

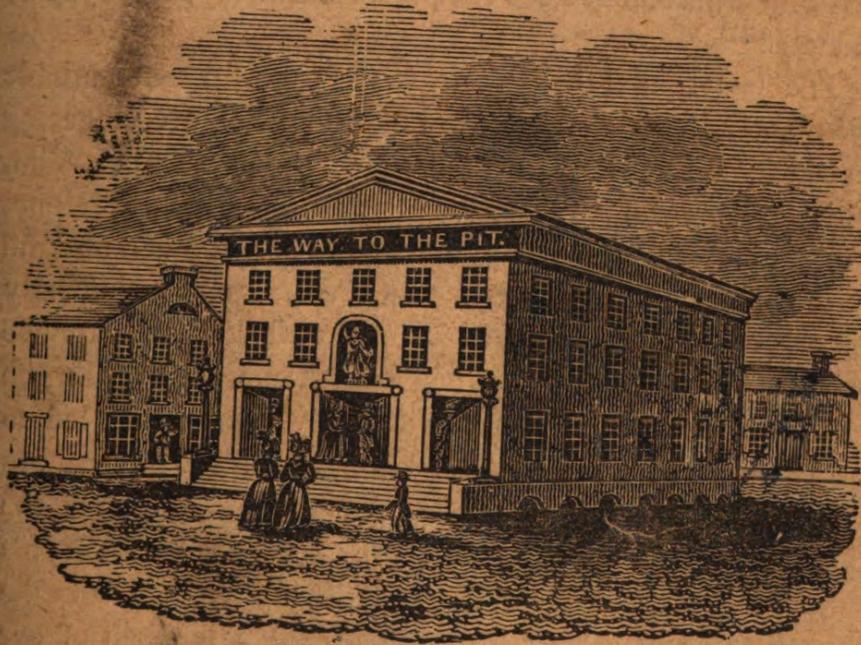
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No 156.

# THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

A PREMIUM TRACT.

BY WILLIAM S. PLUMER,  
Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Virginia.



"The theatre was, from the very first,  
The favorite haunt of sin."—*Pollock*

Philadelphia:  
PUBLISHED BY THE  
AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,

## *The Theatre and its Destructive Influences.*

A true narrative from a Physician's Diary.

UNDER the deceitful coloring "For useful mirth and salutary woe," does the stage present its poisonous chalice to the unwary, who, in the giddy ardor of youth, or the unreflecting moments of mature age, grasp the fatal cup and drink its deadly sweets, and are thus almost imperceptibly drawn into the vortex of destruction. Alas! alas! too often has the decoy proved successful. How many amiable and interesting youth of either sex, even within the circle of our limited acquaintance, have been hurled by this deceitful amusement from happiness to misery, from joy to sadness!

The last time I beheld my once cheerful and amiable friend, was in the medical ward of the poor house, lingering on the confines of eternity, stretched upon a straw pallet, with the coarsest covering for his bed, deserted and alone, no sympathising friend to soothe his dying anguish, no kind voice to solace the last moments of his sad and melancholy existence. A little board suspended against the wall above his bed, on which was written with a piece of chalk the sufferer's name, in characters scarcely intelligible, led to his recognition. I paused and looked with a melancholy earnestness on the emaciated and deathlike features of the dying man, but could not discover a single trace of his once manly countenance. I exerted my imagination to the utmost, to bring to recollection some little incident of our early intimacy with which I could associate the features of the once loved companion of my youth, and those of the ghastly object that lay before me. But I could not—even the faintest trace of what he appeared to be was lost. Could I be mistaken? O that I had been.

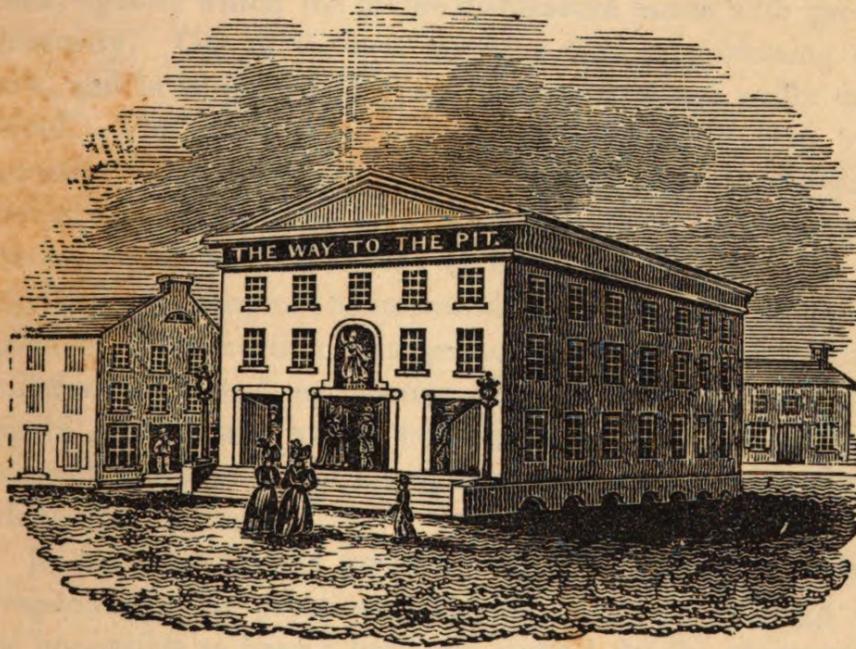
I reluctantly drew near his bed, and in a trembling voice ventured to call the fluttering spirit of the dying man back to this world. I called him by a familiar title; he understood

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## THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

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OUR Lord Jesus, in giving us a form of ordinary prayer, taught us, among other things, to say—"Lead us not into temptation." He who offers this petition, and then of his own accord goes into a place of temptation, is guilty of two sins, against which the divine displeasure burns with great intensity. One of these is mocking God in professing to ask, and in scriptural language too, what is not really desired. The other is presumption, in tempting God by courting trials to which he has forbidden us to subject ourselves. It therefore follows, that all places and employments which can be shown to bring our principles to a needless trial, may not be innocently resorted to for pleasure, pastime, or recreation. In particular, places of theatrical entertainment, such as theatres, circuses, halls of jugglery, opera houses, and stages for mercenary dancing, greatly tempt those who attend them, to commit sin, and therefore should be avoided.

In maintaining this position, whatever is said shall be respectful to the persons and rights of all, even though it be impossible to have a profound respect for the characters and profession of many who are the leaders in maintaining a system which we believe essentially corrupt.

That these entertainments tempt to expensive habits, is generally conceded. The very constitution of the whole system demands large sums of money. The price of tickets of admission declares how this matter stands. All persons know how fascinating these exhibitions are. He, who has acquired a zest for them, will forego the luxury of relieving even the widow and the fatherless; yea, he will neglect his business, often deprive himself of the means of

paying his just debts, and in some cases, consent to subject himself and his family to a scanty mode of living, rather than fail of these entertainments. It is also a well-known fact, that young men, in our large cities, when once brought within the suction of this mighty vortex, will not flee from it, even though, in many cases, their only pecuniary means for gratifying their fondness for a favorite amusement, must be money taken from the chests of their employers. At first they fully intend to return it; but the means of restitution not coming into their possession, and the desire for amusement continually gaining strength, they finally go further, and take money without either the purpose or prospect of refunding it. Thus many young men commence thieves. Of nine young men and lads found guilty of felony, five stole to get the means of going to the theatre. Of seven others, two purloined money to buy lottery tickets, and three to buy tickets to attend the circus.\* Besides these things, an attendance at the theatre being confessedly an *amusement*, a *luxury*, an *extravagance*, it tends not a little to the formation of luxurious and extravagant habits in other respects. So that while it is true that *some* go no further in needless expenditures, multitudes do proceed to greater lengths, and bring upon themselves ruin. Is it not true in all communities that frequent these places of amusement, that very many who attend them, are the least of all able to buy tickets, honestly procure bread, and then pay their *just* debts? And is it not true of *all* who attend them, that they find a great curtailment of the means of meeting the demands of charity, piety and benevolence? In this discussion let it not be forgotten, that all men, in the final judgment, will have to give as strict an account for *small* as for *great* sins, for wasting a *farthing* as for wasting a *talent*. Matt. xii.

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\* An able writer, on London police, says: "I believe that more of the youths, among the lower orders in London, begin their career as thieves, in order that they may have the means of gratifying their passion for *theatricals*, than for any other cause that could be named."

36, and Luke xvi. 10. Therefore, because these things tempt to expensive habits, they ought to be avoided.

Theatrical entertainments also tempt to dissipation and intemperance. These vices are known to be exceedingly expensive; but we wish to speak of them in other respects. In the first place, a very frequent preparation for attendance at theatres and such places, is indulgence, to some degree, in stimulating drink. Then, these places of resort, almost without exception, are supplied with one or more bars, at which liquors of every tempting variety are sold; and what is more common, after the excitement of a protracted sitting at the theatre, than a certain sensation of lassitude and exhaustion, tempting to the use of additional stimulus? Besides this, it is an unquestionable fact, that a people, frequenting the theatre, are, other things being equal, much more apt to become addicted to strong drink, and to entice others to follow their pernicious ways, than a people who are much in the habit of frequenting churches. A church erected with public bars would be abhorrent to the feelings of any Christian community, yet, a theatre with bars, we all expect.

This leads to the remark, that the company which a man finds at these places, is tempting; and he who goes into it is in danger of ruin. All observation unites with revelation in declaring, that he who walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed. All people know that an attendance at the theatre or circus is voluntary, and that those who go can never plead their right to the blessing pronounced on him who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. By common consent, in all Christian communities, ministers of the gospel, and professors of serious godliness, venture not to these entertainments, on pain of witnessing all that they deem sacred, exposed to the ribaldry of the profane. It will also cost all that the fairest female reputation is worth, for its possessor

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to be seen, even for one minute, in the gallery of a theatre; and yet it does not remain unvisited by the sons, and brothers, and husbands, and fathers, of many an humble and pious, and modest female. In this career of crime, the first step is to the theatre, the next to the bar, the next to that lewd company in the gallery, the next to the brothel, the next to disease, the next to death, and the last to HELL.

Attendance at the theatre is also a great waste of time. In past days we have heard much of the waste of time in attending religious meetings; and even yet there are not wanting some who utter ominous croakings on this subject. But, on close examination, it is found that none so advantageously regulate their time as those who worship God. The order and economy thereby introduced into their affairs save much time. We have also heard much said against night meetings, as indelicate, injurious to health, and in many ways improper; yet these very people have no objection to a night meeting, if it be at a circus, an opera house, a ball room, or a theatre, rather than at a church; and if they are to have clownish feats, lascivious songs, indecent dancing, or a play, instead of a lecture on morals or religion; and for a speaker, a vulgar mountebank, or a strolling female, instead of a herald of salvation. We have also heard much of the unseasonable hours to which religious night meetings are frequently protracted; yet, where is the place of worship so habitually kept open long after the regular hour of sleep has arrived, as is every place of mountebank and theatrical amusement in the nation? How much time is taken up first in thinking and talking about them! how much in attending them! and how much in thoughts and remarks upon what has been seen and heard! If "minutes make the years," how soon will he have consumed years of time, who wastes hundreds of minutes nightly at the place of amusement! Allowing a man to spend but six hours in each week at the theatre, for ten years, he will thus consume, of waking hours, one hundred

and thirty days, equal, at least, to two hundred days of ordinary time, a period long enough to pay a visit to London and Paris, and spend sixty-five days in each; and this, too, at a cost of money sufficient to pay one's expenses in performing the tour of Europe. Surely those, whose consciences recognise the authority of scripture in requiring us to "redeem the time," will never attend theatrical entertainments.

Neither must it be forgotten that the theatre is not under the control of play-writers, nor of play-actors, nor of the refined and chaste part of the audience. Indeed, if some of the public journals in this land may be credited, the theatre is so corrupt that the refined and chaste are seldom present at a performance. Whether these journals be correct or not, there is no doubt but the theatre is chiefly under the control of that great floating mass of ignorance, and grossness, and depravity, which pays its way by dollars, and then demands the worth of its money, in being rendered a little more sensual, and gross, and depraved. These remarks are necessary to introduce another general observation, which is, that the exhibitions of the stage are such as to familiarize and even encourage vicious and sinful inclinations and dispositions, and entirely to leave unsung the praises of sobriety, temperance, Christian watchfulness, gospel humility, evangelical penitence, self-denial, heavenly-mindedness, and indeed every Christian virtue. Let me here present the thoughts of a writer in the Port-Royal in France. The author is supposed to be the Prince of Conti. He says: "It is so true that plays are almost always a representation of vicious passions, that the most part of Christian virtues are incapable of appearing on the stage. Silence, patience, moderation, wisdom, poverty, repentance, are no virtues the representation of which can divert the spectators; and, above all, we never hear humility spoken of, and the bearing of injuries. There must be something great and renowned, according to men, or at least something lively

and animated which is not met with in Christian gravity and wisdom; and therefore those who have been desirous to introduce holy men and women upon the stage, have been forced to make them appear proud, and to make them utter discourses more proper for the ancient Roman heroes, than for saints and martyrs. Their devotion upon the stage ought also to be always a little extraordinary." Now, when we place ourselves in such circumstances as continually to fill our minds with images of viciousness, must we not be tempted first to endure, then to admire, then to imitate? Does not all experience corroborate this view? The pious Psalmist said: "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside." Psa. ci. 3. Another scripture declares that "the thought of foolishness is sin." Prov. xxiv. 9. Shall frequenters of theatrical entertainments then be innocent? Another portion of scripture speaks of "vain imaginations" as marks of a wicked character. Rom. i. 21. Are not theatres and such places the very nurseries of vain imaginations? "Lead us not into temptation."

The scriptures require us, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God. Here is a positive command. It would be insulting to common sense to institute a grave inquiry, whether ever any man resorted to these amusements in order to glorify God. No man ever intends or expects thus to glorify God. But it is reasonable to inquire, whether these exercises have not a powerful effect in relaxing the hold and strength of solemn responsibility and religious obligation, and whether it ever occurred to any man interested in the progress of a play or a feat that he was bound to the bar of God, and that even while he sat admiring each successive scene or trick, he was under infinite obligations to glorify God? When such an individual shall be found, it will be easy to show that such thoughts became less and less controlling, or, gaining the mastery over the soul, they drove the man to his home.

There has been something said about a set of gamblers whose consciences were so wrought on by a certain play, that they left the boxes; but whether they went from the theatre to a brothel, or to the bar, or to a faro-bank, or to their closets to weep over their crimes and misdeeds, none testify. So that it is still true that he who visits such places incurs temptation to cast off the fear of God, and become lax and even lawless in his views and feelings concerning the divine honor.

Another passage of scripture requires us to avoid all "filthiness and foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient," or becoming virtuous character. Eph. v. 4. How any frequenter of theatres, circuses, &c., can avoid oft-repeated violations or powerful inducements to violations of this precept, requires more ingenuity to discover than any mortal has ever yet manifested. Indeed this precept forms no part of the moral code of the devotees of theatrical diversions and amusements.

These general views derive considerable strength from the general impression, that attendance on these amusements is *tempting* to some people. For the young and inexperienced to go without some special safe-guard is generally confessed to be unsafe. Men show their candid and real judgments on this subject, when their apprentices, clerks and wards acquire a passion for this amusement. Let a young man seek employment in one of our large cities, annexing the condition that he must be allowed two nights in the week to attend the theatre. Let his brother, of the same qualifications, seek employment at the same time, and in the same city, on condition that he shall have two nights in each week to attend the house of God. The latter will get employment in a desirable situation with comparative ease. The former will either get no situation, or one where he will be very likely to lose all his earnings by the bankruptcy of his employers.

It is true, men have been very noisy in their clamor about

a "reformed theatre" and a "well-regulated stage" and "a refined circus;" just as if such things had ever existed. No man has ever yet told us what these things were. No man is bold enough to assert that they ever existed. It is only said that at some future time they may become so; meanwhile we must endure the abominations at present existing, until a reformation can be wrought. Men, however, will find the truth of the lesson all past experience has taught, that it is easier to remove than to reform some evils, and that the theatre and circus are of this description.

That the foregoing views are not confined to any one person or age, it is very easy to show by a reference to the views expressed by historians, biographers, philosophers, poets, moralists and religionists, of almost every nation and grade. We shall quote them as witnesses, whose conspiring testimony, mightily strengthened and confirmed by their discordance on almost every other subject, is conclusive proof of their correctness on this.

At Athens, where the stage was first known, both tragedy and comedy were soon abolished by public authority because judged injurious to the state. The Greek philosophers speak the same language. Plato says: "Plays raise the passions, and pervert the use of them; and, of consequence, are dangerous to morality." Aristotle says: "The seeing of comedies ought to be forbidden to young people, until age and discipline have made them proof against debauchery." It is thought in our day that there are some *old* men who are not proof against debauchery. Ought not they to stay away from the theatre? The Romans did to a limited extent allow of theatres, yet did they so much dread their prevalence that no public theatre was allowed to remain standing more than a certain number of days. Even the great theatre erected by M. Scæurus, which cost more than four and a half millions of dollars, was speedily taken down. Pompey the Great was the first who had influence sufficient to continue a theatre. Tacitus, the great Roman historian,

says: "The German women were guarded against danger and preserved their purity by having no play-houses among them." Ovid, in a grave work addressed to Augustus, advises the suppression of theatrical amusements as a grand source of corruption. Indeed, Guevara says, that a virtuous Prince or Emperor was known by his banishing from his presence players, jesters and jugglers; and that a vicious Prince was known by his retaining such. Many of even the Roman Emperors declared the scenes of the stage to be "unbecoming exercises and effeminate arts which very much corrupted and disgraced the state, and were seminaries of all vices and intolerable mischiefs in the commonwealth." Seneca, the moralist, says: "Nothing is so destructive (damnosum) of good manners or morals as attendance on the stage." Titus Livy, the accomplished Roman historian, in his history thrice mentions the theatre. In the first instance he says: "It commenced with the purpose of aiding in the worship of the gods," i. e. the devils. In the next instance he calls it a "folly, which had grown to an intolerable height of madness." In the third instance he says the stage had its origin in purposes of superstitious devotions. St. Augustine agrees with Livy in making the same statement of its origin. Juvenal says that in his time "a man could not find one chaste woman whom he might safely love as his wife in all the play-house, and that all who frequent stage-plays are infamous, and forfeit their good names." That Christians ought not, in the judgment of good men of past days, to attend theatres, is very clear. One to whom America is vastly indebted said many years ago: "For many ages there was no debate on it at all. There were players, but they did not pretend to be Christians themselves, and they had neither countenance nor support from any who did." In the apostolic constitutions, stage-players and actors are enumerated among those who are not to be admitted to baptism. All the ancient forms of baptism, written after the apostolic con

stitutions, required a renunciation of all such things. Individual writers have also from the early ages of Christianity borne a decided testimony on this subject. Cyprian says: "The scripture hath everlastingly condemned all sorts of such spectacles and stage-plays." In another place he styles theatres "the stews of public chastity, the mastership of obscenity, which teach those sins in public. It is not lawful for faithful Christians, yea, it is altogether unlawful to be present at these plays." Elsewhere he says: "She that perchance comes a chaste woman to the play, goes away with stained chastity." Tertullian says that "the heathen did chiefly discern who were infidels and who Christians, by the latter abandoning all stage-plays." In another place he says: "We (Christians) renounce your spectacles and stage-plays—we have nothing at all to do with the fury of your circus, and the dishonesty of the theatre—we come not to your plays." In another place he says: "We who compute our nobility not by blood, but by our manners, do with good reason renounce your sinful pleasures, pomps and spectacles whose original with respect to their sacredness, and whose pernicious allurements to sin, we both alike condemn. For in your *Circensian* games, who can but abhor the madness of the people clamoring on different sides? And as for your *gladiatorian* diversions, who can sit with ease in that school of murder? And for your theatres, there also the extravagance is not less, but the lewdness longer. For one while the mimic either recites adulteries or exhibits them; another while the lascivious actor plays the gallant and kindles the passion he feigns. He likewise vilifies your gods by personating their rapes, sighs and discords. And so by a well-dissembled sorrow and hypocritical gestures, he sets you a crying to the life. Thus are you mad upon murder in good earnest, and yet, forsooth, cannot bear it in fable without a tear." Clemens Alexandrinus calls "stage-plays, comedies, and amorous songs, teachers of adulteries

and defilers of men's ears with fornications;" and says: "Not only the use, the sight, the hearing, but the very memory of stage-plays should be abolished." In another place he directs Christian youths "not to permit their pedagogues to lead them to plays or theatres, because they are the occasion of lewdness, and wicked counsel is plotted at them." How much like the modern theatre, "wicked counsel is plotted there," such as is peculiarly dangerous to young men! Origen says: "Christians must not lift up their eyes to stage-plays, the pleasurable delights of polluted eyes." Lactantius says: "These interludes with which men are delighted, and which they willingly attend, are wholly to be abolished from among us, because they are the greatest instigations to vice, and the most powerful instruments to corrupt men's minds." Gregory Nazianzen calls "stage-players the servants of lewdness, and stage-plays the dishonorable unseemly instructions of lascivious men, who repute nothing filthy but modesty." He also calls "play-houses the lascivious shops of all filthiness and impurity." Ambrose calls "stage-plays spectacles of vanity," and exhorts "Christians to turn away from them." Augustine says that "stage-plays are the subverters of goodness and honesty, the destroyers of all modesty and chastity, the arts of mischievous villanies which even modest pagans did blush to behold." In another place he calls them "the cages of uncleanness, the public profession of wickedness." Epiphanius says: "that the catholic and apostolic church doth reprobate and forbid all theatres, stage-plays, and all such like heathenish practices." Chrysostom says: "I wish the theatres and play-houses were all thrown down, though as to us (Christians) they lay desolate and ruined long ago." "Nothing," says he, "brings the oracles and ordinances of God into such contempt as admiring and attending stage-plays. Neither sacraments, nor other ordinances of God, will do a man any good, so long as he frequents stage-plays." Bernard says: "All true

soldiers of Jesus Christ abominate and reject all dicing and stage-plays, as vanities and false frenzies." These testimonies of individuals are fully corroborated by the ancient synods or councils, which did often prohibit, condemn and reprobate, all sorts of stage-plays; and appoint to excommunication from the visible church all who attended them. The Eliberine council in Spain, in A. D. 305, the council at Arles in France, in A. D. 314, the council held in the same place, in A. D. 326, the third council of Carthage, in A. D. 397, the council of Hippo, in A. D. 393, the great African council in A. D. 408, the great council at Constantinople, in A. D. 680, and the great council in the same place, in A. D. 692, did severally and solemnly condemn every thing belonging to theatrical exhibitions of every description.

Modern divines and synods have been as little divided on this matter as on any other subject of Christian practice. Let a few men speak for themselves. Archbishop Usher says: "stage-plays offend against the seventh commandment in many ways together—in the abuse of apparel, tongue, eyes, countenance, gestures, and almost all parts of the body; therefore they that go to see such sights, and hear such words, show their neglect of Christian duty, and their carelessness in sinning, whereas they willingly commit themselves to the snare of the devil." Bishop Collier says: "Nothing has been done more to debauch the age in which we live than the stage-poets and the play-house." Archbishop Tillotson says: "The play-house is the *devil's chapel*, a *nursery of licentiousness and vice*; a recreation which ought not to be allowed among a civilized, much less a Christian people." Andrew Fuller says: "The introduction of so large a portion of heathen mythology into the songs and other entertainments of the stage, sufficiently shows the bias of people's hearts. The house of God gives them no pleasure; but the resurrection of the obscenities, intrigues and bacchanalian revels of the old heathens, afford

them exquisite delight." The Synod held at Rochelle, in A. D. 1571, unanimously voted that "Congregations shall be admonished by their ministers seriously to reprehend and suppress all dances, mummeries and interludes; and it shall not be lawful for any Christian to act or be present at any comedies, tragedies, plays, interludes, or any other such sports, either in public or in private chambers, considering that they have always been opposed, condemned and suppressed, in and by the church, as bringing along with them the corruption of good manners, especially when the holy scripture is profaned, which is not delivered to be acted or played, but only to be preached." The Westminster Assembly numbers among the violations of the seventh commandment "all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections, all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereto, immodest apparel, unchaste company, lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage-plays, and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others." But not only have the ancient heathens and the divines and councils of the church in every age condemned these things. All classes of moderns have borne their testimony in the same way. Dymond says: "The night of a play is the harvest time of iniquity, where the profligate and the sensual put in their sickles and reap." Sir John Hawkins, the biographer of Dr. Johnson, and an infidel, observes: "Although it is said of plays that they teach morality; and of the stage that it is the mirror of human life, these assertions are mere declamation, and have no foundation in truth or experience. On the contrary a play-house and the regions about it are the very hot-beds of vice." Lord Kaimes, a skeptic, says: "It requires not time nor much thought to discover the poisonous influence of such plays, where the chief characters are decked out with every vice in fashion, however gross, and where their deformities are carefully disguised under the embellishments of wit, sprightliness and good humor." Dr. Johnson, speak-

ing of Collier's view of the immorality and profaneness of the English stage, says: "The wise and the pious caught the alarm, and the nation wondered that it had suffered irreligion and licentiousness to be openly taught at the public charge." Dryden, a Catholic, acknowledged the propriety of Collier's remarks, and published his repentance for the licentiousness with which he himself had written. Rousseau, the infidel, has said some things I would not dare to say, viz. "It is impossible that an establishment (a theatre at Geneva) so contrary to our ancient manners can be generally applauded. How many generous citizens will see with indignation this monument of luxury and effeminacy raise itself upon our ancient simplicity! Where is the imprudent mother that would dare to carry her daughter to this dangerous school? And what respectable woman would not think herself dishonored in going there!" As to testimony on the general subject, listen to but one more. It comes from a source which every American must respect. It reads thus:

In Congress October 12th, 1778: "Whereas, true religion and good morals, are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness: *Resolved*, that it be, and it is hereby earnestly recommended to the several States to take the most effectual means for the encouragement thereof, and for the suppressing of *Theatrical entertainments*, horse-racing, gaming, and such other diversions, as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners."

*Extract from the minutes.*

(Signed)

"CHAS. THOMSON, Sect."

Are not these testimonies conclusive on the great subject under discussion? Need they be more numerous? Could they be more pointed and absolute? But we wish to adduce a few testimonies as to the effect of stage-plays on those who are most affected by them. It will readily be observed

that reference is had to the players themselves. Tertullian says: "The heathens themselves marked actors and stage-players with infamy, and excluded them from all honors and dignity." Augustine says: "Men reject from the advantages of good society, and from all honors, the actors of the poetic fables and stage-players." Rousseau says: "In all countries the profession of a player is dishonorable, and those who exercise it are every where contemned." Witherspoon says: "Even those who are fondest of theatrical amusements, do yet notwithstanding esteem the employment of players a mean and sordid profession. Their character has been infamous in all ages, just a living copy of that vanity, obscenity and impiety, which is to be found in the pieces which they represent." Thus also a French writer of some note during the reign of wickedness in that land, near the close of the last century, says: "It must appear very surprising, that even down to the expiration of the French monarchy, there was a character of disgrace affixed to the profession of a player, especially when compared with the kindred profession of preacher or pleader." This same language was used in lamentation by one of our oldest journals forty years ago. A modern writer asks a question which each man can answer or not at his pleasure: "Is there any family of rank or high standing that would not feel degraded by a marriage alliance with a stage-player?" Wilberforce says: "It is an undeniable fact, for the truth of which we may safely appeal to every age and nation, that the situation of the performers, particularly those of the female sex, is remarkably unfavorable to the maintenance and growth of the religious and moral principle, and of course highly dangerous to their eternal interests." Dymond says: "If I take my seat in the theatre, I have paid three or four shillings as an inducement to a number of persons to subject their principles to extreme danger—and the defence which I make is, that I am amused by it. Now we affirm that this defence is invalid." Even the famous

Mrs. Frances Ann Butler—known as Miss Fanny Kemble—says, in her journal: “Acting is the very lowest of the arts”.... “I acted like a wretch of course; how could I do otherwise”... “What a mass of wretched mumming mimickry acting is”... “How I do loathe my most important and unpoetical craft.” Surely a late poet was fully justified when he said:

“The theatre was, from the very first,  
The favorite haunt of sin, though honest men,  
Some very honest, wise and worthy men,  
Maintained it might be turned to good account:  
And so perhaps it might, but never was.  
From first to last it was an evil place.”

All these testimonies, gathered from pagans, infidels, Christians, laity, clergy, poets, statesmen, historians, philosophers, councils, and our national congress, have been presented for the purpose of showing what these entertainments have been in every age, as they have been regularly handed down to us, and for the purpose of developing in a satisfactory manner the peculiar vices which are thus nourished.

No man can properly object to the testimonies cited, because, be his views what they may in morals, here is evidence that the theatre is an “evil place.”

I know of no method by which the force of these testimonies could be destroyed, except by showing that the theatre is *now* in an improved condition—that it is really *reformed*. Yet that it has not changed for the better, is manifest from the complaints made in the journals of the day—the very journals that are crowded with advertisements and notices respecting plays, and therefore cannot be suspected of being righteous overmuch. A recent number of one of the daily and not religious papers published in New York, has this remarkable language respecting the theatre. “The man who murdered Helen Jewett got his

exalted ideas in this *school for scandal*; your forgers, your counterfeiters, your pickpockets, your swindlers, your perpetrators of grand and petty larceny, your rioters and highwaymen, all got their characters in this school for morals, falsely so called. At these dramatic representations you will see mothers and their daughters, respectables from Bond street and Broadway, in boxes; and over their heads, on benches, you may see street walkers from Church and Chapel streets. I have seen, in the Park Theatre, mothers of forty with their daughters of twenty, sitting in all the immodesty of *undress*. There is something so fascinating in dramatic representations to boys of from fourteen to twenty-four, that they will steal from their parents, masters, superiors or equals, or any where, so as they may gain admittance into this 'school of refinement.' I have known gold and silversmiths' apprentices, dry goods, toy-shop, apothecary, and grog-shop boys, before they arrived at eighteen years, detected in a long course of pilfering, that they might get into the play-house at eight, the beer and oyster house at ten, and the gaming house at twelve. I appeal to scores of young men now in Broadway, between the Battery and Bleeker street, if this is not the case with them this week, and two or three times every week." Nor is this evil a little one. A recent New York paper contained an advertisement offering a salary to *five hundred* children, who were required "in the production of a spectacle of a most extensive and extraordinary nature," at the Bowery Theatre. Besides, many *thousands* go, six nights in the week, who take no part in the performance. The same holds true of theatrical entertainments even in Philadelphia.

The Public Ledger of that city for February 2d, 1837, contains the following article under the head of *Theatres*: "I appeal to you, Messrs. Editors, to aid in the suppression of a practice which, I regret to say, has of late years rendered the *pits* of our theatres almost as disagreeable as the upper

tier of boxes. I allude to the admission of prostitutes and loose women into the pit, and thus placing them before the eyes of the entire audience; it is of course the right of the managers to do as *they* please, but it is also the right of any one to state facts, and then call on the public to put down such overt acts against decency. I assert then, 1st. That it is a fact, that the first bench in the pit, next the orchestra, is more or less every evening occupied by females of ill fame, known to be such; 2d. That other parts of the pit are often honored by their presence to the annoyance of respectable persons in their vicinity; 3d. That, on crowded houses, such females, in common with men and boys, stand up on the benches, excluding the sitters in the boxes from a view of the stage; 4th. That it is no uncommon thing for some one in the back of the boxes to be recognized and greeted by their 'cher amie' in the pit, to the confusion of respectable females in the dress circles, and to the great disgrace of all who may intervene between the '*nodder* and *noddee*.' If any one doubts these statements, a visit to the theatres will satisfy the most incredulous, and a denial of their truth is challenged. What then is the remedy? Must virtue and vice be thus amalgamated? Shall ladies, who may choose to visit theatres, be met full in the face by loose women, whose sight is a libel on virtue, and are the patient public to patronize such inroads on propriety? I believe this is the only city in the Union, in which females are introduced into the pit! A place where they ought not to come under any circumstances. It is very likely that now and then respectable women are found in the pit, but they are accompanied by their husbands and friends, and are easily distinguished by their demeanor from the class complained of. My own opinion is, that no woman should be allowed to enter the pit, reserving that for persons who wish to see the play and attend no ladies; and that if our city must differ from all others, then, that it is the duty of the managers to keep the pit as they do keep the first and

second tier of boxes, devoid of avowed prostitutes, and I call on you, Messrs. Editors, as a friend of morals, to satisfy yourselves of the facts above asserted, and then to aid public opinion in purging the best place for seeing and hearing in the whole theatre."—The same journal for February 21, 1837, contains another article in which the writer says: "In my last I asserted that the admittance of prostitutes into the pit was allowed by our theatrical managers, and that the consequence was that respectable females in the boxes were insulted. These statements have not been denied, and cannot be; the presumption then remains, that the managers feel perfectly contented, that their pits shall be little else than assignation places, and that it shall be considered as disreputable to be seen there as to be found frequenting the third tier. This is not the case as yet, because as the pit is one-half cheaper than the boxes, and is undeniably the best part of the theatre for seeing and hearing, people feel disposed to run risks of imputations, and to bear the contact and company of loose women, rather than give up the play. The matter is reduced to this: Here is an excellent actor and a good play for the night—the best seats in the boxes will be taken by parties, and beside, it is more than I can afford, so I will go to the pit, and if in consequence of the jam I am squeezed up against a strumpet, and that too in the face of ladies in the boxes, I must just bear it. That's all."

"Now this reasoning may do for a man whose habits are formed, but apply it to a boy just coming into manhood, and the chance is ten to one he is led off by the syren at his side. The purpose of the pit—and in every city in the Union known by the writer, it is used alone for that, is to give a place to those who do not attend with ladies, and who feel indisposed to pay box price so that they may see the performance at their ease, and, as

only men are admitted, the matter of crowding is compensated by the difference of price between pit and box."

"It is not so here. If any person is not qualified either by dress or wealth to enter the boxes, and does not feel disposed to look over a lady's bonnet and the heads of the standers up in the pit, why, forsooth, he must go there, in company with any prostitute who may choose to sit there. But more are driven into the boxes by this, quoth the managers; we select good pieces and obtain good actors, so as to incite persons to come; we make the pit disreputable by admitting loose women into it, and thus while *they* fill that, the boxes are occupied by pit refugees who take seats no one would take could they decently sit in the pit. Such is the practical operation, if not the reasoning, growing from this vile habit. The managers may say, respectable persons *do* sit in the pit. I have granted that, and shown why; but I assert their number is decreasing, and in their stead come young men and boys, ripe for temptation. So I care not which horn of the dilemma the managers take. They bring virtue and vice in close proximity, and parade vice under the eyes of our wives, sisters, and daughters, or if they disclaim such *intentions*, then they persevere in a course which does, past all doubts, produce the above results."

The same journal for March 2d, 1837, says, that Tuesday evening the upper tier of boxes in the Walnut Street Theatre were much disturbed by the riotous and outrageous conduct of an abandoned woman. "She swore most profusely and fought most furiously." What a spectacle! A vile woman swearing and fighting in a theatre! Were the ladies much pleased? Did they cry *encore*? If such is the state of the theatre in the most quiet, polite and orderly city in America, if not in the world, what must it be in other places? Reader, judge.

These are specimens of the groanings of decent men under the abominations of this school of vice.

Such being the truth on this great subject, the question arises—What shall be done? The answer is—First of all abstain from all attendance at these places of temptation and sin yourself. If you are a father, remember that not only your own ideas of what is lovely and of good report may materially suffer, but your son may become a rake, and your daughter the victim of the designing villain through your example, should you frequent stage-plays.

Art thou a husband, or a brother? Thy wife and thy sister have claims upon thee too strong to be contemned or forgotten in the dissipation of the theatre. Art thou a mother? Canst thou think thyself to be seeking thy own eternal welfare or that of thy child by going to the theatre and taking her with thee? Is this the plain road to heaven? Do you really thus believe? Conscience must say No! All history and all revelation say No! Abstain from all appearance of evil. Art thou a youth? “If sinners entice thee consent thou not.” Art thou aged? Surely the follies of a stage ill suit the gravity of grey hairs.

Let every one who regards the weal or wo of the land most carefully avoid giving any countenance to this system of abominations. There are many persons who would not for their right hand visit these places in their own town or city, who, yet, when travelling, are induced to go on some great occasion, and violate the laws of God and consent to sin. God their judge can see them as well far from home as any where else. And their sin is clear, and their conduct betrays great lack of religious principle. Should no one, stranger or resident, attend these places, they must of course go down. Again: Let all, as they have opportunity, publish the truth on this subject. Especially warn all against an entrance on this kind of amusement. It is in the extreme seductive and ensnaring. A man of great firmness in other matters, resolved that he would the ensuing winter go three times and only three times to the theatre. He went the three times and nineteen times more, and set out

to go again, but an act of Providence hindered him—he returned to his room, and when he awoke in the morning he heard that the night before the theatre had been burned, and many lives lost. The fires that have consumed so many theatres do not still seem sufficient to break the charm. Yet let us exhort men not to listen to the first notes of the syren song. Especially let the pulpit and the press of this nation give solemn and timely warning. Such warning is no less needed throughout our retired country neighborhoods and villages, than in our large cities. For the unwary country youth visits the town and is induced to attend these haunts of sin, and returns to his home far less a man of virtue than he was when he commenced his journey.

**LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.**

not, he seemed insensible as death, until I gently shook him ; he opened his eyes, started up, and gave me a wild look, for a moment, then his eyelids gradually closed, his forehead contracted, and he slunk away into his stupor as if he knew me, for the instant, and from remorse of conscience would avoid all remembrance of early days.

What a sad reverse was exhibited in this awful spectacle. In his youth he was the gayest of the gay ; the favored child of favored parents ; he was indulged to a fault ; his every desire was gratified. He grew a handsome boy, polite and easy in his manners, gentle and amiable in his disposition ; at school we all loved him, and in the innocent sports of the play ground he was the ring-leader ; he was always our choice. When the time came for his leaving school and engaging in mercantile business, he mingled with new associates. Early in life he centered his affections upon a lovely girl of his own age ; they were united in matrimony, and for a time never was there a happier couple. But, alas ! the allurements of company, the theatre, the ball room, and the tavern, proved temptations too powerful for his unsuspecting heart—the consequences are soon told. Driven from business, excluded from virtuous society, divorced from his broken-hearted wife, deserted by all his friends, he became an outcast and a beggar. O ! methought while I stood over his dying body, if he had the ability to speak, and the inclination to communicate, he would address me in some such language as this :

“ Beware of the theatre ; it first led me in youth, and I was easily led, into immoral indulgences. It is no difficult task to trace the primary step of my destruction to the lobbies of the theatre, and its infatuating connexions, the bar and the coffee room. There I spent my evenings ; Shakspeare and the British theatre became my only reading ; actors and actresses my only associates. The tavern, the oyster house, and houses of pleasure finally drew me into their destructive labyrinths. I strove to avoic

the earthly hell I saw myself plunging into; but its fatal chains were rivetted too fast and too strong upon my poor soul. I attempted to plead with myself the innocency of my indulged pleasures—It was the gratification of a harmless desire that induced me for the first time to cross the threshold of the theatre. It would not do. I could not allay the pangs of an already wounded conscience. Well do I remember, when the curtain rose for the first time to my astonished view, how my heart bounded for joy as I viewed the rich and dazzling scenery, and drank in the deceitful representations of the actors. The play was the ‘Road to Ruin,’ a true semblance of my future destiny; but little did I then think that I had taken the first step towards consequences fraught with my eternal destruction. The glittering attractions of the stage soon drew me there again, and too soon did I become infatuated with its seductive charms. One fatal step led on to another, until I found myself sliding rapidly down the steep abyss of ruin.”

A little restorative which I procured from the distant nurse of the ward aroused for a moment, in the struggling effort to swallow, the dying man from what appeared to be his sleep of death. I again called him by his own familiar name, he again, and for the last time in this world, looked at me; but, O! it was a fearful look! Heaving a deep-drawn deathly sigh, he put out his emaciated and cold hand, and attempted to speak; his voice failed him, he recovered himself and made a second effort, it was a desperate one—“O W——,” calling me by name, “the theatre, the first fruits of my transgression, is sending my poor lost soul to hell; O! admonish the the the”—young, he would have said, but his utterance and his breath were simultaneously interrupted by the death gurgle. After several ineffectual attempts to breathe freely, during which he firmly yet insensibly grasped my hand, he gave one long gasp and was no more—his unfettered spirit had forsaken its earthly tenement and fled to regions beyond the grave. W. J.