

walls. The advocates of the modern stage are careful to choose their own ground—they defend an *ideal* theatre; but we recognize an ideal theatre no more than an ideal church. A theatre whose plays should contain no line in violation of Christian morality, whose performers should be men and women of unchallenged virtue, whose audiences should be composed of the purest people, and which should bar its doors against every immodest costume and licentious temptation would certainly be entitled to respectful treatment from the Christian Church. But every man of common sense knows that the actual average American theatre is no more like this ideal play-house than the average Pope is like St. Peter or the average politician is like Abraham Lincoln. If our average theatre should attempt to conform itself to such a puritanic ideal, it would be deserted by the vast majority of its present patrons in twenty-four hours. As the Church came in, the thirsters for sensual stimulations would go out. An ideal puritanic stage would go into bankruptcy as speedily as the dram-shop which should furnish nothing but lemonade and cold water; and for the very sufficient reason that the great mass of theatre supporters visit the play-house for passionate excitements. They go there for the very purposes which make it dangerous to a servant of Jesus Christ. They go there to gratify what is carnal in their natures, and not to fit them better for life's highest end—to serve and glorify God.

Let it be understood distinctly that I do not affirm that every popular play is immoral or that every actor or actress is impure, and every attendant upon a play-house is only "on the scent" for sensualities. But we do affirm unreservedly that the whole trend of the popular stage is hostile to holiness, and the Christian who discards holiness discards Christ. We affirm that it ignores God and too often tramples on His commandments. If the theatre be a school of morals, it must be judged by its pupils and graduates, and we do not hesitate to declare that an institution which *unsexes* womanhood, by putting her before the public in male attire and often in almost no attire at all, is an anti-Christian abomination. The accomplished Mrs. Frances Kemble, in her maturer years, condemned the stage. One of the most eminent living actresses declares that she only enters the theatre to enact her part and keeps no company with her profession. A converted actor said to me, while passing a play-house in which he had often performed, "Behind those curtains lies *Sodom*!"

The American theatre, be it observed, is a concrete institution, to be judged as a totality. It is responsible for what it tolerates and shelters. We, therefore, hold it responsible for whatever of sensual impurity and whatever of irreligion, as well as for whatever of irreligion, as well as for whatever of occasional and "sporadic" benefit, there may be bound up in its organic life. Instead of helping Christ's kingdom, it hinders; instead of saving souls, it corrupts and destroys. We pastors know too well that when our church members are enticed within its walls they do not find there a re-creation of body and soul for a more vigorous service of their Lord. Their spiritual garment is not always brought away "unspotted by the flesh." They have given their public sanction and pecuniary support to an institution whose doors open downward, and not upward toward a Christian home in the heavens. Can a servant of Jesus take coals of fire in his bosom and not be burned? The average theatre is a gilded nastiness. Can we handle pitch and not be defiled? What concord hath Christ with Belial? Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, said the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

We have briefly reviewed the claims of the average American stage to the countenance and support of conscientious Christians. Let us also apply the principles already laid down to another popular amusement—the *promiscuous dance*. This form of social diversion or, rather, of social dissipation is increasingly persistent in its demands for the sanction of Christ's Church. Its advocates have an innocent ideal of domestic dancing, which they always push to the front, and against which people of common sense would no more wage warfare than against a game of croquet or the juvenile romp of "blind man's buff." We shall waste no ammunition upon this form of domestic diversion in the sacred privacy of a virtuous home. We are dealing now with popular amusements,

and we maintain the inherent rights of Christian parents to regulate their own domestic recreations. As parents, they are responsible to God. We also affirm that, if the only dancing that is known were simply the chaste and decent movements of a household or its intimate guests, in a private parlour, under the parental eye, then the whole subject of dancing would never have entered into the domain of ethical controversy. It would have offended no Christian conscience and called forth no "deliverances" from the Christian Church.

But there is a popular amusement which involves the promiscuous contacts and caressings of the sexes in the miscellaneous party and in the ball-room, which is fraught with terrible peril to personal purity and godly character. It is in no sense a wholesome recreation to body, mind, or immortal soul. This promiscuous dance has in it all the elements of intense excitement, with the inevitable stimulation of the most inflammable passions. It often tolerates unchaste movements and contacts, to which the daughters of Christ's household, the "handmaidens of the Lord," should not be exposed. It kindles salacious thoughts. It is associated with extravagance in dress, extravagance of late hours, with temptations to vanity, jealousy, and "fleshy lusts that war against the soul." Instead of being a recreation, it is a "revelling," which God's Word forbids. That divine guide teaches young women to be sober; but how shall sobriety be cultivated amid the passion-kindling whirl of the waltz? What a tormenting discordance is there between the divine description of woman's true "adorning, not with gay apparel; but with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," and the flashing flaunt of the ball-room! Is the dancing hall a department in the school of Christ? Shall our Christian daughters cease to emulate the examples of Ruth, Lydia, and Dorcas, and learn to enact the part of the daughter of Herodias? Surely, the household of faith is not so utterly bankrupt of pure, innocent recreations that it needs to steal from Satan a sensual pleasure which even heathen Rome in the best days of the Republic would not permit.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Quebec has prohibited his flock from engaging in the "round dance"—a form of the dance which is said to be especially "possessed with a devil." He stigmatized it as the last sigh of expiring modesty. Shall Popish morality exceed Presbyterian? If promiscuous dancing shall (like the theatre) be regarded as a totality, then let us make a clean sweep of the whole business.

I have now subjected two of the most popular amusements to the test between Christian recreation and un-Christian stimulations. The principles applied to them should be applied to every form of amusement. Every recreation which makes the body stronger and the mind more alert for life's duties is positively beneficial. Against such there is no law. A healthy conscience, enlightened from above, will judge rightly on these points. It may also be affirmed that no follower of Christ should ever engage in any social entertainment or public amusement from which he cannot return with a clean conscience to his Bible and his closet. No follower of Christ should ever frequent any place which the Master would eschew, if He were personally on earth; nor should a church member be ever found in places of amusement so questionable in character that irreligious people would be startled to find him there. The Master's command is to "abstain from all form of evil."

The Word of God draws a sharp, clean dividing line between the pursuits and pleasures of the world and the pursuits and pleasures of Christ's flock. Over that dividing line lies the tempting path to self-indulgence, which is to-day the besetting sin and bane of the Church. Over that line lie sensual allurements, extravagance, frivolity, and slavery to the world. Over that line godly character is sacrificed; for no man can walk in the Spirit and at the same time fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Over that line into perilous amusements the servant of Jesus Christ has no moral right to go. If he goes to participate, he offends his Master. If he goes to protest, he offends and disgusts the votaries of sinful pleasure. If he ventures toward the doorway to sensual amusement, he must meet the sentinel of conscience, armed with the bayonet of this injunction: "Be ye not conformed to the world; for whosoever would be the servant of the world is the enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This whole subject is one of prodigious practical import. The spiritual health and life of myriads of

our youth depends largely upon the character of the recreations which they seek and the social pleasures in which they indulge. They must have and they will have some sort of recreations. It is the bounden duty of conscientious parents not merely to denounce sinful amusements, but to *provide* innocent, healthful recreations for their families. The employer who wishes to keep his clerk or apprentice from the haunts of danger must provide and point out some substitute for Satan's advertisements. No wiser service can be rendered by Christian philanthropy than the organization and opening of wholesome resorts for recreation, which shall be the antidotes to the play-house, the gaming room, the dancing hall, and the drinking saloon.

To every true Christian the law of Christ will be the law of his pleasures. Walking in the Spirit, he does not stoop to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Free to choose his pleasures, he is too free to want the sinful ones. As, when we listen to a well-trained orchestra, the music of the horns mingles with the rich swell of the bugle and the finer notes of the delicate viols, so a true Christian life should be a full, heaven-tuned harmony, in which pleasure shall blend with toil—in which work shall soften into play, and recreation shall rise into that strain of holy or heroic activities which impart to life both its sweetness and its sinew. Existence on earth is too short to be wasted in play; but it must not be made shorter by the wear of unrelenting toil.

Let me give you in one line the conclusion of the whole matter. "Whatsoever ye do, *do all to the glory of God*." This rule permits liberty and prohibits license. This rule padlocks the door to every sinful amusement; but it swings open a gateway through which life may become a procession of pure enjoyments, until it swells into the raptures of heaven. Blessed Saviour! let Thy service be our unending recreation, Thy presence our everlasting delight!

#### LITTLE AGAINST BIG WORDS.

A MONOSYLLABIC PROTEST.

Think not that strength lies in the big round word,  
Or that the brief and plain must needs be weak,  
To whom can this be true who once has heard  
The cry for help, the tongue that all men speak,  
When want or woe or fear is in the throat,  
So that each word gasped out is like a shriek  
Pressed from the sore heart, or a strange wild note  
Sung by some fay or fiend? There is a strength  
Which dies if stretched too far or spun too fine,  
Which has more height than breadth, more depth than length.

Let but this force of thought and speech be mine,  
And he that will may take the sleek fat phrase,  
Which glows and burns not, though it gleam and shine—  
Light, but no heat—a flash, but not a blaze!

Nor is it mere strength that the short word boasts;  
It serves of more than light or storm to tell,  
The roar of waves that clash on rock-bound coasts,  
The crash of tall trees when the wild winds swell,  
The roar of guns, the groans of men that die  
On blood-stained fields. It has a voice as well  
For them that far off on their sick beds lie;  
For them that weep, for them that mourn the dead,  
For them that laugh and dance and clap the hand;  
To joy's quick step, as well as grief's slow tread,  
The sweet plain words we learned at first keep time,  
And though the theme be sad or grand,  
With each, with all, these may be said to chime,  
In thought or speech or song or prose or rhyme.

—Prof. J. Addison Alexander, D.D.

"BELIEVERS," says Besser, "must be ever spelling at these words, 'in Christ we can do *all* things; out of Him, *nothing*.'"

HAVE you made one heart happy to-day? How calmly you can seek your pillow! how sweetly sleep! In all this world there is nothing so sweet as giving comfort to the distressed, as getting a sun-ray into a gloomy heart. Children of sorrow meet us wherever we turn; there is not a moment that tears are not shed and sighs uttered, yet how many of these sighs are caused by our own thoughtlessness! how many a daughter wrings the very soul of a fond mother by acts of unkindness and ingratitude! How many husbands, by one little word, makes a whole day of sad hours and unkind thoughts! How many wives, by recrimination, estrange and embitter loving hearts! How many brothers and sisters meet but to vex each other, making wounds that no human power can heal! Ah! if each one worked upon this maxim day-by-day—"Strive to make some heart happy!"—jealousy, revenge, madness, hate, with their kindred evil associates, would forever leave the earth.