

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

## "A TIME TO DANCE."

A worthy clergyman who had been suspected of having improperly interfered in influencing some of the young people under his pastoral care to absent themselves from a ball that took place in that parish, received in consequence the following anonymous note:

Sir,—Obey the voice of Scripture. Take the following for your text, and contradict it. Show in what consists the evil of that innocent amusement of dancing—"A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." (Ecc. iii. 4.)—A TRUE CHRISTIAN BUT NO HYPOCRITE.

The minister wrote the following admirable reply, which he inserted in a periodical publication.

MY DEAR SIR (or Madam):—Your request that I would preach from Ecc. iii. 4, I can not comply with at present, since there are some Christian duties more important than dancing, which a part of my people seem disposed to neglect. Whenever I perceive, however, that the duty of dancing is too much neglected, I shall not fail to raise a warning voice against so dangerous an omission. In the meantime there are certain difficulties in the text which you recommend to my notice, the solution of which I should receive with gratitude from "a true Christian." My first difficulty respects the *time* for dancing; for although the text declares that there is "a time to dance," yet when that time is it does not determine. Now this point I want to ascertain exactly, before I preach upon the subject; for it would be as criminal, I conclude, to dance at the wrong time, as to neglect to dance at the right time. I have been able to satisfy myself, in some particulars, when it is *not* "a time to dance." We shall agree, I presume, that on the Sabbath day, or at a funeral, or during the prevalence of a pestilence, or the roaring of a thunderstorm, it would be no time to dance. If we were condemned to die, and were waiting in prison the day of execution, this would be no time for dancing, and if our feet stood on a slippery place beside a precipice, we should not care to dance.

But, suppose the very day to be ascertained is the whole day, or only a part, to be devoted to this amusement? and if a part of the day only, then which part is "the time to dance?" From the notorious evil effects of "night meetings," in all ages, both upon morals and health, not one will pretend that the evening is "the time to dance," and perhaps it may be immaterial which portion of the day is devoted to that amusement. But allowing the time to be ascertained, there is still an obscurity in the text. Is it a *command* to dance or only a *permission*? Or is it merely a declaration of the fact that, as men are constituted, there is a time when all the events alluded to in the text do come to pass? If the text be a *command*, is it of universal obligation? and must "old men and maidens, young men and children," dance obedience? If a *permission*, does it not imply a permission also to *refrain* from dancing, if any were so disposed? Or if the text be merely that there is a time when men do dance, and there is a time when they die, then I might as well be *requested* to take the first eight verses of the chapter, and show in what consists the evil of those innocent practices of hating, and making war, and killing men, for which, it seems, "there is a time"—as well as for dancing. There is still another difficulty in the text, which just now occurs to me. What *kind* of dancing does the text intend? for it is certainly a matter of no small consequence to "a true Christian" to dance in a scriptural way, as well as at the scriptural time. Now, to avoid mistakes on a point of such importance, I have consulted every passage in the Bible which speaks of dancing; the most important of which permit me to submit to your inspection.

"And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dances." (Exod. xv. 20.) This was on account of the overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

"The daughter of Jephthah came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances" (Judges xi. 34.) This also was on account of a victory over the enemies of Israel.

"The yearly feast in Shiloh was a feast unto the Lord, in which the daughters of Shiloh went forth in dances" (Judges xxi. 21.) This was done as an act of religious worship.

"And David danced before the Lord with all his

might." But the irreligious Michal "came out to meet David, and said, 'How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself in the eyes of the handmaids, of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself'" (2 Sam. vi. 14-20.)

Dancing, it seems, was a *merit* *rite*, and was usually performed by women. At that day, it was perverted from its sacred use by none but "vain fellows" destitute of shame. David vindicates himself from her irony, by saying, "It was before the Lord;" admitting that, had this *not* been the case, her rebuke would have been merited.

On account of the victory of Saul and David over the Philistines, "the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing." (1 Sam. xvii. 6.) "Let them praise His name in the dance." (Ps. cxlix. 3.)

"Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing." (Ps. xxx. 11.) The deliverance here spoken of was a recovery from sickness, and the dancing an expression of religious gratitude and joy.

"As soon as he came nigh to the camp he saw the calf and the dancing." (Exod. xxxii. 19.) From this it appears that dancing was a part, also, of idol worship.

"O virgin of Israel, thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and go forth in the dances of them that make merry." (Jer. xxxi. 4.) This passage predicts the return from captivity, and the restoration of divine favor, with the consequent expression of religious joy.

"We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." (Matt. xi. 17.) That is, neither the judgments nor the mercies of God produce any effect upon this incorrigible generation. They neither mourn when they are called to mourning by His providence, nor rejoice with the usual tokens of joy when His mercies demand their gratitude. "Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing." (Luke xi. 25.) The return of the prodigal was a joyful event, for which the grateful father, according to the usages of the Jewish Church, and the exhortations of the Psalmist, praised the Lord in the dance. "A time to mourn and a time to dance." (Ecc. iii. 4.) Since the Jewish Church knew nothing of dancing, except as a religious ceremony, or as an expression of gratitude and praise, the text is a declaration that the providence of God sometimes demands mourning and sometimes gladness and gratitude.

But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod." In this case dancing was perverted from its original object to purposes of vanity and ostentation.

"Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they 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 shall we have, if we pray unto Him?" (Job xxi. 7-15.) Their wealth and dancing are the reason of their saying to God, "Depart from us," and of their not desiring the knowledge of His ways, or of serving Him, or of praying to Him.

From the preceding quotations it will sufficiently appear:

1. That dancing was a religious act both of the true and also of idol worship.
2. That it was practised exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or great victories.
3. That it was performed by maidens only.
4. That it was performed usually in the daytime, in the open air, in highways, fields and groves.
5. That men who perverted dancing from a sacred use to purposes of amusement were deemed infamous.
6. That no instances of dancing are found upon record in the Bible in which the two sexes unite in the exercise, either as an act of worship or amusement.
7. That there is no instance upon record of social dancing for amusement, except that of the "vain fellows" devoid of shame; of the irreligious families described by Job, which produced increased impiety, and ended in destruction, and of Herodias, which terminated in the rash vow of Herod and the murder of John the Baptist.

I congratulate you, sir, on the assured hope which you seem to have attained that you are "a true

Christian," and on the meekness and modesty with which you have been enabled to express it; and most sincerely do I join with you in the condemnation of all hypocrites. I am, etc.

## THE HILLS OF THE LORD.

He hath made them the haunt of beauty,  
The home elect of His grace;  
He spreadeth his mornings on them,  
His sunsets light their face.

His winds bring messages to them,  
Wild storm-news from the main;  
They sing it down to the valleys,  
In the love-song of the rain.

They are nurseries for young rivers,  
Nests for His flying cloud,  
Homesteads for new-born racos,  
Masterful, free and proud.

The people of tired cities  
Come up to their shrines and pray:  
God frothens again within them,  
As He passes by all day.

—Gannet.

## THE STREAMLET AND THE POOL.

A minister of Philadelphia in illustrating the blessedness of cultivating a liberal spirit, uses this beautiful figure:

"See," he says, "that little fountain yonder—away yonder in the distant mountain, shining like a thread of silver through the thick copse, and sparkling like a diamond in its healthful activity. It is hurrying on with tinkling feet to bear its tribute to the river. See! it passes a stagnant pool, and the pool hails it: 'Whither away, master streamlet?'"

"I am going to the river to bear this cup of water God has given me."

"Ah, you are very foolish for that—you'll need it before the summer is over. It has been a backward spring, and we shall have a hot summer to pay for it—you will dry up then."

"Well," said the streamlet, "if I am to die soon, I had better work while the day lasts. If I am likely to lose this treasure from the heat I had better do good with it while I have it."

"So on it went, blessing and rejoicing in its course. The pool smiled complacently at its own superior foresight, and husbanded all its resources, letting not a drop steal away. Soon the mid-summer heat came down, and it fell upon the little stream. But the trees crowded to its brink, and threw out their sheltering branches over it in the day of adversity, for it brought refreshment and life to them; and the sun peeped through the branches and smiled pleasantly upon its dimpled face, and seemed to say, 'It's not in my heart to harm you;' the birds sipped its silver tide, and sung its praises in the overhanging branches; flowers gemmed its border, and breathed their perfume upon its bosom; the beasts of the field loved to linger near its banks, and chewed the cud of content under its cool shadows, and the husbandman's eye always sparkled with joy as he looked upon the line of verdant beauty that marked its course through his fields and meadows; and so on it went, blessing and blessed of all!

"And where was the prudent pool? Alas! in its inglorious inactivity it grew sickly and pestilential. The beasts of the field put their lips to it, but turned away without drinking; the breeze stopped and kissed it by *mistake*, but shrunk chilled away. It inhaled the malarial in the contact, and carried the ague through the region, and the inhabitants caught it and had to move away; and at last the very frogs cast their venom upon the pool and deserted it, and Heaven in mercy to man, smote it with a hotter breath and dried it up!

"But did not the little stream exhaust itself? O no! God saw to that. It emptied its full cup into the river, and the river bore it on to the sea, and the sea welcomed it, and the sun smiled upon the sea, and the sea sent up its incense to greet the sun, and the clouds caught in their capacious bosoms the incense from the sea, and the winds, like waiting steeds, caught the chariots of the clouds and bore them away—away to the very mountains that gave the little fountain birth, and there they tipped the brimming cup, and poured the grateful baptism down; and so God saw to it that the little fountain, though it gave so fully and so freely, never ran dry. And if God so blessed the fountain will He not bless you, my friends, if 'as ye have freely received, ye also freely give?' Be assured He will."