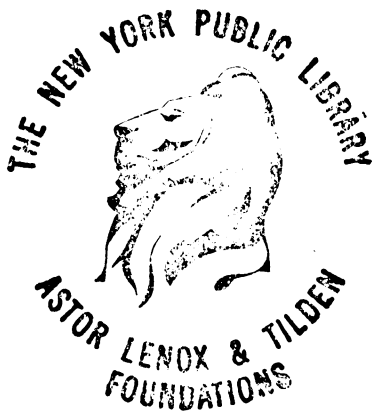


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DANCING.

A DISCOURSE

OF THE

FASHIONABLE AMUSEMENT OF DANCING.

DELIVERED IN THE

First Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati,

ON

SABBATH EVENING, NOV. 26, 1854.

BY

SAMUEL R. WILSON, PASTOR.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SESSION OF SAID CHURCH.

CINCINNATI:

BEN FRANKLIN STEAM PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT, NO. 95 WALNUT STREET.
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“Nemo fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit.”—CICERO.

“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; but rather reprove them.”—PAUL.

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* * * * *

"I stood amazed, and blushed for human kind,
 When on my ears a strain of music broke,
 Melting in soft, harmonious cadences;
 I looked, and on a platform raised on high,
 Beheld a lady beauteous as the dawn,
 Dancing in robes of white and azure gauze;
 Her breast was bare; her limbs nor bare, nor hid,
 But full defined through her transparent robes,
 Filled the beholders with voluptuous thoughts,
 She seemed to float upon the buoyant air,
 To be a creature of an element
 More spiritual than earth; and when she smiled
 There was such witchery in her painted cheeks,
 That all the crowd, entranced with great delight,
 And quite forgetful of their past distress,
 Shouted with loud acclaim, and clapped their hands;
 And when she twirl'd upon her pliant toe,
 One fair limb vertical, the other raised
 To horizontal straightness; such a burst
 Of irrepressible, overpowering joy,
 Filled all the air, it seemed as men were mad,
 And dancing were supremest bliss of earth;—
 The fairest dancer, first of womankind;
 Then as she curtsied with a winning look
 To her idolaters, a shower of wreaths,
 Garlands, and evergreens, and laurel crowns,
 Fell all around her, and another burst
 Of universal gladness rang around."—VISION OF MOCKERY.

DISCOURSE.

“A TIME TO DANCE.”—ECCL., III. 4.

TIME is a term commonly used to indicate the measure of motion, or to signify the duration of anything. This is its primary import. But there is a secondary sense in which it is employed to convey the idea of opportunity, the favorable or fitting occasion for doing anything or forbearing to do it. The use of the term in this secondary sense is not unusual in the inspired writings. As Eccl. viii. 5, “A wise man’s heart discerneth both *time* (the proper or favorable occasion for doing or not doing a thing) and judgment.” It is by some supposed, that the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes designed the word, as used in these verses, from which my text is taken, to be understood as meaning a fitting occasion. “*To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*” That is, there is an opportunity, both favorable and suitable, afforded to man in the course of his life for performing or ceasing to do whatever he may purpose or choose that comes within the range of his capacities. The language therefore implies the lawfulness and propriety of the several things particularly enumerated. “A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.” That is, there are occasions in the course of man’s his-

tory, when it is lawful for him to take life away, and again there are other occasions when it is his duty to endeavor to preserve it, if imperilled by disease. There are occasions in which it is fit and proper that men should shed tears of mourning, and again there are occasions which call for hilarity, and render it right and becoming for them to dance.

But there is another way of explaining the mode of expression in this passage, which is more in accordance with the evident design of the writer. This explanation confines the word *time* to its more strict meaning and considers it as equivalent to the word *period*. In this view Solomon is understood as merely affirming that certain things actually occur in human history without any reference to the lawfulness or unlawfulness, the fitness or unfitness of these things. There is a time—a period during which men actually do mourn, and then there comes another period in which they are found rejoicing in the dance. He is speaking of the mutability of human affairs, the inconstancy of man's condition. He is painfully affected in contemplating the fact well known and ever newly confirmed by bitter experiences, that the history of man is a history of the most singular vicissitudes. Now he is enjoying life and anon he is at the gate of death. One while he is at the pinnacle of prosperity, the next moment he is tumbled down into the abyss of poverty. To-day the welling tide of grief finds vent only in bitter sobs and scalding tears; to-morrow forgetful of his sorrow he is whirling in the giddy dance amid mirth and laughter. Such is the changeful life of man; and of this fact the Holy Spirit here speaks, as full of instruction to the considerate. But as respects the specific changes instanced, there is

nothing here determined as to whether they are proper or improper, right or wrong. So that it is plainly a mere frivolous wresting of the Scriptures which those are guilty of, who allege anything from this place as giving sanction to the indulgence of their hate or their lusts.

I will not, however, at present insist upon the interpretation of this Scripture, just given, as the only correct one. So far as relates to the words selected as a foundation for the present discourse, you may consider them as not only containing the statement of a fact, but also that in this statement there is an implied admission that there is a fitting season for the doing of the thing here mentioned. In other words, I mean to admit not merely that there is a time when men do dance, but that there is a time when they may dance without impropriety.

Having made this admission, it will be necessary to add some further remarks in the way of explanation of the word *to dance*, as it is made use of in the Scriptures. For it would be a great mistake for any one to suppose that it imports that fashionable amusement so much admired and so constantly indulged in by the gay world. So far is this from being the case, that in our text it is not expressive of any kind of amusement at all, but is simply equivalent to the word rejoice, without having any particular regard to the precise manner in which this rejoicing may find expression. This is manifest, both from the antithesis in which the term is put with the word to mourn, and also from the the parallism of the two clauses of the verse. In the first clause, laughing is opposed to weeping, and in the last clause mourning to dancing; and the plain, simple

idea conveyed by the whole is, that there is a time for sadness and a time for joy. So David says, (Ps. xxx. 11,) "*Thou hast turned for me my MOURNING into DANCING: thou hast put off my SACKCLOTH and girded me with GLADNESS.*" And Jeremiah expresses his own and Israel's melancholy reverses, by saying (Lam. v. 15) "*The joy of our heart is ceased; our DANCE is turned into MOURNING.*"

The words *dance, dances, danced* and *dancing*, are found in the English version of the Bible twenty-six times. Of these five are in the New Testament, and the rest in the Old. There are four different Hebrew words which our translators have rendered occasionally by the word *dance*.¹

The simple idea fundamental to all these words and that which they all convey is that of lively motion either by leaping, jumping, bounding, skipping, whirling round and round, or reeling to and fro. They do not of themselves determine whether these motions are regular according to some studied method, or governed merely by the sudden and irregular impulse of feeling.

1. These are, 1: חננים—from the verb חננ *in gyrum agitatus est; festum celebravit.*—LEOPOLD. *Circularity of motion or form.*—PARKHURST. *To move in a circle.*—ROBINSON'S GESENIUS. 2: כרכר—from כרר, *subsiliit.*—L. *To go round in a circuit.*—P. *To move in a circle.*—R. G. The motion being like the frisking motions of a lamb, or the skipping of a camel. 3: רקק—*saliit.*—L. *To leap, or jump; to pound, as chariots when running swiftly over rough places.*—P. and R. G. 4: מחול—from חול, *in gyrum agi, saltare.*—L. *To make a hole by boring; hence a wind instrument of music with holes, like the flute.*—P. *To turn round or twist, to whirl.*—R. G. Upon this word Parkhurst remarks, "It is often, in our translation, rendered *dance*, but this is rather implied than expressed in the word."

As to this point all that can, with any certainty be said is, that when used in connection with music, either instrumental or vocal, it is natural to suppose that the motions of the body indicated by them were so regulated as to keep time with the music. And this seems to be the proper signification of the two Greek words in the N. T., which are translated *dance*. The one *μεχισαοθη* (Matt. xi. 17; xiv. 6.) meaning any dance to the sound of music; and the other *χορω* (Luke, xv. 25.) a choral dance, in which a chorus or choir of singers or players upon instruments kept time with the motions of their feet or bodies to the strains of the music. It is in this fact that we discover the reason why the English translators made use of the terms they have, in endeavoring as nearly as possible to convey the exact idea contained in the original. For the verb *to dance*, in our tongue, signifies "To make certain motions or movements with the feet, corresponding to the sound and tune of music."² Yet it is necessary to observe if we would avoid attaching wrong notions to those places in Scripture where dancing is mentioned, that we must dissociate from the word those ideas which have their origin in the practices of modern times.

It may assist in the right understanding of this matter to bring into one view the several passages in which this exercise is mentioned. The first is in Exod. xv. 20, where we are told that when the children of Israel were engaged in singing the song of triumph over the Egyptian host upon the banks of the Red Sea, "Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with

2. Richardson's Dictionary.

timbrels and with dances." The next instance is recorded in Exod. xxxii. 19, and is a part of the narrative of Israel's idolatrous worship before the golden calf. "*And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the Mount.*" In Judges, xi. 34, we read that as Jephthah returned from the slaughter of the Ammonites to his house at Mizpeh, "*his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances,*" in honor of the victory her father had obtained over the enemies of Israel. When the strife between the other tribes and little Benjamin had come to an open war, and after a protracted and bloody struggle there remained but a handful of that heroic tribe, in order to prevent its utter extinction, and at the same time to preserve inviolate the oath which had been sworn by the rest of the nation, not to give their daughters in marriage to the men of Benjamin, it was arranged that the children of Benjamin should take advantage of a festival which the daughters of Shiloh celebrated, and lying concealed when they came out to dance in dances, should seize upon them and carry them into their own land as their wives. (Judges, xxi. 21, 23.) When David had met and slain the Philistine, Goliath, the giant of Gath who defied the armies of Israel, as he returned from the field of battle with the victorious host, "the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music." (1 Sam. xviii. 6.) When upon another occasion the Amalekites had made an incursion into the southern part of Judah, and David, guided by an Egyptian servant, who

had been left behind by the party, came up with them, he found them "*spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking and dancing, (reeling as drunken men,) because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah.*" (1 Sam. xxx. 16.) During the religious ceremonies attending the removal of the ark of the covenant from the house of Obed-Edom into the city of David; the king, elated at the propitious event, and filled with pious enthusiasm, "*danced before the Lord with all his might,*" girded with a linen ephod. (2 Sam. vi. 14. 16. 1 Chr. xv. 29.) In the New Testament two instances of dancing are mentioned, one on the occasion of keeping the birth-day of Herod, when "*the daughter of Herodias danced* (*ὑπέταξε*) before them and pleased Herod." (Matt., xiv. 6.) The other is in the story of the Prodigal son, whose return was indicated to his elder brother by the joyous sound of music and *dancing*, (*χοῳδοῖα*) which he heard as he drew near to the house. (Luke, xv. 25.) In that graphic delineation of the character and conduct of the prosperous wicked, who say unto God "*Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways,*" which is given in the book of Job, we are told that "*They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance.*" (Job, xxi. 11.) The Prophet Jeremiah, in depicting the future glory and beauty and joy of the Church, says, "*Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.*" * * "*Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their*

sorrow." (Jer. xxxi. 4. 13.) And twice in the Book of Psalms a command is given and a call made to men to praise God "*in the dance.*" (Ps. cxlix. 3. cl. 4.)

Now in all these instances, with two, or at most three exceptions, it is perfectly evident that the dancing spoken of was not promiscuous between the sexes. The only two cases in which it might be contended with any plausibility that the dancers consisted of persons of both sexes are, first, that of the profane multitude who tempted God at the foot of Horeb; as it is written "*the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play:*" and, second, that godless crowd who, as they revel in luxury and pleasure, impiously ask, "*What is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit should we have if we pray unto him?*" It would not at all surprise me, if one should find evidence, that the dancing of the persons described in these verses, was in some respects closely similar to the promiscuous movements of male and female dancers in the parlors and ball-rooms of modern fashionable society. At all events, however in other respects they may be dissimilar, in this surely they very well agree, that, for the most part, they fear not God, neither regard the operation of his hands. The terrors of the holy and fiery law of God, have not more effect to restrain the lusts of the laughing crowd that in midnight dances pay their devotions to some warrior hero, than did the thunder and flame of Sinai as it smoked and quaked beneath Jehovah's tread, to deter idolatrous Israel from the mad worship of the golden calf.

In the Scriptures, whenever dancing is spoken of with any intimation of its being approved, it is as a religious exercise; not promiscuous, but performed mainly,

if not exclusively, by select bands of females; not resembling in any wise the revellings of modern society, except that the motions of the body were regulated, to some extent, by the sound of music. "The character of the ancient dance," says Kitto, "was very different from that of ours, as appears from the conduct of Miriam, who took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. Precisely similar is the Oriental dance of the present day, which, accompanied of course with music, is led by the principal person of the company, the rest imitating the steps. The evolutions, as well as the songs, are extemporaneous—not confined to a fixed rule, but varied at the pleasure of the leading dancer; and yet they are generally executed with so much grace, and the time so well kept with the simple notes of the music, that the group of attendants show wonderful address and propriety in following the variations of the leader's feet."³ Amongst the Greeks, such a band of of singers and dancers were styled the *χορὸς*—chorus—choir: and it was a company of either hired or voluntary performers (probably servants of the household,) composing such a chorus that is meant, when in the story of the Prodigal son it is said, the elder brother as he drew near to the house heard within the sound of "music and dancing."

"At a very early period" says Kitto again, "dancing was enlisted into the service of religion among the heathen; the dance, enlivened by vocal and instrumental music, was a usual accompaniment in all the processions and festivals of the gods (Strabo); and indeed

3. Cyclopaedia of Bib. Lit., Art. *Dancing*.

so indispensable was this species of violent merriment, that no ceremonial was considered duly accomplished—no triumph rightly celebrated without the aid of dancing.”⁴ “Dancing,” says Anthon, “was common among the Romans in ancient times in connection with religious festivals and rites, and was practiced, according to Servius, because the ancients thought that no part of the body should be free from the influence of religion.” “Dancing, however, was not performed by any Roman citizens, except in connection with religion; and it is only in reference to such dancing that we are to understand the statements that the ancient Romans did not consider dancing disgraceful, and that not only freemen, but the sons of senators and noble matrons practiced it. In the later times of the Republic we know that it was considered highly disgraceful for a freeman to dance: Cicero reproaches Cato for calling Murena a dancer, and adds “*Nemo fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit.*”⁵

It is evident, therefore, that anciently, dancing was ranked along with other methods of religious worship, and only so far esteemed becoming the dignity of man as it could be made subservient to the quickening his pious affections into greater activity, or to the giving fuller play to those affections when highly excited. For such purposes it was made use of by the Jews upon extraordinary occasions; such as the victory over the Philistines, when they rendered praise to God for delivering them from their invaders; or upon the more ordinary occasion of their annual religious and national

4. Cyclopaedia of Bib. Lit., Art. *Dancing*.

5. Anthon, Diet. Greek and Roman Antiq., Art. *Saltatio*.

festivals; or in the temple service. And an exercise of this sort was in perfect harmony with the other splendid and complicated ceremonials of that gorgeous ritual, which was instituted for the preservation and instruction of the church during the period of her minority, and under an administration which served only as a shadow of good things to come. But since the handwriting of those burdensome ordinances was blotted out by Jesus Christ, when he nailed them to the tree, and a more enlarged administration, as well as a simpler worship has taken place in the church, choral dancing no longer seems appropriate in the sanctuary, nor was it ever made a part of the religious exercises of the primitive Christians. Their feelings of religious joy found utterance in psalms and hymns of praise, chanted to the simplest tunes, agreeably to the direction of the Apostle "*Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*"

If, however, any are not content with adhering to the simplicity of manners and of worship which adorned the profession of the first Christians, but will insist that as our text affirms, so there certainly is "*a time to dance,*" I will not dispute the matter with them further, but will admit it to be so. I will agree that there are times and seasons when men may perhaps do well to praise God in the dance; as did Miriam upon the shores of the Red Sea, or David, when he danced before the Ark of God, even at the risk of being despised as one of the "*vain fellows.*"

Let us say then that a time to dance is such as this;

1. When in answer to fervent and importunate prayer, God removes affliction or calamity from a person, a family, a church or a Commonwealth. In such a change there is oftentimes produced so great a re-ac-

tion of feeling in the soul, from deep depression to exuberance of joy, that it is with difficulty the transition can be credited as real. One is ready to take up as their own the song of the pilgrims from Babylon—“When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream; then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. * * The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.” And the ecstasy of delight which fills the heart of the released mourner finds expression in singing, and shouting, and laughing, and dancing.

2. When upon a soul that has been walking in darkness God lifts up the light of his countenance, and after having for a season withdrawn the sensible evidences of his favor, restores again to him the joys of salvation. Now the reclaimed and revived saint may take down his unstrung harp from the willows, and tuning it anew to the songs of Zion, go forth in the dance of them that rejoice in the Lord who gives light in darkness, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

3. When the devices of those that devise evil counsel against the church are brought to naught, and the enemies of Christ and his people are broken and scattered, and their power for harm destroyed. Let the victory thus granted to his church call forth the highest tribute of praise to Him that sits and rules as King in Zion; let Miriam seize once more her timbrel and lead the dance of the daughters of Israel, whilst they sing to Jehovah who triumphs gloriously over all his foes.

4. When the Prodigal, who has wasted his substance in riotous living, thinks upon his ways with peniten-

tial sorrow, and returns from his wandering in the paths of folly and sin, back to his heavenly Father's house; then celebrate the happy event with music and dancing, for it is meet to make merry and be glad when the dead are alive and the lost are found. Yes, such an event claims at our hands unwonted demonstrations of joy, for it is an event that thrills the celestial choir, and strings their harps anew. A soul emancipated from the slavery of sin. A criminal, condemned to die, freely and fully pardoned. A sinner saved. A child of hell made an heir of heaven. Surely a change so strange, so great, may well cause the "*lame man to leap as a hart, and make the tongue of the dumb sing.*" The penitent prodigal, the pardoned sinner, the reconciled believer, if he will, may leap and dance, whilst he sings in chorus with a gladsome church,

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see."

If these be the occasions when it is fitting that men should praise God in the dance, then may I not safely decide when it is *not* a time to dance? Surely it is not a time to dance when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. When the hearts of men are failing them because of those things that are coming upon the world—when the ways of Zion mourn because few come to her solemn feasts—when the quickening power of the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from the church—when men are hastening in mad and careless crowds to the judgment bar of heaven without Christ, and having no hope in the world. Shall a nation to whom God is speaking in wrath, as he scatters upon it 'the burning coals of

pestilence, or hurls against it the thunder-bolts of war—shall such a nation dance? Shall men condemned to eternal death, with the burning pit of Hell before them, and avenging Justice swift pursuing them—shall such men make merry? Ah, no! The voice of reason, of conscience, of Scripture, of God's Spirit, all—all call such to mourning instead of dancing—to sackcloth instead of feasting.

These, however, are not the only results at which we arrive from a careful and candid examination of the Bible teachings upon the subject under discussion. There are other and not less important conclusions to which these teachings inevitably lead us, touching that dancing which is practiced to so large an extent in every circle of society; from the imported Italian or French danseuse, the admired star of the Opera or the Theatre, who, Salome like, turns at once the heads of Princes and of fops, down through the whole range of ball-room revelers, holiday soldiers, pleasure-loving philanthropists, elegant and accomplished beaux and belles in respectable christian parlors, until we reach the wild midnight wake of the miserable Irish hovel, or the bacchanalian orgies of the public stew. And what are these conclusions? I answer,

FIRST.—*That no countenance is afforded by the Word of God to the practice of this Fashionable amusement.* It is more unlike that religious exercise which is spoken of in the Scriptures, heretofore explained, as sacred to the worship of God, than are the psalms of David, or the Song of songs to the odes of Anacreon or of Horace. It has its counterpart not in the graceful though un-studied movements of the sister of Moses, prompted by the impulse of pious emotion, but in the voluptuous

pantomime of the daughter of Herodias impelled by vanity and leading to crime. It is a corrupt and corrupting practice, derived to modern society from the public games and private amusements of the Greeks and Romans, at which slaves and courtesans entertained the spectators and guests with an exhibition of their persons and their skill, in dances, scarcely less indecent than the *pas de deux* of a common theatrical performance, or the immodest waltz of a social parlor party of five hundred particular friends. Without the least hesitation it may be affirmed, that this fashionable amusement, as taught by French Monsieurs and Mesdames, whether to children or grown up boys and girls, and as indulged in by a thoughtless world, at soirees, at fairs, at weddings or at balls, belongs to the forbidden category of "*chambering and wantonness*," which the Spirit of God has associated with "*rioting and drunkenness*."

SECOND.—*This amusement can never with propriety be participated in by Christians.* This proposition would appear to be so necessary a corollary from what has already been said, as to require no further proof. Is this amusement but the remnant of the licentious customs of heathenism, an exercise which it was reserved for slaves and courtesans alone to cultivate; is it so utterly devoid of countenance from the holy word of God, and does it necessarily imply the making of provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof; then surely one might suppose that no Christian could regard it as a thing in which he could innocently participate. But nevertheless there are Christians who can see no harm, they say, in mere dancing; who think people must have some such recreation; who go into ecstasies of delight at the charming sight of the little ones whom God has

given them to be trained for heaven, whirling amid the fascinating mazes of the *petit bal*. Christians, who are oftener seen at the dancing party, than at the prayer meeting; and who, though they cannot stand upright during a ten minutes prayer in the house of God, can keep upon their feet to the sound of the piano or fiddle until the dawning of the morning. Christians, who never could understand why the ministers of the gospel should be so uncompromising toward the world, and not make piety more attractive by showing that it is not incompatible with pleasure. For the sake of this class of professing Christians, as well as to disabuse the gospel we preach, from the charge of being opposed to real enjoyment, it is proper to assign some special additional reasons in support of the opinion we entertain as announced in the proposition, that *a Christian cannot with PROPRIETY participate in the fashionable amusement of dancing.*

1ST. It is beyond all contradiction, and by way of eminence known to be a worldly amusement. It belongs to the men and women of this world by long prescriptive right. It cannot be placed along side of those things which all men have in common with each other, and the doing or not doing of which in no wise marks a Christian as distinguished from another man. This amusement may not be classed with conversation or reading, with walking, jumping, riding, hunting and some less athletic recreations. It does not stand on a footing with some children's plays, which enliven the domestic fire-side. It belongs to the same class of dissipating recreations as horse-racing, card-playing and theatrical exhibitions. I know there are professing Christians who esteem these last named amusements as

harmless, and whose consciences are no hindrance to their occupying a box at the theatre, or taking a hand at whist. But how little difference the man of the world recognizes between himself and such professors, we know but too well. What remains to show that the Christian has renounced the vanities of the world, and been crucified to its follies, when the hand of a godless partner has been accepted for the next reel or polka? Alas! she who has been whirling round the ball-room for half the night clasped by the hands of some flattering debauchee, needs, methinks, to spend many days of fasting and penitential sorrow before she comes again to handle and taste of the body and blood of the crucified Jesus. The sad experiences of not a few wanderers, who still remember with shame and tears the steps of their back-slidings, more than sufficiently attest the correctness of what I have said.

2ND. Those who engage in this amusement with most avidity, and advocate it with greatest zeal, do not propose to praise or worship God in it. It may safely be affirmed that the vast majority of such persons so far from esteeming the honor of God in what they do, curse him in their hearts. The God that made them, and before whom they must shortly appear to give an account of the deeds done in the body, is not in all their thoughts. They love the dance all the more because it helps them to forget him, and they can so easily drown all serious thoughts of "a judgment to come" in the intoxication of pleasure. And the sight of those whom they know to be professed followers of Christ mingling in the giddy throng with themselves, only serves to render the task an easier one. This is a fact attested

by too many sad examples to be disputed. No one ever went to a dancing party with the expectation of having his religious affections quickened into new life. Did any one ever return from the excitement of such a party without feeling that those affections were chilled? But supposing that here and there one may be found who, in the midst of such scenes, is unseduced, the vigor of his piety remaining unimpaired, these form only the exception, the usual effect remains the same. Thoughts of eternity suit not with the unbridled gaiety of the cotillion party; and men who are considered exemplary for godly living are not often named as floor-managers upon such occasions. The duties of that post suit much better to those who "Have cast off fear and restrain prayer before God." Who sneer at the rigidness of puritanic piety, and think apostolic Christianity "a religion unfit for a gentleman."

3RD. This amusement, as practiced, is highly injurious to health. I mention this because not a few are beguiled into sending their children to dancing schools, through the influence of those that represent it as a healthful recreation. Now this plea might have in it some force, if this exercise was performed in the open air, and in the ordinary dress of every day life. But how far otherwise it is, every body very well knows. The thin dress, the tightly laced corset, the heated room, the oppressed atmosphere, the unnatural hours, all tell of disease and death, instead of health-bringing relaxation. Surely it is not rosy-cheeked health that keeps the entrance to those places where youth and beauty assemble to spend the wakeful hours of night in dissipation; no, it is CONSUMPTION with gaunt and pallid

form, that stands sentinel there, breathing his icy, poisonous breath upon the face of the laughing crowd.⁶

I remember to have heard a gentleman of some literary fame, whose name is familiar to you all, in a Lecture in this city not long since, very wittily indeed, describe those who objected to dancing as an amusement, as "a long-faced and sour-visaged" set of fellows. The stroke of humor was given apparently with great satisfaction to the artist, and was received with no small merriment by the audience. Now, without disputing the correctness of the picture, nor stopping to suggest that it is not unlikely many of the persons thus flippantly disposed of would readily challenge a comparison with the most rotund visaged, giggling dancer, in the matter of substantial enjoyment of the sweets of domestic and social life, it may admit of a fair question, whether, in so far as respects every thing essential to man's true dignity and high destiny, a "long face" is not more becoming than a bloated one, and a sad or sour visage to one which dissipation has rendered haggard, pale, effeminate or sottish. Give me the tearful eye of the

6. "As a hygienic method it is obnoxious to several strictures. *First:* It partakes too largely of the character of an amusement to admit of sufficient muscular exertion, without generating a love of pleasure; which, once established, will render all exercise, not productive of immediate enjoyment, tasteless and irksome. Thus, this kind of exercise may be said to be self-limited. *Second:* Children and young persons, when prepared for dancing school or dancing parties, are generally dressed in a way that is unfavorable to the free action of their limbs; and, what is of far greater moment, of the muscles of respiration. *Third:* They are crowded into an apartment where the air is heated and impure; and often too, at night, during the very hours when they ought, according to their physiology, to be asleep. *Fourth:* Some, who have frail and delicate nervous systems, are injured by the music so long acting upon them. *Fifth:* They are all liable to be injured by the eating and drinking which too often prevail. Dancing, in fact, is much more a means of disciplining the muscles, than of giving them vigor. As a method of exercise in childhood and youth, it is insufficient; and as a method of amusement, in after years, it is neglected by those, who, physiologically speaking, most require it."—Drake's Diseases of the Valley of North America. Vol. 1. pp. 698, 699.

praying saint, before the bloodshot, languid look of the devotee of lust. If my face must be marked with premature furrows and my vigor exhausted by midnight watchings, let my vigils be like those of the Man of sorrows, and not such as are kept by the worshippers at fashion's meretricious shrine.

4TH. The promiscuous dance is incompatible with modesty. This remark may be applied to the children's dance in the parlor, and to the dancing of grown up men and women in other places, according to the measure of each. The evil indeed, begins in the dancing school, which, instead of being called a school of easy manners, ought rather to be styled a place where girls are taught to substitute the finesse of the coquette for true female delicacy, and boys take their primary lessons in the art of seduction.

But suppose we yield you these two points, and except in your favor the dancing school, and the social parlor quadrille, would you be satisfied? Will you stop here? Can you assure us or yourselves that your children will be content with this amount of indulgence?⁷ Have you spent so much money in having them taught this very desirable accomplishment, and now shall they not have liberty to show how attentive they have been to their culture, and what proficiency they have made? Shall the little boys and girls dance, and not the young men and maidens, the old men and matrons? No one can sincerely expect a condition of things like this. Why then do so many people plead for the innocence of having children taught this accomplishment, and permitting well-regulated dances at weddings and tea-

7. This experiment has more than once been tried; with what sort of success let the sad regrets of over-indulgent parents and Pastors bear witness.

parties, yet pretend a pious disapprobation of ball-room and theatre dancing? Is not dancing the same thing in effect every where? Are not the same steps, the same bodily movements, the same dances taught in the school that are practiced on the stage? Why then should Mary, grown to woman's years, be blamed for practicing what the child, Mary, was taught to love and call an elegant accomplishment?

"Strange such a difference should be
'Twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee."

The truth is, if the dancing you condemn is immodest and improper, that which you approve is so too. And it is in this view of the matter that it has long been agreed by eminent christian men, that an indulgence in this amusement is inconsistent with that purity which is required by the seventh commandment. Hence, in the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly, under the list of particular sins forbidden by that commandment, "*lascivious dancings*" are included. How justly entitled to this denomination are the most fashionable dances of the present day, I submit to the candid judgment of every Christian who knows any thing on the subject. I do not say that no one can be chaste or modest who dances. But that there is an incompatibility, an incongruity between that delicate modesty which ought ever to characterize the intercourse of the sexes, and the promiscuous dances now so almost universal, I unhesitatingly affirm. Whether it be that most lascivious of all exhibitions, the ballet dancing of a French Opera, or the vile round of polkas and waltzes⁸ performed by young and old at

8. THE WALTZ.—"As many of the retired matrons of this city, unskilled in "gestic lore," are doubtless ignorant of the movements and figures of this modest

parties and weddings, makes small odds. All must be alike hurtful to true purity of heart; all ought to be abhorred by him that would follow the command of Paul to "Flee youthful lusts," and by her that would heed the charge of the Apostle to Christian women "to adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety."

5TH. Indulgence in this amusement is inconsistent with that Christian sobriety, vigilance and prayerfulness, to which we are called by our circumstances, in the midst of a world that lies in wickedness, and in view of the near approach of death and judgment. "Watch and pray" said Christ to his disciples "lest ye enter into temptation." "Watch, therefore, for ye

exhibition, I will endeavor to give some account of it in order that they may learn what odd capers their daughters sometimes cut when from under their guardian wings. On a signal being given by the music, the gentleman seizes the lady round her waist; the lady scorning to be outdone in courtesy, very politely takes the gentleman round the neck, with one arm resting against his shoulder to prevent encroachments. Away then they go, about, and about, and about—"About what, sir?" About the room, madame, to be sure. The whole economy of this dance consists in turning round andround the room in a certain measured step, and it is truly astonishing that this continued revolution does not set all their heads swimming like a top; but I have been positively assured that it only occasions a gentle sensation, which is marvellously agreeable. In the course of this circumnavigation, the dancers, in order to give the charm of variety are continually changing their relative situations—now the gentleman, meaning no harm in the world, I assure you, madame, carelessly flings his arm about the lady's neck, with an air of celestial impudence; and anon, the lady meaning as little harm as the gentleman, takes him round the waist with most ingenious, modest languishment, to the great delight of numerous spectators and amateurs, who generally form a ring, as the mob do about a pair of Amazons pulling caps, or a couple of fighting mastiffs. After continuing this divine interchange of hands, arms, et cetera, for half an hour or so, the lady begins to tire, and "with eyes upraised," in most bewitching languor, petitions her partner for a little more support. This is always given without hesitation. The lady leans gently on his shoulder; their arms entwine in a thousand seducing, mischievous curves—don't be alarmed, madame—closer and closer they approach each other, and in conclusion, the parties being overcome with ecstatic fatigue, the lady seems almost sinking into the gentleman's arms, and then—"Well, sir! what then?" (Why madame, how should I know?)—WASHINGTON IRVING.

know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." "Let us," says Paul "who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation." "Be sober, be vigilant;" says Peter, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." And again, "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer."

With such admonitions and warnings sounding in their ears, how can Christians plunge headlong into the dissipations of an unfriendly world? Men are continually undone by things that are beyond all doubt lawful and even necessary. Why then increase the perils of immortal souls, by giving sanction to things, in themselves, at least of questionable propriety? Intoxicating pleasures, possessing a power of fascination, by far the fewest number have strength to resist. Oh, Christians, if you have any compassion for dying souls, for their sakes "be not conformed to this world."

6TH. If professing Christians are seen engaging in the giddy dance, unconverted men will take occasion, from their conduct, to scoff at the religion they profess, and to contemn the name of Christ. It is only to practice a delusion upon oneself for any to indulge the thought that it can be otherwise. I cannot well imagine a more speedy method of teaching a careless young man to despise the Christian name, than for some female acquaintance, whom he has seen at the communion table, to become his partner in the dance. Nor is any thing probably more usual in such a case, than for those who look on, quietly to pass the ungracious whisper, "See that pious dancer—why she waltzes as if she had been

accustomed to it—she seems to love it as much as any of us poor sinners—a pretty Christian to be sure.” This is no fancy sketch, they know little of the world who suppose it to be so; for that which Cicero did not hesitate to call “*omnium vitiorum extremum*, a vice that no one would be guilty of till he had utterly abandoned all virtue; and *umbram luxurice*, that which follows riot and debauchery, as the shadow follows the body;”⁹ I take it is now in the middle of the nineteenth century well understood by unconverted men, not to consist with what ought reasonably to be looked for in genuine Christian character.¹⁰

For reasons like these, of the soundness of which time and observation have more fully satisfied my

9. “Cato styles L. Murena a dancer. If this be truly alleged it is the reproach of a fierce accuser; if falsely, it is the slander of a reviler. Since then in this you may have influence, you ought not, M. Cato, to catch up a slander from the street or from some convivial assembly of scoffers, nor lightly call a Consul of the Roman people a dancer; but consider with what other vices he must be corrupted against whom this could be charged with truth. For almost no one ever dances who is sober, unless he be a madman; neither in solitude, nor at temperate and decent entertainments. Of a seasonable banquet, of an agreeable place, of many pleasant recreations, dancing is the last (or basest) accompaniment. You impute to me that which is necessarily the lowest of vices, and yet you pass over those things which being discarded this vice surely could not exist. No shameful banquet, no wanton love, no revel, no debauch, no prodigality is shown; and since none of those things are proved that have the name of pleasure, and which are vicious, do you think to find that which attends only upon sensual excess in him, in whom you cannot find even excess itself?”—Cicero Orat. pro. L. Murena, vi. 13.

10. It is true, indeed, that the sneers of the world are no more to regulate the conduct of the Christian, than its smiles. It may object against him for too rigid abstinence, as they did against John Baptist; or he may be reproached for over-indulgence as was Jesus Christ. The truly wise will justify those who show a wholesome discretion in a seasonable doing or not doing of things lawful. But yet we are not at liberty to disregard the report of “them that are without.” Christians are to avoid the appearance of evil, and not to be conformed to this world. It is necessary, therefore, to listen to what the world thinks and says about certain practices, in order to form a right judgment as to whether indulgence in them is forbidden by these precepts.

mind, I still entertain the opinion several years ago publicly expressed, that dancing, cannot with propriety, be participated in by Christians. And by Christians, whilst I mean especially those who have been admitted to the Lord's supper, I do not mean them exclusively. I wish to be understood as comprehending under the name all the Baptised. And it seems necessary to state this particularly, in order to correct a not uncommon mistake. Many think that if they have never come to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they are not members of the church, and it is not inconsistent for them to live and act as the ungodly world. And so I have heard a Christian parent urge that it was not improper for her children to go to the dancing school, though she considered it inconsistent for a communicant to dance. But are not all baptised children members of the church? and are not members of the church bound to live as Christians? If so, where the propriety in Christian parents sending their children to learn that which, as Christians, it would be unbecoming in them to practice, and which they must unlearn and renounce as a preparative step towards being admitted into the full communion of God's people? The whole thing is sufficiently plain, "the wayfaring man though a fool, need not err" in regard to it. If it is incompatible with Christian character for a communicant to dance, it is scarcely less so for the baptised to do so; and therefore the parent, who has presented his child to receive this seal of the covenant and sign of his engrafting into Christ, is unfaithful to his vows and does a wrong to his child if he trains him in the practice of that which is unsuitable to a true disciple of Christ.

And now, in conclusion of this discussion, I say to

those who plead for this vain and hurtful amusement, and who indulge in the practice of it, never appeal to the Bible as sanctioning it. Be candid enough to others and honest enough toward yourselves to acknowledge that there is no word of God that countenances your sinful pleasures. When you cross the threshold of the ball room, remember that you cannot take with you the protection of God's promises, for you will have gone out of the path prescribed in his precepts. If an upbraiding conscience disquiets your heart, amidst the hilarity around you, and you would fain take shelter from its chidings, under the cover of the words there is "a time to dance," remember that such a perverted use of Scripture will only prove a refuge of lies. Forget not also to recall these other words here written, "a time to mourn," and "a time to die." Yes, take this thought with you to the ball room and dancing party, *There is a time to die!* When, where, how, no one can tell. Perchance Death may become your partner in the dance, and your ball dress be your shroud. Such things have been. There have been gay youth who have danced away their precious lives, and their immortal souls have sped into the presence of God while as yet the sound of the viol had scarce died on their ears. Ah! there is a time to die, and God has set that time. You need not dance, you must die. You can excuse yourself from the scene of mirthful revelry, but not from the bed of death. You can easily stay away from the ball room, when your companions invite, but not from the chamber of death, when called by the voice of God. And if that call should find you unprepared, alas! how sad the change! How truly must your dancing be turned into mourning. But if you love the world—the

things of the world—the vain, fleeting, deceitful pleasures of the world, surely, you cannot flatter yourself with the thought, that you are prepared to die? Prepared to die?

“ Prepost'rous fool * * *

Think'st thou that mirth and vain delights,
High feed, and shadow-short'ning nights,
Soft knees, full bags, and beds of down,
Are proper prologues to a crown?
Or can'st thou hope to come and view,
Like prosp'rous Cæsar, and subdue?
* * * * Ah! fool, beware,
The safest road's not always ev'n;
The way to Hell's a seeming Heav'n.”

The round of gaiety and pleasure you and thousands of others are pursuing, leaves little time for preparation to die. To talk of the last party, to recover from the lassitude and ennui it has produced, and to get ready for the next, leave no place nor disposition for serious thought or earnest inquiry into the soul's state. Balls and routs suit ill with prayer. And without prayer can any think to be prepared for death and judgment?

“That day, that day, whose all-discerning light
Ransacks the secret dens of night,
And severs good from bad; true joys from false delight.
How will your eyes endure this day?
Hills will be deaf, and mountains will not hear;
There be no caves, nor corners there,
To shade your souls from fire, to shield your hearts from fear.”

Christians, I turn to you and ask, is this a time to dance? Look out upon the world; listen to the sounds of lamentation, and mourning, and woe that are borne to our ears upon every breeze. Lift up your eyes and see, do not the heavens gather blackness? are not the clouds big with the wrath of an angry God? Are not famine, and pestilence, and grim-visaged war stalking over the face of the earth; and is not one commercial

disaster after another filling the nations with perplexity, and sending consternation into every community? And the church of Jesus Christ, alas! what shall be said of it. Divided more and more; distracted, corrupted; forsaken of her children; the sport of the profane, and the song of the drunkard. And shall we make merry? Is this a time to dance, when the threatening hand of a jealous God is stretched out over the nations, and his Holy Spirit is withdrawing from the church? Surely, rather is it a time to turn to the Lord "with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." A time for the ministers of the Lord to weep between the porch and the altar, and to plead with God to spare his people, and have mercy upon the perishing multitude. A time for Christian churches to unite in a common protest against that pleasure-seeking, world-loving spirit, which is eating out the heart of religion like a canker. A time for Christians of all ages, ranks and names, not to mingle in the dancings of the thoughtless crowd, but to speak often one to another; to pray much, both with and for each other, that the world may return at last, and in very deed be able to "discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not."

In particular, I address myself to the members of the Presbyterian church. Whatever the opinions or practices of particular men may have been, that church in her purest days, and throughout this land, now, in theory at least, has pronounced fashionable dancing a dangerous and hardening practice, fascinating and infatuating to immortal souls.¹¹ In a large portion of

11. Pastoral Letter, General Assembly, A. D., 1818.

the church it is looked upon as unfitting the person for the communion table. And indeed, I may say, as one once said of Monarchy and Presbytery, "Dancing and Presbyterianism agree together as well as God and the Devil." How long, think you, would the purity, the piety, and the influence of the church for saving souls, survive the general practice of this pastime by her members? Ah! if Presbyterian members revel in the dance; and Presbyterian Elders give dancing parties; and Presbyterian Pastors look on with smiles of approval, the disciples of Tom Paine, the Pope, and the Devil may surely laugh in derisive triumph, for ICHABOD—The glory is departed—must soon be written upon all our holy and beautiful palaces. Better, far better, for us and a perishing world, to have a little band of praying, faithful, self-crucified Christians, than a whole nation of worldly-minded, pleasure-loving, dancing professors.

AND "now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you, faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

