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Sermon on the Theatre.

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There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and in the end of that mirth is heaviness.—Proverbs 14:12, 13.

The greatest danger to Christianity is "theatricality." There are now no amphitheatres in which the fierce beast leaps upon the humble follower of Christ; there are no arenas, no deaths at the stake. But the "cut" which is used by some to compel Christians to surrender their principles, is employed at the demand of the theatre of darkness. A young man is often "hooded" if he refuses to attend the theatre, the dance, the euchre party, or the wine supper. Against this spirit, and these institutions we speak. We use no "Paritane severity," but wish to apply argument to reason.

We avow our faith in recreation. The Christian with hope and faith to sustain is the happiest person on the earth. He can enjoy ever more in the Lord. He has pleasures untold. He is enabled to enjoy perfectly all the pure amusements of this life. He can have fun and laugh. There is a necessity and as harmless work when not associated with evil. Many amusements are not connected with sin. Such are many parlor games which do not weary the mind. There are many outdoor exercises which are exhilarating. We can engage in all such without encouraging institutions blackened by sin.

In Exodus 32:6, we have an example of an amusement which was exceedingly sinful. Because of Moses' delay on the mount with God, the Israelites became dissatisfied and prevailed upon Aaron to erect a golden calf. It was fashioned after the gods of Egypt. "They rose up early and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play." What was there in eating, drinking and playing? These, *per se*, are certainly harmless. Yet the Lord was offended at them. The result is at hand. The Israelites were supporting an institution that was exceedingly sinful—idol worship. God had commanded that they should make no graven image. They broke his law. They encouraged this idolatry of Egypt.

Amusements must draw their moral qualities from their association. When they are linked with established institutions of sin, they are sinful. The theatre is an institution. If it be one of sin, then theatre-going is sinful and must be avoided. The institution has a

HISTORY.

It was organized in Greece. When Rome acquired the supremacy, it became the center of the theatrical performances. It was patronized by the empire, and was established for its aid. Yet, when in its glory, it was a contempt of the people. So said the sages, to my more recent historians and discoverers. During the twelfth century it was revived in England. It reached its glory in the Shakespearean age. Before this age no woman had ever appeared upon the stage. It was forbidden by the laws. Still the women were looked upon as "vagabonds" and "tramps." Shakespeare's great desire was to acquire the title of "gentleman."

The theatre of to-day is composed of men and women. The nature of theatrical performances, the essential demand of the age, the constitution of human nature, makes it impossible for the theatre to exist under the law of degeneracy. The actors and actresses are upon a whole immoral. Of course there are exceptions. This fact is enough. They are "exceptions." The concession is demonstration. There are a few whose names are comparatively unsullied. But they are dangerous, because they decoy to the infamous. Among the vast majority virtue is unknown. Lewdness is master. A friend of Mr. Theo. L. Caylor, who had been an actor, pointing to a theatre, said: "Behind those curtains lies Sodom."

The institution results in prostitution. We do not speak exclusively of the lower order, but of the so called best. The manner in which girls are forced to dress, is degrading. The opera is undressed. It is vulgar. Think of a young girl entering such a place, when her home training had been such that it is heathenish. It is barbarism. Some years ago a ballet dancer published her experience in one of the great theatres. In this she told how she was horrified when she first dressed, and how she

begged the manager not to subject her to such a trial. "The public demand it," was his reply. A reporter tells how embarrassed some girls were who came to an opera company in answer to advertisements; how some blushed themselves out of the place when they saw the outfits which they were to wear; how others struggled against their modesty until, for the sake of the dollar, they submitted to such shameful exposure of their persons. These women became brazen-faced sinners, who even endeavor while before an audience, to give their bewitching glances to young men. They, with their beauty of person, are jewels of gold in a swine's snout. Dr. Caylor, an observer of men and of society, says: "The American theatre 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 there may be bound up in its organic life. * * * The average theatre is a gilded nastiness."

The plays themselves are very corrupting. Again we speak of the best plays. Certainly the low are degrading. Just as certainly are Shakespeare's and all the rest. In these the spirit of revenge for insult is taught, injured honor can only be vindicated at the point of the sword. Such is unchristian. It is contrary to the teachings of our Lord, who said, "Love your enemies." When the life of Christ, as exhibited on the cross, is introduced, it is done for ridicule and to excite the disgust of the auditors. When good traits in character are introduced, this is only to make bad passions more prominent. If the bad be killed by sword, pistol, or poisoned, the impression left upon the young mind is harmful in the extreme. The pictures which are posted every where are enough to teach one who does not attend the corrupting influence of the stage.

As I was walking down the street the other day I saw some of these illustrations: There was a woman half-dressed led to another fainting. There was also a picture of the faithless wife or villainous husband, the intrigues of one and the heartless desertion of the other. It is the trashy novel and *Poison Gazette* illustrated before the young mind. The law of North Carolina prohibits these in the mails, and it ought to forbid such in the opera halls. It is the divorce court with all of its scandals framed upon the girls and boys, bringing its terrors into our homes.

Dr. Buckley, of New York, has carefully examined the plays which have been performed in the principal theatres of New York for the past three years. "I procured," says he, "the copies of the plays used in all the prominent theatres of the city. They number sixty. It is a singular fact that, with three or four exceptions, these dramatic compositions, which are morally unobjectionable, are of a comparatively low order of literary execution. But if language and sentiment which would not be tolerated among respectable people, and would excite indignation if addressed to the most uncultivated and coarse servant girl, not openly vicious, by an ordinary young man, and profaneness which would brand him who uttered it as irreligious, are improper amusements for the young and for Christians of every age, then at least fifty of these plays are to be condemned."

It is well known that Edwin Booth never allowed his children to attend the theatre without first examining the play. Maeready advised against theatre-going. Edwin Forrest, upon hearing Dr. Brantly denounce the institution as immoral and corrupting, told him that he only did not put it strong enough. Mrs. Butler, once famous as an actress, became horrified with the tendency of the stage, and gave it as her decided opinion that the theatre should not be patronized.

I know its influence upon the young. The girls and boys of my congregations who have attended now and then, or habitually, have had no positive Christian influence. Instead of helping Christ's kingdom, they hinder; instead of saving, they often corrupt. Their spiritual garment is not always brought away "unspotted by the flesh." Young men have frankly told me that they have left the exciting scenes of the theatre and have sought gratification for their aroused sensual passions; that they have been led along in the giddy whirl to the bar-room and to the card table. Young men always leave with base ideas of woman. Verily, the steps of the theatre take hold on hell, and its chambers are the chambers of death. Dr. Herrick Johnson, of Chicago, says: "The stage of to-day is a moral abomination. It is trampling on the Sabbath with defiant scoff. It is defiling our youth. It is making crowds familiar with the play of criminal passions. It is exhibiting woman with such approach to nakedness as can have no other design than to breed lust behind the unlooking eyes. It is furnishing candidates for the brothel. It is a startling question asked by a recent play writer: 'To what extent will a continued progress in the same direction take us in the next twenty-five years?' With such gross immoralities and its corrupting influence, is it not time for good men and women, whether church members or not, to stop giving their presence and pecuniary aid? Would you support a house of ill-fame? Would you help degrade young women and young men? If not, never again enter a theatre, for it does all this."

Can it not be reformed by receiving

the patronage of good people?" asks one. How often this has been attempted! How signally it has failed!

Rev. C. W. Winchester, of Brooklyn, says: "The facts are, (1) that the theatre in this city and country never had the support and encouragement of moral and religious people it now enjoys; (2) that the theatre was never so bad. Clearly, if Christians patronage is going to reform the theatre the reform ought to begin. But the grade is downward. The theatre is growing worse and worse."

The managers plan to prevent any defeat. They work to make money. Like bar room keepers, the end with them justifies the means. They aim to please their patrons. Christians, therefore, in order to influence theatrical management, must go often enough and in numbers enough to compose a preponderating attendance.

Dr. W. O. Wilkinson gives the following mathematical argument: "The protestant Christians of New York number about a hundred thousand out of a million and a half of inhabitants. Supposing a general agreement among them all that a regular attendance at the theatre was the most pressing and most promising method of evangelic effort, they would not then constitute even one tenth of the numerical patronage which the management would strive to please. Rather a slender minority to dictate the character of the representations."

Another asks: "Are not some good? Can't we attend those?" I have already granted that some are good, being exceptions. But we should not attend those which are exceptions. They are a part of the institution. They keep bad company. To patronize only the good is to patronize the institution, which is a curse to the nation. Aaron tried to mix good with evil. He worshipped the Lord before the calf. But God did not accept it, because evil was present. He cursed the people. He had the calf ground to powder and cast into their drinking water. The dust of the calf cleaved to their lips as they drank of the water. The church is suffering because of unstable members who drift with sin. It is best to come on the side of the Lord as the Levites did, and with a pure life pat to flight the enemies of Christ.

The Word of God condemns this institution. The term theatre is not used, but all manner of sin is condemned. The Scriptures speak plainly against fornication and lewdness, against the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. I have proven the theatre to be an institution of lust, that it engenders and encourages lewdness. It destroys spiritual aspiration, it ridicules the sufferings of Christ. It corrupts the youth. God has said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" "thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." He has commanded us to have no fellowship with sin; to be separate from the world; to avoid the appearance of all evil.

If the institution described above does not break the law of God, if it is not evil, nothing in this world is against His law, there is nothing evil.

Friends, we offer you a more excellent way. "Keep thyself pure." Live righteously before God and man. Count all things loss for a good name, for the friend ship of Jesus Christ. Shun, therefore, the place and the people who would beguile you and lead you astray. Better still, join yourself to Christ by faith. Walk in the strength of the risen Lord. Overcome evil with good. Purchase for thyself a crown of life. Lie down to die with hope in the future and peace derived from a well spent life. Angels will come to bear you away on their snowy wings. Jesus will receive you with the joyful welcome, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord."

The *Western Recorder*, says the *Baptist Courier*, punctures the pretentious claim of the Roman Catholics that one of their number, Lord Baltimore, was among the earliest advocates of religious liberty in this country:

"The Roman Catholics in their meeting in Baltimore are represented by the papers as boasting of Lord Baltimore's establishing a colony whose charter provided for religious liberty; and an effort is made to make the impression that the Catholic church is favorable to religious freedom and deserves some of the credit for such freedom being established in this country. The claim is grotesquely absurd. In the first place the charter Lord Baltimore got was obtained from a Protestant country, and he could not have got a charter which required conformity to Romanism. He would greatly have preferred such a charter if he could have got one. It was no love for religious liberty that prompted him. In the second place, that charter did not provide for religious freedom at all. It provided only for toleration broad enough to take in Romanists. It forbade Jews and Quakers from exercising religious freedom in the colony. Lord Baltimore arranged for just enough toleration to get himself and those who believed with him tolerated, no more. And for these Roman Catholics to represent him as a pioneer of religious liberty, is a travesty upon his story. It presumes on the ignorance of the people. Roman Catholic prelates have never tolerated the exercise of any other religion than Romanism, where they could help themselves, never."

Be careful in the selection of friends.

The Christian Race.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the Christian's career is viewed as a race. The lives of some men suggest anything but a race. There is no progress, no rapid passing on wards, no intense hastening to a goal. Listlessness, vacillation, a sauntering dalliance with pleasure characterize many lives. There is no steadfast and urgent pursuit of a single object. Where this exists, even though the object be unworthy and the pursuit of it unchristian, the life may be compared to a race. For a race implies a running towards a goal, a straight and rapid making for a desired object or end. The Christian's career is a race, because with mingled made up as to the worth of his object he makes for it with fixed eye and unswerving tread. Of the various attractions presented to us, the Christian has selected one, and with undivided mind makes it his single object to be all he can be, and do all the good in his power. The prize he aims at is likeness to Christ in his personal goodness and power to do good.

This is the prize he aims at; but he finds that he cannot choose his own way to it. The race is "set before" him, marked out for him, and measured and staked in by a power not his own. His birth, his natural condition and temperament and talents, his opportunities, the vicissitudes of fortune he encounters, are all arranged for him. That is the course set before him, and he must win the prize by running in it. He may not leap the ropes and try a short cut; he may not demand some softer course, some more elastic turf; he may not ask that the sand be lifted and a hard beaten surface prepared; he may not require that the ascents be levelled and the rough places made smooth; but he must take the course as he finds it. In other words, he must not wait till things are made easier for him; he must not refuse to run because the course is not all he could wish; but he must recognize that the difficulties of his position in life are the race set before him. The Christian must open his eyes to the fact that it is in the familiar surroundings of the life we now actually lead, God calls us to run: in the callings we have chosen, amid the annoyances we daily experience, where we are and as we are, from the very position we now occupy our race is set before us. It is through your own actual circumstances you must win the prize. A race is set before you by God. You have your own sins to subdue, your own troubles to overcome, your own opportunities to use, you are yourself and not another person, and you have your own race to run and no other person's.

The conditions of successful running are that we look to Jesus and lay aside every weight. When we are sunk from all hope of ever being delivered from sin, when we seem to have been deceived all along and are ready to turn to scorn every other argument that can be used to show us that it is reasonable to believe we may be holy and pure, nothing shoots such a real hope into our souls as for any one whom we know to have also had his sins and his snares and his vices, to look us in the face and say: "There is such a thing as sanctification. I know it. I am not more certain that I live than that I live as once I did not, that now I am what once I was not." And the apostle says that we are surrounded with a cloud of men giving us just such testimony. He points us to hosts of instances of successful attainment. Time would fail him were he to attempt in the briefest manner to indicate how even the most eminent among them have won the position they now occupy. There is a perfect cloud of them, he says. Each a star in himself if you could see him closely; but there are so many like him and so distant to our feeble vision, they are but a bright cloud, a milky way in the heavens to guide and animate us.—*Dr. Marcus Dods.*

"Give him a Cheer."

"Give him a cheer." The hearty words came from the lips of some one in the crowd gathered around a building enveloped in flames, and were prompted by the momentary faltering of a brave fireman at the final effort that was needed to save a human life. Instantly hats were waving in the air, and above the crackling and roaring of the fire, the cheering of the multitude below fell upon the ears of the wavering fireman. Electrified by the applause he renewed his efforts, beat back the flames that scorched his face, burst in the window that would not yield to the young girl's strength, and through a cloud of smoke and fire bore his unconscious burden to her weeping friends below.

"Give him a cheer," said a voice in the audience, as the young aspirant for academic honors began to hesitate in the midst of his well prepared oration. "Give him a cheer," and as the appreciated huzza was raised the heart of the youth gathered new courage, so that he succeeded in winning the scholarship, which to him meant much more than empty honors. In this very way the applause of a sympathetic and responsive audience bears up the speaker, who otherwise would fall. Mr. Gladstone once said: "A speaker gets from his hearers in vapor that which he gives back to them in flood," and when they have got it they return it to him with interest.

"Give him a cheer." Who? Why, that young Christian who has come out from the world, and in the midst of the tempta-

tion is trying to live a consecrated life. He needs more than an interest in your prayers. Give him a warm hand shake, a word of praise, or a smile of recognition when he begins to faint and falter by the way. Let him know that you appreciate his efforts, and will be disappointed if he fails. If he does a noble thing give him a cheer by telling him he has done well. It will give him strength to meet new trials and temptations.

"Give him a cheer"—the stranger within your gates. No matter how brief a tarrying he may make, bid him welcome. Do not let him go away feeling that no one feels an interest in his welfare.

I have in mind a young girl who went through life under a cloud. She had many things to discourage her. She was misrepresented and misunderstood. No one spoke a cheering word to her, or offered to lend a hand when troubles thickened about her. People did not understand her shrinking nature. They mistook her exclusiveness for pride, until in a fit of desperation she took away the life God had given her. A little note among her effects explained the seemingly rash act. It ran thus: "I can endure this strain no longer. If I only had help to carry my burden I would try to be brave and stand up under its weight, but in all this wide world I have not a friend. No one has ever given me a cheering word, or dropped a tear of pity over my hard fate." Then over her icy form the neighbors lamented their lack of sympathy, and tears of regret in plenty fell upon the still white face now mute in death. Enough appreciative, tender words to have gladdened her whole life were wasted around her coffin and over her open grave. But what good did they do when they fell upon ears hushed in death?

"Give them a cheer." A host of weary, toiling men and women are to-day calling loudly for cheering words and helpful ministries. Do not keep the cheer that would bless them lying idly in your hearts or tremblingly unsaid upon your lips to scatter around their tombs when they are dead. Bring the flowers that you are keeping for their coffins and strew along their paths to-day while they are alive to inhale their sweet fragrance.

"Give them a cheer." Words of honest praise will spoil no man. If you gain a blessing from a sermon or a prayer, it will encourage the preacher to bear you say so. If some one's holy living strengthens you and helps you on to a better life, would he not be happier to know of the unconscious influence he is exerting?

"Give him a cheer." No matter where, or when, or how you come into contact with poor, struggling human souls, lend them a hand—give them a cheer that will help them to live better, nobler lives.—*Christian Weekly.*

The Study of the Bible.

It is wholly out of my power to reply to your letter in the manner which its purpose would recommend and its object requires. But I am unwilling altogether to withhold a few words which may, at any rate, serve as an indication of sympathy with your desire to profit by the treasures of the divine word. I will not dwell on the need of a light from above, or the duty of seeking it; of being vigilant against the excuses of the slothful spirit; of cultivating humility; of bearing in mind that God has, through the long ages, had a people whom he has led; that we are not the first who come to the wells of salvation opened by Christ and his apostles. I will assume that you are strict adherents of method in this great study, so as to make your results comprehensive. In this view I recommend you to consider whether the table of lessons, old or new, may not be of much use. Two things, however, especially I commend your thoughts. The first is this Christianity in Christ and nearness to him and his image is the end of all your efforts. Thus the gospels, which continually present to us one pattern, have a kind of precedence among the books of Holy Scripture. I advise your remembering that the Scriptures have two purposes—one to feed the people of God on green pasture, the other to serve for proof of doctrine. These are not divided by a sharp line from one another, yet they are provinces, on the whole distinct, and in some ways different. We are variously called to various works; but we all require to feed in the pastures and to drink at the wells. For this purpose the Scriptures are incomparably simple to all those willing to be fed. The same cannot be said in regard to the proof or construction of doctrine. This is a desirable work, but not for us all. It requires to be possessed with more external helps, more learning and good guides, more knowledge of the historical development of our religion, which development is one of the most wonderful parts of all human history, and, in my opinion, affords also one of the strongest demonstrations of its truth and the power and goodness of God.—*Mr. Gladstone to a Leader of a Men's Bible Class in Manchester.*

Do to-day's duty; fight to-day's temptations; and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking forward to things you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them.—*Charles Kingsley.*

Solomon was led astray by his wives. Be cautious, young man, about the selection of a wife. Many have been ruined right here.