

*The Moral Problem of the Theatre*

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THE problem of theatre-going is one which cannot but challenge the earnest consideration of everyone who takes life at all seriously. On the one hand, it is not so simple a matter as it may seem to take a negative attitude toward any practice. One might somewhat naturally think, "Why, theatre-going has been objected to as unworthy of Christians; I can find plenty of ways of being entertained without it; and so I shall not go, and there's an end of it." But it is doubtful whether one can morally dismiss moral questions so lightly. Our negative attitude toward life and conduct should have a rational basis, as well as our positive attitude. And when we come to really give this phase of the subject our thought, the difficulty is enhanced by the fact that a great many good men in the past and present, the genuineness of whose Christianity we have no right to question, have patronized, or do now patronize, the theatre. One might mention here the names of Queen Victoria and Browning and Tennyson, besides many distinguished clergymen of undoubted piety.

On the other hand, we have to face such facts as the rules of the Methodist Church. And here we may wholly omit any discussion of the relative merit of the footnote as compared with the older portion of the Rules. It is well known that the older rule referring to amusements or "diversions" was, and from the very beginning, universally and consistently interpreted as condemning the theatre. Nor need we discuss whether the Rules are, in the nature of the case, mandatory or recommendatory. In either case they must be assigned the highest significance, not only by the members of the Methodist Church, but by all persons whose purpose is to live the best life possible to them; just as no one, of whatever church, seeking to practice the highest ethical conduct, can ignore the judgment of the Roman Catholic bishops on the subject of dancing. It is perhaps a misfortune that the Rules are not so stated that these discussions might be eliminated, as they serve too frequently, it is to be feared, to divert the attention from the real question at issue. It is well known, more-