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DELIVERED IN THE

BRAINERD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

NEW-YORK,

FEB. 14, 1847, AND REPEATED, BY REQUEST, FEB. 28.

BY ASA D. SMITH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

NEW-YORK :
PUBLISHED BY LEAVITT, TROW & COMPANY,
191 BROADWAY.
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Geo. Burdett

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S E R M O N .

Rom. 14: 23.—And he that doubteth is damned if he eat.

THE eating, here referred to, is of meats pronounced unclean by the Mosaic law. The expression “damned,” does not mean inevitably lost, but merely condemned, or guilty. The affirmation is, he who eats, doubting whether it be right, sins in so doing. To the same effect are other passages of this chapter: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” “To him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” “Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

We have here, in application to a specific case, a general principle. It is briefly this—**DOUBTFUL COURSES ARE SINFUL COURSES.** True, in respect to two possible courses, there may be equal doubt. We may question the propriety, as much of leaving undone, as of doing. But we speak of other cases; what we affirm, on the ground of the text, is, that where, of two acts or of two ways, one is safe, perfectly safe, and the other is at least questionable, to take the safe course is duty, to take the doubtful course, is sin. This principle is well set forth in one of President Edwards’ Resolutions:—“Never to do any thing, of which I so much question the lawful-

ness, as that I intend at the same time to consider and examine afterwards, whether it be lawful or not ; unless I as much question the lawfulness of the omission.”

I have selected the text, not for the purpose of mere general discussion, or of going extensively into its manifold practical bearings, but that I may apply it to a single subject—the *fashionable amusement of dancing*. There is special reason why, at the present time, the pulpit in this city, bound here as every where to declare all God’s counsel, and give warning of all danger, should take distinct notice of this subject. To bring it before you in a just light, I offer a few preliminary remarks.

1. *As to what is meant by dancing.* Expostulation is often warded off by the inquiry, What precisely do you condemn? Is all dancing, under all possible circumstances, censurable? If not, how shall we discriminate? To this we reply, that what we mean to condemn, is just what every body would gather at once from the terms in which our subject has been announced. We have nothing to say of a gentleman’s dancing alone in his chamber, or his parlor, whether for health’s sake, or from buoyancy of animal spirits, or as a mere pastime ; or of several gentlemen’s doing the same thing together. Nor would we condemn a like indulgence in the other sex. We undertake not to censure those refined gymnastics, practised by rule and by prescription, in many of our female schools ; unless, indeed, as we have sometimes feared, they form a taste, and prepare the way, for other and more doubtful recreations. We touch not the question, whether the saltatory part of Shakerism be right ; or whether, in imitation of David’s dancing before the ark, in an early and rude age, and under a by-gone dispensation, it be now incumbent on ministers and elders to dance before the people, as part of our regular Sab-

bath services. We have probably no hearers who find it difficult to distinguish things of this sort from what is obviously intended by the phrase, the fashionable amusement of dancing. We mean—is it necessary to add?—dancing as all the world know it to be practised in fashionable circles—“promiscuous dancing,” as some have termed it, or as engaged in by the sexes in company. We mean the mingling of the sexes at full-blown balls, or those balls in the bud, dancing parties, or—to meet certain nice distinctions—parties, great or small, at which there is dancing.

2. *Our discussion has in view primarily the duty of the Christian.* True, it bears also upon the unconverted; for all ought to be Christians. And a strange sight it is, to see men and women, soon to be laid in their winding sheet and their grave—condemned already, and only waiting the day of execution—forgetting all this in the excitement of the dance. It is as if a criminal should dance at the hearing of his death-warrant, or on his way to the scaffold. Yet there is a sense in which dancing is not inappropriate to a worldling's character. If a man will seek his portion here, if, turning from rational and spiritual delights, he resolves to satisfy himself, as he can, with the phantasies and pollutions of sense, if he is intent on repressing serious thought, stupefying and searing conscience,—and all this *is* involved in determined worldliness,—there are few more effectual means of attaining this end than the amusement before us. But our present inquiry is, May a Christian engage in this amusement? Does it comport with the character, the aims, the profession, the vows of those who “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people?”

3. We concern ourselves with the subject before us,

as might be inferred from the last remark, *only in its high moral and spiritual bearings*. We consider it not as a matter of physical regimen and training. Affairs of the gymnasium we shall not bring into the pulpit. We have, indeed, the opinion, that in respect to *health*, bodily exercise of this sort profiteth little. The best medical testimony would doubtless be to this effect, that when we take into view thinness of dress, transition from cold to heat and from heat to cold, crowded rooms and vitiated air, excitement, late hours, and other ordinary accompaniments of dancing,—where one has been improved in health by it, it has sown in hundreds the seeds of disease and death. But we dwell not on bodily health; it is the health of the soul we are now concerned with. Nor can we turn aside from our purpose, to consider the alleged conduciveness of this amusement to *grace and refinement*. We are, indeed, quite incredulous on this point. A certain kind of factitious and occasional grace, of little value in its highest degrees, the lessons of the dancing-school may, indeed, in some instances impart. But as to real refinement, just as truly as to all other individual and social elevation, the claims of dancing are amply refuted by its history. Look where you will, at nations or smaller communities, you will find it to be a general fact, that just in proportion as society goes up, dancing goes down, and as dancing goes up, society goes down. The farther you go back in the history of our race, toward the barbaric state, the more does dancing abound, till it mingles, as an essential element, with the gravest transactions—till you meet the Indian in his war-dance—the Egyptian dancing before his gods, and the Greek in his Bacchanalian orgies; and you find, at length, the ignorant and degraded African, rivalling, if not excelling, all the rest of the world both in

the motion and the music of the dance. In this city, as you descend from the most elevated circles and localities, toward others which I will not here name, this amusement is more and more practised, till every night is made hideous by it, and instead of dancing parties you have dancing houses. True refinement, my hearers, is an affair of the heart, rather than of the heels; of sentiment, and principle, and delicate sensibility—of that charity which “doth not behave itself unseemly”—rather than of artificial gesture, motion, and locomotion, of factitious forms, and constrained conventionalities. As conducive to it, we should value more one revival of religion, than all possible dancing-school influences for a century. But on such points we will not enlarge. Our concern is not with manners, but with morals; not with æsthetics, but with spiritualities. The question in hand, is not, by what means we shall bow gracefully to the master or mistress of a feast, but how shall we bow sincerely and hopefully before God; not how we shall enter most exquisitely a drawing-room, or a ball-room, but how “an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly” into heaven. That question settled, all others are as the small dust of the balance.

4. *We propose not to inquire*, I remark once more, *whether the practice in question be more or less objectionable, than many others in which Christians sometimes allow themselves.* Is it worse, it has been asked, than some of those rude and childish plays sometimes introduced into social circles, or than idle gossip, tale-bearing, or scandal? Christian morality, we have only to reply, is *positive*, not *comparative*. Let every practice stand on its own foundation; let it be judged of by itself. It is a poor defence of any course of conduct, miserable special pleading, to say of it,—“True, it may not be right,

but there are other things as bad." We stand in doubt of the heart that can content itself with such a plea. It is the profligate's plea—it is the logic of the penitentiary, not of the sanctuary. It would not be difficult, indeed, to find other subjects of censure in our social circles; but sufficient for the present discourse is the evil it proposes to consider, and sufficient for you, my Christian hearers, to show that that is an evil.

With these preliminary remarks, we recur to the principle of our text, *all doubtful courses are sinful courses*, and applying it to the amusement in question, we remark:—

I. IT IS SAFE FOR THE CHRISTIAN NOT TO DANCE. On this point there can be no controversy. Who of you, my hearers, ever found it otherwise? Who of you was ever conscious of spiritual loss, who of you had ever trouble of conscience, from letting this amusement alone? Or have you ever heard of a soul's being harmed thus? If I may refer to my own observation, I have, in the course of a twelve years' ministry, met with a great variety of troubles of conscience, but never with one on this account. Various misdeeds have I found to burden the heart of the awakened sinner; but never have I heard him lamenting that, among his other omissions, he had neglected to dance. Never have I heard such a lamentation from a sinner's dying bed. Only think of a Christian's saying, when piety is low in his heart, "Oh, that I had been more diligent in my attendance upon parties and balls, then had I kept nearer my Saviour!" Heard you ever such a declaration? Draw near to that mother, just about to part for ever with her children. She has many things to mourn over, touching her discharge of maternal duty; but do you expect to hear her say—was a dying mother ever heard to say,—“This lies as a bur-

den on my heart, that I have given too little attention to my children's dancing; I have not sufficiently encouraged their attendance at the dancing school and the dancing party." But I rest not alone on your observation, or on my own. In all my intercourse with ministers of the Gospel, in all our conferences as to the proper treatment of spiritual troubles, never have I heard of a trouble of this sort. Nay more, I have read not a little of what good men have written on cases of conscience, such men as Baxter and Jeremy Taylor, and other old divines, who have ferreted out almost every species of heart-trouble; yet have I not found in them a single case of spiritual loss and self-accusation, from the neglect of the amusement before us, or the slightest hint that any one of them had ever known such a case. I cannot but conclude, then, and I am sure you will go with me to the conclusion, that it is safe, perfectly safe, not to dance—safe for the heart, and safe for the conscience.

II. Let us turn now to the other side of the subject. While it is safe not to dance, our second position is, that IT IS NOT SAFE FOR THE CHRISTIAN TO DANCE. In so doing, he treads, at the very least, upon *doubtful* ground, and of course, according to our text, upon *sinful* ground. But while we take this as our very lowest position, a position sufficient of itself to settle the question in hand, we expect to show, by a course of cumulative argument, that the amusement before us is not merely doubtful; it involves not merely the possibility, or the probability, but the *certainty* of evil.

1. My first remark under this head is, that *the general sentiment of the pious is against it*. We mean not by this that another man's conscience is to be our conscience, or that there is any other rule of faith and practice than God's word. When that fully decides a point, our con-

science is bound. But when the question is, what *does* the Bible decide, or what accords with its spirit, we may not overlook the general judgment of holy men. Especially should we give heed to that judgment, when the question is an eminently practical one, when we seek to know what comports with high spirituality, what tends to promote, and what to interrupt communion with God, what has been found to further, and what to hinder religion in the community. "Wisdom is justified of her children." "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," says John, "and ye know all things." It is always the part of wisdom to heed the teachings of experience. Foolhardy would be the merchant who should rush into operations pronounced ruinous from time immemorial by the general voice of mercantile men; or the shipmaster, who should sail needlessly in courses abounding, by the united testimony of all wise and skilful navigators, in quicksands and hidden rocks. And foolhardy is the Christian, who allows himself in practices regarded as detrimental to piety, by devout men generally in every age. You do well to disregard the false alarm raised by Timorous and Mistrust, as, with nothing of the pilgrim's spirit, they run from the lions; but to heed not Christian and Hopeful, as they warn you against By-path Meadow, and the grounds of Giant Despair, is both folly and sin.

Now we do not say there are none in the churches called Evangelical, who both justify and practise dancing. Strange things are said and done in the visible church, and sometimes by those who, we may charitably hope, will be saved "as by fire." Our reference is to the general sentiment of spiritually-minded people, and on this head there can be no doubt. Nor need we confine ourselves to the testimony of individuals as to their own course;

such, for example, as that of the unascetic Cowper, given in one of his letters, after he had learned to sing, "O, for a closer walk with God." "As to amusements," he says, "I mean what the world calls such, we have none. The place, indeed, swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the gentle inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of *murdering our time*." So important has the matter before us been deemed, that ecclesiastical bodies have not thought it beneath their dignity to make it the subject of solemn remonstrance. In instances more numerous than I could cite, they have decidedly condemned the amusement of dancing, and have warned the churches against it. Not to adduce, as I might, the testimony of Presbyteries and Synods, let me call your attention to that of the General Assembly, the highest authority known in the Presbyterian Church. I quote first from the Assembly of 1818, because then both branches of the church, old school and new school, were united. In their Pastoral Letter they say:—"With respect to dancing, we think it necessary to observe, that however plausible it may appear to some, it is perhaps not the less dangerous on account of that plausibility. It is not from those things which the world acknowledges to be most wrong, that the greatest danger is to be apprehended to religion, especially as it relates to the young. When the practice is carried to its highest extremes, all admit the consequences to be fatal; and why not then apprehend danger even from its incipient stages? It is certainly, in all its stages, a fascinating and an infatuating practice. Let it once be introduced, and it is difficult to give it limits. It steals away our precious time, dissipates religious impressions, and hardens the heart." Such was the solemn declara-

tion of the ministers and elders representing the whole Presbyterian Church in the United States. Testimony to the same effect, and quite as emphatic, was uttered in 1843, by the New School, so called, or Constitutional Assembly. In a resolution adopted on occasion of an overture from one of the Presbyteries, they speak of dancing as a practice "so entirely unscriptural and eminently that of the world, which lieth in wickedness, and so wholly inconsistent with the spirit of Christ, and with that propriety of Christian deportment, and that purity of heart, which his followers are bound to maintain, as to render it not only improper and injurious for professing Christians either to partake in it, or to qualify their children for it by teaching them the art; but, also, to call for the faithful and judicious exercise of discipline on the part of church sessions, when any of the members of their churches have been guilty."

Can it be supposed, we ask now, that such a mass of testimony is wholly wrong? Are the wise and pious individuals, who have given it, the grave ecclesiastical bodies, embracing many of the most excellent and venerable men of the age, utterly deceived and infatuated? Is it safe, in a matter of this sort, to set your individual judgment against theirs; or, as would be nearer the truth, possibly, to set your individual *wishes* against their solemn judgment? Has not that judgment sufficient weight to raise in your mind at least a serious doubt? And when not to dance is safe, he that doubteth, remember, is damned if he dance.

But look at the matter in another light. Just suppose, for the sake of argument, that these individuals and ecclesiastical bodies are all mistaken—that they are all imposed on by their own fancies, or by "old wives' fables"—that they are quite in the dark as to what

constitutes and promotes the Christian spirit, and that you are in the light. Just take the modest supposition that they are all "weak brethren;" still they *are* your brethren, and you are bound to treat them as such. Especially are you bound to regard the feelings, the consciences, even the "weak consciences," of those associated with you in the same ecclesiastical connection; above all, in the same particular church. Love for the brethren requires it; love for Christ, whose image they bear, requires it; your solemn vows require it. "Give no offence," says the Scripture, "neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." "Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another." "We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably." "When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ." "Wherefore," says the holy Paul, "if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth." To bring the matter home, when in this particular church the feelings and the consciences of officers and members are generally against dancing, when it would fill their hearts with grief to see their brethren engage in it, and when you could forego it without suffering the slightest spiritual loss, would it be right for you to practise it? Would it be consistent with the laws and the vows of Christian fellowship? How could you answer it to your own conscience and to God? Is there not more than a doubt here? "If thy brother be grieved with thy *dancing*, now walkest thou not charitably."

2. Not only is the general sentiment of spiritually-

minded people against a Christian's engaging in the amusement before us, *the general sentiment of the unconverted is against it.* I mean not by this, that the unconverted never argue for the lawfulness of dancing. I mean not that they are displeased to see a Christian in the dancing party or ball-room. They may smile upon him there. His presence may serve as a salvo to their consciences. As religion is thus let down, they may feel the less their distance from it, and their need of it. "What do ye more than others?" they may say in their hearts; their fears may be allayed; and glad even of such poor relief, they may commend an unscrupulous and accommodating piety, while they heap reproaches upon illiberality, bigotry, and superstition. But after all, in a community like ours, there is a deeper and a different sentiment, of which they cannot divest themselves, and there are times and ways in which it will out. The Christian who dances with them, is, after all, in the judgment of their inmost soul, but a poor Christian. Let them be sick unto death, and he is not the man for whom they would send to pray with them. Let the Spirit of God awaken them, and he is not the man to whom they would unbosom themselves, whom they would choose as a guide to the cross. A good dancer, they may deem him—a right graceful and merry dancer—but a poor spiritual helper. They go now to the narrow-minded, the precise, the over-righteous ones, whom in their inmost hearts they have always revered. Does the dancing Christian question this? Let him learn, if he can, the casual remarks which, with all their factitious approval of an easy Christianity, the men of the world now and then throw out respecting his piety; let him know the surprise with which some of them hear, for the first time, that his name is really

upon the church books ; let him note the staring eyes with which they take their first view of him at the communion table—eyes whose gaze seems to say, “ Is Saul also among the prophets ? ” Let him know the peculiar emotions with which they listen to his voice, if indeed they ever do, in the prayer-meeting—the vague impression that he is somehow out of his place—the more distinct idea that his dancing is better than his praying. Let him get but a faint impression of all this, and he will doubt no longer. The unconverted are wicked and worldly enough, but they are not fools. With the light in which they here live, they have a keen discernment of character, a nice perception of what is morally congruous and incongruous. Suppose I had announced to them on this occasion, that instead of discountenancing the amusement under consideration, the pastor of this church, the elders, and deacons, and private members, were all warmly in its favor, were themselves accomplished and indefatigable dancers, would it have raised, or lowered, think you, their respect for us as a church ? How many of them would have hesitated to write “ Ichabod ” upon these walls ? In the mouths of how many of them should we have become a by-word and a reproach ?

In all these remarks we have in mind, of course, not those who are trained up under the inculcations of mere formalism, but those who have been conversant with a spiritual Christianity. If the impenitent, thus taught, do in their hearts condemn the dancing Christian, is it not obvious that his power for good over them is gone, that his example tends to discredit religion in their view, to stupefy their consciences, and to destroy their souls ? And is not a course, not only judged unchristian even by the ungodly, but fitted to exert over them so fatal an influence, a *more than doubtful course* ?

3. In addition to all this testimony against Christians' engaging in dancing, *revivals of religion are against it*. Revivals of religion are excellent tests both of persons and things. That which flourishes best when the love of many waxes cold, is at least to be suspected. And is not this the fact in respect to the amusement in question? There has hardly been a time, for forty years past, when the reviving influences of God's Spirit have been so generally withdrawn, as at the present period; and just at this time is there an almost unprecedented passion for dancing—not confined to the world, but making inroads upon the church. As religion declines, dancing flourishes! And who does not know that the reverse is true? Who ever knew dancing parties and balls to abound in a powerful revival of religion? Just suppose the Spirit of God to descend in might and in glory upon the congregations of this city, the people of God to be filled with love and the spirit of prayer, sinners to be awakened and converted, the cry of anxiety or the song of salvation to be heard in every dwelling. Would not the spirit of dancing be checked? Would Christians, think you, be inclined to dance? But why this result? God's Spirit is a *holy* Spirit; it favors only what is right, and roots out only what is wrong. I cannot refrain from quoting here the reasoning of President Edwards, so like a mathematical demonstration is it. "The flourishing of religion," he says, "has no tendency to abolish or expel any thing that is in no way against religion. That which is not against religion, religion will not appear against. Religion has no tendency to destroy any custom or practice that has no tendency to destroy that. It is a rule that holds in all contraries and opposites;—the opposition is equal on both sides. So contrary as light is to darkness, so con-

trary is darkness to light. It is equal both ways. So, just so contrary as the flourishing of religion is to any custom, just so contrary is that custom to the flourishing of religion. That custom that religion tends to destroy, that custom, if it prevail, tends also to destroy religion. Therefore, if the flourishing of religion, and the outpouring of the Spirit of God, tends to overthrow any custom that takes place or prevails, we may surely determine, that that custom is either in itself sinful, or exposes to evil." To apply this reasoning, if a revival of religion be, as it undeniably is, against the custom of dancing, then is the custom of dancing against a revival of religion, and of course against religion itself. Shall then a professor of religion allow himself in it? Especially while he is praying, "Thy kingdom come;" "O Lord, revive thy work?" Shall he do that which tends to shut out grace not only from his own soul, but from the perishing thousands around him? Can he do it without blood-guiltiness?

4. I pass now to remark, finally, what has been implied in previous arguments, but should be distinctly stated and illustrated, the amusement before us *is, in itself considered, eminently of a worldly character and tendency*. It is of a worldly spirit—it is conformity to the world—worldliness is its legitimate result. This, though in the present argument a crowning view, is also a fundamental one. It touches the core of the evil. There has been much misapprehension as to what that is. Persons disposed to justify dancing, ask often, In what precisely does the evil of it consist? They profess to have made a diligent but unsuccessful search for the sin which is said to pertain to it. Does it lie, say they, in the keys of the piano, the strings of the harp, guitar, or violin, the quavers and semiquavers of the tune, the perpen-

dicular raising of the feet, or the waving lines perpetrated in the dance? In what particular sound, look, attitude, or movement, is the element of evil to be detected? They have analyzed and scrutinized, till with aching eyes they have given over the search. And well they might abandon a search of this sort. It is as if one were to hunt with a microscope after the law of gravitation, or to throw a loadstone into the crucible, expecting to find, by analysis, the principle of magnetism. It is as if sin were a thing to be represented by a diagram, or to be weighed in scales. There are numberless forms of iniquity, in which, by such inquisition, it would be hard to discover evil. In what part precisely of the process of gambling, does its sin consist? Is it in the pasteboard of the cards—the red and black spots on them—the shuffling of the pack—the throwing of one after another upon the table—the laying down of a few pieces of coin, or the taking them up again? The truth is, sin is not so much a matter of outward form, as of spirit and purpose. There are few if any outward forms which are always wrong; there are few if any outward forms which are always right. To determine whether an act or custom is justifiable, we must inquire after the end it contemplates, the affections which engender and pervade it, its subtle, though usually quite discernible moral affinities, relations, and tendencies.

Hence it is, that the Bible is chiefly a book of principles, not of specific statutes. It would be no defence of dancing, or of any other practice, to say, however truly, that it is not specifically forbidden in the Bible. There are sinful acts enough to ruin a thousand worlds, which, though abundantly condemned by general precepts and principles, are nowhere, by name prohibited. And a poor student of the Scriptures is he—not to say a poor

student of natural ethics—a dim apprehension has he of the spirit of Christianity, who can feel no obligation save that of a particular enactment. Too true is it with him, that while the Spirit would make alive, “the letter killeth.” In the words of Peter, “he is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins ;” for the good reason, probably, that such purgation never took place.

Our way is open, then, to show, not that the mere act of dancing is in all possible circumstances and relations wrong, or in what particular part of it sin is deposited; but that in its ordinary form as a fashionable amusement, its spirit, its affinities, its relations, its tendencies, are *worldly*. And this view is of vital importance, touching, as it does, all that is comely in the Christian character, all that is precious in the Christian hope. What takes place when one becomes a Christian? From making creature good his portion, he comes to make God his portion. From loving the world supremely, he comes to love God supremely. Instead of being of the world, he comes out from the world. And what is the great struggle of the Christian life? It is to keep the heart from being drawn back to the world—to keep it on God, its proper centre. Here lies the Christian’s greatest danger. If he depart from Christ, the brief record commonly is, as in the case of Demas—“having loved this present world.” As regeneration is giving up the world, perseverance is keeping clear of the world. On this head, the New Testament is full of injunctions and warnings: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” “Be not conformed to this world.” “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.” “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” “Love not the world, neither the things that are

in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." These precepts, in becoming a Christian, you solemnly engaged to regard. And whatever tends to withdraw your heart from God, and fasten it upon earthly things—no matter how specious its form—you virtually covenanted to avoid. Its tendency is sinful, and especially so, if to avoid it is every way safe. With a heart intent upon God's glory and spiritual good, with a conscience tenderly alive to the slightest sin, how could you do otherwise than avoid it?

Apply this now to the amusement of dancing. By confession of all, it is eminently fascinating. Let a relish for it be acquired, such as springs up readily in the young, and more sober and rational recreations and pursuits become comparatively vapid. There is in it a confluence of sensual delights, tending, almost irresistibly, to carry away the whole heart. Different temperaments may, it is true, be somewhat differently affected; yet of its general influence, no one can doubt who has noted how eagerly it is engaged in, against what obstacles, remonstrances, and reproaches of conscience often, and how reluctantly it is abandoned. Now if the Christian is in danger of worldliness even amidst the ordinary pursuits of life, its gravest and least attractive concerns, in danger of having serious thought dissipated, and his heart stolen away from God, is he not in special danger amidst the allurements and excitements of the dancing party and the ball-room? There, it is to be remembered, he is brought into close intimacy with the worldly; his danger is enhanced by the power of example and of sympathy. Did duty call him there, he might hope for Divine help. But what hope of it when he rushes needlessly into temptation? Nay, how little thought of it on such occasions! I ap-

peal to the consciences of any present who have had experience in these matters,—Do you not feel, in such scenes, that they have no congruity with religion—that there is no religion there?

Let us test this point by a few very practical inquiries. Could you kneel down before going to a ball, and ask God's blessing upon it—pray that he would lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from evil, and keep you “unspotted from the world?” Did you ever do this? And may you engage in that on which you cannot ask God's blessing?—What if in connection with a dancing party, as has been often done among us at other social gatherings, the reading of God's word and prayer were to be proposed? Would it seem suitable to the occasion? Would it not jar upon every heart? But must not that be of very doubtful character, *very worldly*, which the word of God and prayer cannot sanctify?—Would religious conversation seem in place on such an occasion, discourse about God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and death, and heaven? What if, in some pause of the dance, your partner should begin to speak of the worth of the soul, of the preciousness of holiness, of the assurance of hope, of the life of faith; would not utterances like these fill you with amazement? Heard you ever in such a place such utterances? But can there be aught of heaven where heavenly themes must be banished from the lips? May a Christian go where to speak of his Saviour would be deemed incongruous?—Would the thought of dying amid such scenes be pleasant to you? Would it not rather shock you to think of passing from them to the judgment-seat? And may a Christian place himself in circumstances where his lamp cannot be kept trimmed and burning, and he be as one waiting for his Lord?—

When all is over, and with a jaded frame you retire to your chamber, is your heart prepared for devotion? Is not devotion rather often omitted; or if performed at all, performed in so hasty and formal a manner, as to be little else than solemn mockery?

Do I speak to some who still say they have been conscious of no worldly influence from the amusement in question? It is hard, certainly, to reason against consciousness—yet may you not mistake? It may have seemed to you, that in treading the minuet and the cotillon, you have desired more than ever to tread well the pilgrim's path; that in the whirl of the waltz, you have felt more than ever like "crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts." Yet I remember, that the heart is deceitful above all things; that some do not perceive their religion to be injured, just because they have no religion; that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Even if we give credit to so unique and almost miraculous an experience, we cannot reason from it. It is the exception, and not the rule. The general fact is, that dancing Christians are worldly Christians. They are not the persons ever faithful in attendance at the prayer-meeting, ever ready to converse on divine things, ever intent on the salvation of souls, most active and useful in revivals of religion. It is no wonder if they leave the prayer-meeting, and even revival scenes, for the more congenial pleasures of the dancing party or the ball-room.

To the views we have now presented, there are one or two OBJECTIONS, deserving a moment's notice. It is sometimes asked, *Are there not certain passages of Scripture which favor dancing?* It would be strange,

we reply, if there were, when by the spirit, the general principles and precepts of the Bible, it is so decidedly condemned. But what are the alleged passages? No reliance will be placed, surely, on those already referred to, which relate to dancing as an act of worship. Of this class are nearly all the few texts in which there is any mention of it. Yet, be it observed, even on religious occasions among the Jews, the two sexes never mingled in the dance. But, it is asked, Does not Solomon say, "There is a time to dance?" He does indeed, and so his royal father thought, when he danced before the ark. If we take this passage as approving dancing, it would not necessarily sanction any thing more than its religious use. We are not to understand it, however, as speaking of what God *approves*, but only of what, in point of *fact*, by the ordination or permission of his providence, actually takes place, with a congruity, good or evil, manifest to us—or, if you please, with a higher and more mysterious congruity, apparent only to the Divine Mind. Solomon says, in the same connection, to *every thing* there is a season, and a *time to every purpose under the heaven.*" But he means not, certainly, to say, that God *approves* of "every thing;" or that "every purpose under the heaven" is right.—It has been said, also, there was music and dancing at the return of the Prodigal Son. True, but how do you know it was not religious dancing? Perhaps the sisters on this joyful occasion were praising God, as did Miriam the prophetess. Be that as it may, it is only dancing in a parable. In all our Lord's parables, there are a few leading points of instruction, to which the various incidents are merely subservient; they are the mere background of the picture. It would be a violation of all sound rules of interpretation, to regard all these inci-

dents as mentioned with approbation, or held up as examples. Does our Lord, think you, mean to approve of the unjust steward's fraudulent liberties with his master's bills receivable? Would you who are merchants commend such an example to one of your clerks?—Only two other passages occur to me, which have indubitable reference to dancing as an amusement. The first is from the 21st chapter of Job, a part of his description of the wicked, who “say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?” These persons, he says, “send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance.” Perhaps they had them instructed in a dancing school. But none of us, I am sure, will plead such a precedent. Still less help would the advocate of the amusement in question find, in the other scripture referred to,—the account of the profligate Herodias, who danced her father out of his senses, and John the Baptist into a martyr's grave.

It may be further asked by the objector, *Would you proscribe all recreations?* Do not your views tend to that issue? By no means, we reply. Yet should the Christian use them with great caution, and with a constant regard to the spirit and principles of his high vocation. “Is any merry,” says the Apostle, “let him sing psalms.” If he express not his gladness in praise alone, let him at least do it in a way consistent with praise. I know not how better to exhibit my views on this point, than by quoting from the holy Baxter:—“Recreations,” he says, “are lawful and useful, if thus qualified:—1. If the matter of them be not forbidden; for there is no sporting with sin. 2. If we have an holy Christian end in them; that is, to fit our bodies and minds for the service

of God, and do not do it principally to please the flesh. If, without dissembling our hearts, we can say, I would not meddle with this recreation, if I thought I could have my body and mind as well strengthened and fitted for God's service without it. 3. If we use not recreations without need, as to the said end; and so do not cast away any of our precious time on them in vain. 4. If they be not uncivil, excessively costly, cruel, or accompanied with the like unlawful accidents. 5. If they contain not more probable incentives to vice than to virtue; as to covetousness, lust, passion, profaneness, &c. 6. If they are not like to be more hurtful to the souls of others that join with us, than profitable to us. 7. If they be not like to do more hurt by offending any that are weak or dislike them, than good to us that use them. 8. If they be used seasonably, in a time that they hinder not greater duties. 9. If we do it not in company unfit for us to join with. 10. Especially, if we make a right choice of recreations, and when divers are before us, we take the best; that which is least offensive, least expensive of time and cost, and which best furthereth the health of our bodies, with the smallest inconvenience." "These rules being observed," adds Baxter,—and were he to come back from heaven, who of us supposes he would alter them,—“recreations are as lawful as sleep, or food, or physic.” There are forms enough of recreation, which by these rules would be allowed; but there are many others that would be condemned, and by some of them certainly, the fashionable amusement of dancing.

Such is our argument against Christians engaging in this amusement. *It is safe to omit it—it is not safe to practise it. The general sentiment of the pious is against it—the general sentiment of the unconverted is against it.*

Revivals of religion are against it, and it, of course, is against them. In its spirit, affinities and tendencies, it is eminently worldly. It is conformity to the world; it not only springs from, but fosters worldliness. If half what has been advanced be correct, is there not at least a doubt on the subject? And if he that *doubteth* is damned if he dance, what shall we say of him who dances *against a moral certainty*. It is bad enough to sin ignorantly—worse to sin *doubtingly*—more fearful still to sin **WILFULLY!**

I have, indeed, on this subject, used great plainness of speech; but I watch for your souls as one that must give account. By my Pastoral vows I am constrained to warn you—to warn especially young Professors. Keep clear of this amusement, for your own soul's sake, for Christ's sake, for the sake of your solemn vows, and of dying sinners around you. It will be to your own souls and to the cause of Christ, "evil, and only evil, and that continually." Go not, even as a *spectator*, to the social gathering in which you know it is to be practised. What you cannot lawfully engage in, you may not sanction by your presence; no, not though there be some thin partition between you and the dancers. It is only a wooden partition, not a moral one. Let not a specious misnomer deceive you, as "a patriotic ball," "a charity ball," "a temperance ball." There are obvious reasons why these public balls should be specially shunned. I would warn unconverted youth to avoid this amusement, as a "snare of the fowler," as one of the most potent spells of the god of this world. I warn parents, to have a care over their children in this matter, and if need be, to "command them." Be not even persuaded, by a delusive sophistry—by vain talk about their acquiring grace—to send them to the dancing school. Seek

first for them the grace of God, and never fear but they will have enough of earthly grace. Why should they *acquire* an art which they may not *practise*? When acquired, *will* they not practise it? Will the heart of childhood resist fascinations, which master even manhood and womanhood? Can you forbid them to practise, what you have bidden them learn? Do you not in this case, what is as the letting out of waters? With your consciences, my hearers, and with God, I leave this whole subject. To some of you, possibly, my views may seem needlessly rigid. But they will not seem so, I am sure, when the vanities of earth are remembered as a dream, and we stand together at the judgment-seat of Christ.

