, to learn that he run off with the funds of the bank with which he was connected. Who is this black angel that you call *Religion*—wings black, feet black, feathers black? Our religion is a bright angel—feet bright, eyes bright, wings bright. Taking her place in the

soul, she pulls a rope that reaches to the skies, and sets all the bells of heaven a-chiming. There are some persons who, when talking to a minister, always feel it politic to look lugubrious.

Go forth, O people! to your lawful amusements. God means you to be happy. But when there are so many sources of innocent pleasure, why tamper with anything that is dangerous and polluting? Why stop our ears to a heaven full of songsters, to listen to the hiss of a dragon? Why turn back from the mountain-side, all a-bloom with wild flowers, and a-dash with the nimble torrents, and with blistered feet attempt to climb the hot sides of fire-belching Cotopaxi?

The day comes when the men who have exerted evil influence upon their fellows will be brought to judgment. *Scene*: the Last Day. *Stage*: the Rocking Earth. *Enter*: Dukes, Lords, Kings, Beggars, Clowns. No sword. No tinsel. No crown. For foot-lights: the kindling flames of a world. For orchestra: the trumpets that wake the dead. For gallery: the clouds filled with angel spectators. For applause: the clapping floods of the sea. For curtain: the heavens rolled together as a scroll. For tragedy: the Doom of the Destroyed. For the last scene of the Fifth Act: the tramp of nations across the stage—some to the right, others to the left.

“These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but those into life eternal.”

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