

over, that the pulpit of the other Protestant churches—or most of them—is just about as pronounced as the Methodist pulpit in its attitude toward the theatre. The reasons for this attitude, when any are assigned, are various, and many of them of small validity, but the attitude itself is simply a matter of fact.

I have now briefly stated the problem as it presents itself to us, and it needs only to be stated thus to show that the weight of the evidence of those whose duty it is to give special attention to the question of public and private morals, condemns the moral and spiritual influence of the theatre; and this condemnation, if not altogether exclusive, is practically so. It embraces the theatre as it is generally known to the people at large, and that, too, not in its more obtrusively immoral aspects, but the theatre that solicits the patronage of people of decency and self-respect.

But that this condemnation has not always been merited will be clearly shown by the history of the theatre itself. On the contrary, it was, at least in its earlier years, a great power for good. This suggests two conclusions; first, that the evil is not inherent in the stage itself, and second, that we may discover that it is a loss greater than we are justified in suffering, to allow one of the historic agencies for good to be turned against the moral forces of the day. It may just be questioned whether we have any other that can exactly take its place.

To discover the germ of disease that preys upon the stage may point in the direction of an effective treatment of the disease. We may note in passing the marked tendency to deterioration on the part of that which caters only to amusement. This seems equally true, both in the case of persons and institutions, and would suggest the necessity of associating amusement with some other and more serious purpose, or that it be engaged in only with a distinct view to the end to be served, and with a due sense of proportion. Otherwise, it is likely at once to degrade the entertainer, and to develop in those who are entertained a tendency to an unserious and trifling conception of life.

But when the entertaining function of the stage is kept strictly subservient to its educative function, the difficulty under which it has struggled, and beneath which it has sunken, begins to be apparent. Certainly there can be no evil tendency in the