

### The Methodists and Dancing.

BY A MINISTER OF THE METHODIST  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

From its earliest history Methodism has carried on a vigorous warfare in defense of Spiritual Christianity. It took at the beginning and has held to this day, what some might regard as extreme positions on the subject of worldly amusements.

But let us not flatter ourselves with the idea of a vantage-ground, which no one else has the wisdom to see nor the grace to occupy. Others, as well as ourselves, see the beauty of holiness. Almost every branch of the church of Christ has taken the alarm, and, by its leading ministers or resolutions passed in Ecclesiastical Councils, has spoken emphatic words of warning. A few extracts from the sources whence they emanate, will show us the sentiments and convictions of the general church in our whole land. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church thus spoke half a century ago:

"On the fashionable, though, as we believe, dangerous amusements of theatrical exhibitions and dancing, we deem it necessary to make a few observations. The theatre we have always considered as a school of immorality. With respect to dancing, we think it necessary to observe that, however plausible it may appear to some, it is perhaps not the less dangerous on account of that plausibility. Let it once be introduced, and it is difficult to give it limits. It steals away precious time, dissipates religious impressions and hardens the heart."

The General Assembly of 1865 reaffirmed the action of the session of 1818, and "affectionately exhorted all the members of the church to avoid all recreations and amusements which are calculated to impair spirituality, lessen Christian influence, or bring discredit upon them in their profession as members of a Christian church."

The late Bishop McIlvaine, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, thus speaks on the same subject: "Let me now turn to two objects in which there is no difficulty of discrimination—the theatre and the dance. The only line I would draw in regard to these is entire exclusion. And yet, my brethren, I am well aware how easy it is for the imagination to array both of these in such an abstract and elementary simplicity, so divested of all that gives them their universal character and relish, that no harm could be detected in either."

In 1866 the Young Men's Christian Association held a General Convention in Albany, N. Y. Delegates were present from all parts of the United States, and the British Provinces. The question of amusements was carefully considered, and the conclusion reached was thus set forth:—"That we bear our energetic testimony against dancing \* \* \* as so distinctively worldly in its associations and unspiritual in its influences as to be utterly inconsistent with our profession as the disciples of Christ."

It is presumed that the advocates of dancing will insist, at the outset, that we shall make a distinction among the various fashionable dances of the times. It is not probable that any Christian reader of this article will attempt to defend the round dances. But cotillions and quadrilles, we are told are different—they are modest, graceful and harmless. Doubtless, there is a difference. It is not necessary to prove that the mere motion is sinful in order to condemn it; nor need we assail the personal character of all who plead for dancing as an innocent amusement. The abstract possibility of its being so practical as to render it healthful exercise may be admitted. We will even go so far as to confess the beauty of certain pictures of innocent dancing in the family circle, wherein one daughter presides at the piano and the rest of the children whirl about in their graceful evolutions till father and mother feel the happy contagion and join in the mirth until it is time to call the house to order for evening prayers. We do not happen to know any family where devotion and dancing live together on such excellent terms; nevertheless extraordinary things do occur in the world, and this may be among them. I quote from a recent article in a religious paper—the *Christian Advocate*.

"Dancing—a mere springing, measured motion—is as different

from 'the modern dance' as the acting of an animated and unconscious child from an organized theatre. The theatre is acting in a certain way. It is an institution whose captivating and harmful power lies in its inseparable incidents. Dancing in itself is a subject of discussion foreign to the dance of society. Dancing is not otherwise harmful than as it takes its inspiration from the ball-room and educates its participants in a sort of knowledge which seems to embolden and enforce the solicitations of the dance. \* \* Christian people are not much in danger from the solicitations of gross vices. We waste breath when we exhort them not to get drunk, gamble or steal; real peril lies in the license accorded to the mild vices. Without a beginning there can be no end. The wisdom of the ancients aimed at stopping beginnings. To close up the entrance way is to prevent disaster. In the swift declivity of moral deterioration every step accelerates motion and dims the probability of stoppage or return. The polite amusements of the day are the angles of departure from earnest Christian living. Were I to express a deliberate judgment, founded upon a basis of some experience and much observation, it would be this: That thousands of the young members of our churches lose their Christian hope by participating in these questionable festivities. Not for the reason that these forms of indulgence are open and obvious vices, but in part for the reason that they are not. If they were, they would meet with prompt rejection from the classes of whom I am writing. But they are so innocent-looking, so plausibly defended and reputably patronized. Exactly here lies the hiding of their harmfulness. They captivate, capture and graduate to lower stages and styles of self-indulgence a great multitude of victims."

Dancing is essentially an exhibition which addresses the eye of the spectator and craves admiration. It tends directly to cultivate the love of display and of the praise which it elicits, a passion as avaricious in its way as the miser's greed of gold. Introduce dancing generally, and of the youths who attain a degree of proficiency, not a few will soon tire of the approval of the little circle and thirst for the applause of the multitude. And in this form dancing is detrimental to soul and body. The late hours which it involves are a fatal objection to it. The confined atmosphere in which it is practised is injurious. The style of the refreshments common on such occasions and the untimely hour when they are taken, increase the evil. The undue excitement exhausts instead of invigorating the vital powers. The sudden transitions from the heated ball room to the chill night are not safe, as many an early grave can testify. The dress, the excitement, the confined air, the unseemly hours, are all palpable violations of health laws. But we are told that these can all be regulated. Possibly they can; but we are dealing with facts as they exist and are likely to remain. Such a reply will hardly meet the difficulty. You say that some of the above statements would apply with equal force to religious services and other public entertainments. Grant this in part, if you please, and still the evil is not obviated. We are not excusing but accusing.

Finally, dancing involves undesirable associations. Here we desire to be especially careful, that we may not offend. We bring no indiscriminate accusations against those who love to dance. It is a prevailing custom in Montana among all classes. Some of my best friends dance. Further, I am looking at this subject from a Christian standpoint. If we are to tell the whole truth, it must be stated that as a rule dancing prevails less as you ascend the scale of virtue, intelligence and religion and more as you go down to explore the realms of ignorance and vice. In our great cities, those sections which are recognized as the homes and dens of vice and degradation, abound in dance-houses, and the sound of the violin and of many trampling feet mingles nightly with the noise of rage and blasphemy. But as you ascend the scale, not only the more gross forms of vice but the dance is left behind long before you reach the highest altitude. In all ages of the church the acknowledged spiritual fathers and mothers have kept aloof, and the devotedly pious have had "no fellowship with un-

fruitful works." Dancing wastes time, destroys health, scatters serious thought, and often leads to entangling associations. It is a sure foe to spiritual growth. With these facts and testimonies we leave the subject to the solemn consideration of the reader; believing that the position taken by most of the Evangelical churches is rational, scriptural and safe.—*Deer Lodge, Ma., New North-West.*

**A CHILD'S TERRIBLE DREAM VERIFIED.**—A very sad occurrence took place at Clinton. Mr. James Brooks, who is constable of the township, has a family of nine very promising children. Among them were two little boys, one aged seven and the other five years. Yesterday morning Mr. Brooks was standing by the stove with his children around him. He had a revolver in his pocket, or strapped around him, which by some means became disengaged and fell. The pistol struck the stove in the fall, and one barrel was discharged, the ball passing through the body of the little five-year-old child and into the body of the other. The ball struck the youngest child, and, passing through the body, came out near the spinal column, producing death in a short time. After passing through the youngest child, the ball entered the body of the eight-year-old boy above the hip, and passed into the abdomen, where it lodged. The oldest boy may recover, although seriously injured. The ball had not been extracted this morning. The boy that was killed was a remarkably bright little fellow, and the sad accident has overwhelmed the family with distress.

The most remarkable part of this sad affair remains to be told. The night before the accident the older boy, after having been put to bed upstairs, awoke in a great fright and came down stairs. He told his father that a neighbor's boy (calling him by name) had shot him and his little brother, and that his brother died, and he did not. The little fellow was dreaming, but he was so much frightened that he would not go to his bed again, so his father took him in his own bed to pacify him, where he slept the remainder of the night.—*Lawrence (Kan.) Standard, Jan. 20th.*

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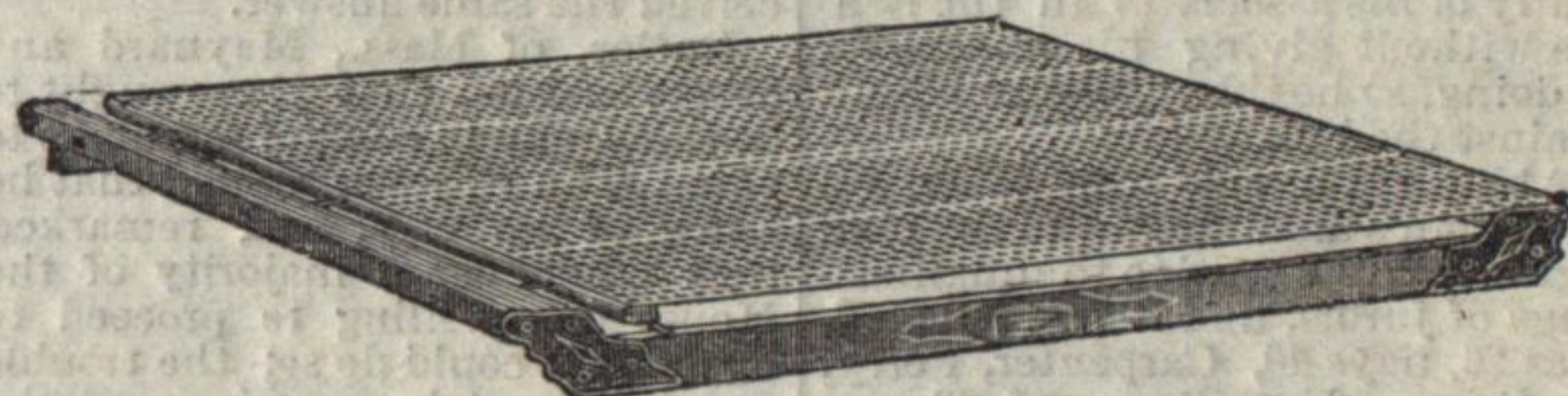
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