

## ANOTHER YEAR OF CHURCH ENTERTAINMENTS.

IN other studies prepared for this magazine,<sup>1</sup> I have been constrained to point out how seriously the division of Christians into the multiplicate sects which flourish among us interferes with the spiritual work of the Church. I would not always be uttering maledictions; and, with what grace an enemy of sectarianism can do so, I am now making the admission—to which I am forced by a second year's attention to the subject—that at all events the work of amusing the public is, under this system, prosecuted with a zeal born of no other.

My record of entertainments given by religious societies in the United States from June 1, 1895, to June 1, 1896, includes more than five hundred of these occasions. This is, of course, the merest fraction of the whole number given during the year, and yet, fragmentary as is my record, it probably affords a fair index of the remarkable labors of American religious organizations in this direction. It is with a feeling of wonder touched with awe that a student turns the pages of this chronicle of a year's activity by the churches; that he discovers how instant and keen is their appreciation of the wants of the amusement-loving, how tireless their devotion to the interests of the box-office: it is with a sense of amazement tinged with admiration that he discovers with what increasing ardor the institution, founded not to be ministered unto but to minister, is giving itself to the duty of providing fun at a minimum cost; with what unexampled philanthropy it is placing within reach of the humblest and poorest of Christian people, the Female Minstrel, the Dog-Show, the Dance of the Wood-Nymphs, the Brownie Drill, and kindred joys.

Glancing through my record, I glean such religious intelligence as the following:

St. John's Church, Lowell, Massachusetts, in its Easter festivities,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. HALE has published in THE FORUM, "A Religious Analysis of a New England Town," March, 1894; "The Impotence of Churches in a Manufacturing Town," November, 1894; "A Religious Study of a Baptist Town," February, 1895; and "A Study of Church Entertainments," January, 1896.

produced "Violet in Fairyland" and "A Comedy of Errors up to date." The Unity Church, Brockton, the Porter Church, Brockton, and various other congregations in surrounding towns, have delighted southeastern Massachusetts with a laughable performance entitled "Aunt Jemima's Album." Another Brockton church has given a Wish-bone Party. The Christian Endeavorers of Menlo, Iowa, have engaged in a New Woman Social. St. Paul's, Rahway, New Jersey, and several other religious societies, have presented that awakening and gladdening exhibition, "The Mystic Midgets." St. Paul's, Newburyport, Massachusetts, offered "Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks," rejuvenescent with *Trilby* characters (without whom no well-ordered modern church performance is complete) and *The Man who Tickled his Wives to Death*. Grace Church, Salem, Massachusetts, scored heavily with its "Masque of Culture." St. Francis de Sales, Charlestown, Boston, entertained a thousand people at a Progressive Whist Party. St. Catherine's parish, Charlestown, has given a Grand Barbecue, with athletic sports, political speeches, fireworks, and dancing, as features. Several thrifty Boston churches, fortunately situated on the line of march taken by the parading Knights Templars at their recent national conclave, erected stands on, or in front of, their consecrated premises, and turned an honest penny by selling seats for an entertainment which they did not have to trouble themselves to give. Members of the New Church, Bath, Maine, came forward with "Woodcock's Little Game," said to be a clever thing in the comedy vein, a brilliant series of Living Pictures, and that screaming farce, "Poor Pillicoddy." St. Paul's, Pawtucket, Rhode Island, held a Shakesperian Carnival; a reverend cleric, as *Hamlet*, did effective work in the ghost scene, and selected members of the choir, with others, rendered the lullaby from "Midsummer Night's Dream." Dancing furnished a fitting conclusion of the evening, the Grand March being led by *Julius Caesar* and the one hundred and twenty-five costumed actors. Unusually successful was the last annual Fair of Highland Congregational Society, Larch Street, Providence, whose place of worship was skilfully transformed into a market-place, where macaroni and suspenders—specially mentioned among other articles—were sold. The First Parish, Groton, Massachusetts, danced the New Year in, and realized about twelve dollars. The Asbury M. E. Church, Providence, has given a Hay-seed Party. Ballou Universalist Church, Providence, has rendered "Down by the Sea," a two-act drama; tickets twenty-five cents, dancing *not* included.

At Norwood, Massachusetts, on a Wednesday, the appetizing odor

of coffee pervaded the Baptist church. On Thursday, in the Methodist church, the pastor sang a number of songs, grave and gay, unfortunately to a small audience, and a talented monologue artiste was heartily applauded. On the ensuing Wednesday, the Universalists (whose dining-room had recently been enlarged) gave a Birthday Party, in the course of which a Baby Rattle and Spoon Drill was performed in a gratifying manner. Another Birthday Party was given by the Congregationalists the next evening, but on Wednesday following, as nearly as I can make out the time, the Universalists again pressed to the front with a Yule-Tide Market, at which, at a slight advance over secular prices, confectionery, linen, stationery, meat, vegetables, and groceries of all descriptions were offered for sale. The Norwood "Advocate's" accounts of these events are among the most exquisitely vivid of contemporary religious records.

Epworth M. E. Church, Toledo, has enriched its treasury by a Weigh Social. St. John's M. E. Church, Toledo, has given a stimulating entertainment by the Peak Sisters, widely known in American religious circles, introducing that touching ballad, "Do You Know the Mouth of Man?" in which the gentle art of kissing is referred to ninety times; while the First Presbyterian Church, Toledo, has produced a refined diversion called "Just Us Girls," opening with a "What Is It?" march, in which the young ladies wear their hair over their faces, and masks on the back of their heads; thus convulsing the audience by the spectacle of apparent deformities in an extraordinary series of evolutions.

Passing on through the notices I have preserved, my eye is caught by accounts of a Mock Town Meeting, a Poker Party, a Fancy Dress Drill, a Tambourine Drill (irreverently described by the secular press as "a winner"), a Dude Drill, a Great Moral Dime Show (introducing McGinty, a dwarf, and a petrified man), a Spider-web Party, a Mother Goose Market, and a Husking Bee. There are one or two announcements of "Gymnastic Exhibitions" and "Athletic Exhibitions," which I make bold to believe are euphemisms for sparring contests. It was in the Boston "Herald" of only a day or two ago, that I recognized in the name "Ike Weir, the Spider," committed to trial for brutal assault, that of a pugilist long disreputable, who has appeared in my own town of Middleboro, Massachusetts, in a boxing-match which was a feature of a church fair. After having served his time, "the Spider" will be an even more attractive personage for churches desiring to interest the public.

There is in my collection a brief reference to a pastor who entertained his flock with feats of legerdemain. Let the admiring fancy picture the reverend gentleman as he stands at the sacred desk, the glow of spiritual enthusiasm in his eye, the flame of holy ardor on his forehead, making an omelet in a silk hat, or taking rabbits out of the ears of his devoted people!

I have this year no report from Christ Church, Springfield, Missouri, which has formerly shown noteworthy ability in the preparation of such gladsome affairs as a "Dance of the Arab Maidens," a "Black-bird Ballet," and "The Chew Glue Sisters in their Song and Dance Specialties." The term by which the Christ Church shows were by some referred to is that very vulgar one applied by people of the baser sort to burlesques of the Sam Jack and Rentz Santley type. Christ Church does not, I think, maintain its activity in this direction, and St. John's, I believe, has done little since its experience with the peripatetic managers of a Kirmis, but that the line of entertainment so fearlessly initiated in Springfield has not been permitted to die out through any loss of zeal there, my record abundantly proves. The First Reformed Church, Bedford Avenue and Clymer Street, Brooklyn, has this year given a Living-Picture Show in which society women of the Eastern District posed in gilt frames, indifferently as St. Cecilia and Bacchante, The Madonna of Consolation, and La Zingarella. Ladies of St. John's, Youngstown, Ohio, in a black-face performance, made a pleasing appearance when they came before the foot-lights with songs, dances, and local hits.

Now, I would not cloud with one moment's annoyance the brows of the esteemed persons who get up these shows. I do not carp at sacred Female Minstrels: they don't happen to suit my taste; but I may be peculiar. And yet when I read in the Buffalo "Enquirer" that at Fredonia, New York, the young ladies not only corked, but appeared in bloomers, and that at Woodside, Long Island, a similar performance was further enlivened by a pleasing act on the part of a young lady who, with enviable agility, if not discretion, kicked a tambourine held above her head, I cannot but feel that—considered as religious exercises—these doubtless delightful occasions may be, in some details, open to criticism.

Neither can I personally with quite untempered enthusiasm commend the form which consecrated zeal has taken in the case of Grace Church, Erie and Second Streets, Jersey City. According to a press despatch, this congregation made a distinct advance in the art of sacred amusement by its recent production of "The Talisman," a three-act

opera, the novelty being that the male rôles, those of *Sir Roland* and *Don Carlos*, were taken by girls in fleshings. I may be wrong,—the New York "Independent" will correct me if I am,—but I should be disposed to regard this also as perhaps an error of taste. I know how great is the pressure for more and more exciting shows upon churches which have gone into the theatrical business,—and the press reports state that Grace Church owes much of its prosperity to the frequency with which it provides high-class entertainments,—but, frankly, there has been, at least until recently, a prejudice against this particular costume as an attire for young ladies in church.

I have, however, no hesitation in commending—as a successful exhibition of impudent and attractive indecency—the New Woman Social given, according to the New York papers, by the male members of the Methodist Society of Hancock, New York. Some of the more engaging toilets worn by these followers of John Wesley are described in the despatch. "W. F. Stimpson in lilac bloomers with lace trimmings, was irresistible, as was E. H. Taylor in a Mother Hubbard, and with a weeping-willow plume. E. C. Seeley wore shiny black bloomers, set off with a gorgeous sash. J. Curtis Martin wore red bloomers and an angelic smile. Olin Henderson in check bloomerettes, Ward Thompson in a shirt waist, and W. H. Dean with balloon sleeves, were also conspicuous."

This is, possibly, funny. But for monumental godlessness made endurable by no saving grace of humor, for simian imbecility, for supreme and inimitable folly unmarred by the slightest suggestion either of common decency or ordinary self-respect, for grovelling baseness and depraved vulgarity,—the Trilby Party, otherwise the Foot Social, otherwise the Ankle Auction, stands at the head of the church entertainments of the year. While others are trudging along the weary plains of the unimaginative and the ordinary, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Suffern, New York, and St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey, with unblanched cheek and dauntless eye, have scaled the Alpine heights of deathless shame. I have received from all parts of the country marked copies of newspapers reporting these events; some of the papers bearing the request, "Please give this your attention." I am very willing to do so, but I regret the inadequacy of my vocabulary, and I refrain from any further attempt to characterize the performance. In the Trilby Social, as given by the Suffern M. E. Epworth League and the New Brunswick P. E. Olive Branch Society, the young ladies

of the church display their—feet, let us say, and be polite,—behind a curtain which is lifted to a height described as “tantalizing.” Men in front of the curtain view what is displayed of one female after another, and then bid for the privilege of taking her to supper. The charm of the scheme is the ease with which it lends itself to the worse than dubious; and I have no doubt that the press accounts of the scenes which attended the bidding are, in both cases, highly colored, though the most literal truth would certainly be exciting enough. The Boston “Sunday Journal” illustrated one of these events with a half-page picture; the “New York Herald” gave it a two-column illustration; the accompanying letter-press, and the reports published in other papers, describe a show which, in a respectable community, under other than ecclesiastical management, might have difficulty with the police.

Tom-Thumb Weddings and Mock Marriages multiply. Plymouth Church, Chicago, is this year among those which have thus made Holy Matrimony a pleasing joke. One P. E. Church in Massachusetts, fired by the realistic spirit of the modern tank drama, added a vivid touch to its mock celebration of this Sacrament, by the introduction of real choir-boys; but an African M. E. Church in New Bedford, with native imitative genius, outshone its white competitors with a sumptuously staged burlesque of the Marlborough-Vanderbilt nuptials. These congregations would profit under the tutor to whom St. Paul consigned Hymenæus and Alexander.

For Sunday-evening entertainments, for which, as a rule, no charge is made, the stereopticon is easily the most popular device. The pastor of the First Lutheran Church, Kansas City, testifies with enthusiasm that since he took up the lantern the collections have trebled. From Plymouth Church, Salina, Kansas, comes the true story of a man who had not entered a church for thirty years previous to his attendance upon its picture-show: he was so affected that he immediately joined *another* church. Here are specimen numbers, taken from lantern programmes in my possession:

#### ILLUSTRATED HYMN: ROCK OF AGES. (9 SUPERB VIEWS.)

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| (1) <i>Cross in angry sea.</i>                       | (7) <i>Borne on high—Cross beneath.</i>   |
| (2) <i>Lightning illuminates face of Cross.</i>      | (8) <i>The silent sea; Cross seen from above.</i>   |
| (3) <i>A rainbow spans it.</i>                       | (9) <i>Mechanical framed slide throws on last slide twinkling stars and rippling water.</i> |
| (4) <i>Female figure clings to it.</i>               |   |
| (5) <i>Angel lends a helping hand.</i>               |   |
| (6) <i>A heavenly ray of light shines upon them.</i> |   |



## DANIEL.

*Daniel before the king.  
Belshazzar's feast.  
Daniel praying.*

*Nebuchadnezzar before the fiery  
furnace.  
Angel effect to the same.*

Few cities or towns in the land have this year been without a Bicycle Service. Floral wheels make appropriate decorations, and if the organ has a Swiss Bell stop, it may be appropriately played. A favorite text is Psalm LXXXIII, 13, "O my God, make them like a wheel." (Hebrew גלגל, *galgal*, a whirling thing.) The anthem might be a musical setting of the tender, howbeit uninspired, sentiment:—

"Watch o'er my safety while I sleep."

The pastor of the Methodist Church of St. Louis, Michigan, having entertained firemen, veterans, and blacksmiths, outdid himself in a Barber's Sunday Evening. Scissors, hair-dye, cups, soaps, brushes and combs, mirrors and washes, tastefully arranged on the walls and platform, with festoons of towels and rosettes of brilliantine and bay-rum bottles, gave a homelike appearance to the church; sitting in a barber's chair, the pastor gathered inspiration for his lecture, and then, rising, he pressed home in the choicest terms of the tonsorial profession, the lesson of the razor and the strop.

An Otsego, Michigan, pastor has issued a show-bill headed "SILVER GIVEN AWAY! Eight Dollars To-night and Each Evening This Week at Congregational Church!" The money is given as prizes to the first persons who unravel the texts for the several evenings. These are printed on the bill in this fashion: "Text for Friday Evening: 'Eodht anrfo ehfte htbso euout awsol belet eosfo dgons hdlæ duhet hsnpd wteha rhaet vloen mawlh.'"

I need not, I fancy, further transcribe from my record. The extremes to which venders of sensational religion, and managers of sensational church performances, are forced, will sufficiently appear from the instances already given. Referring to the Sunday performances, I would be understood. I am launching no anathemas at any well-meant effort to make religion attractive. Dignity is not the chief consideration in a divine service, and it is conceivable that it is sometimes expedient to sacrifice good taste to a more important thing—the benefit of souls. But I deplore, and I feel that serious men must everywhere deplore, the conditions which make the sensational Sun-

day show frequent and familiar. As a means of drawing a big house, I concede its convenience, under our present unhappy divisions ; but I traverse the opinion, if it is anywhere held, that a Sunday show would be necessary under a sane and Christian—that is, a united, a Catholic—administration of religion. Where now rival sects find it necessary to “go to the masses” with Prize Texts, Bicycle Runs for Christ, Cyclone Evangelists, and Lantern Services, a united Church, soberly engaged in its proper work, would find the masses eager to come to it. I greatly misjudge the people if they would not be more strongly attracted by an institution with a distinctive and easily discerned character, than they are by a multitude of nondescript concerns which are indifferently meeting-houses, cycle depots, or barber shops.

But it is not a desire to gather the people, in order to preach the gospel to them, that actuates congregations which engage in the miscellaneous entertainments, some of which I have described. Thereat suck they out no small advantage. The *raison d'être* of these things is in the fact that a hundred and forty sects have fastened themselves upon a people who cannot support them. The show is the only means by which thousands of our innumerable and unnecessary religious societies can pay their bills. The inevitable tendency toward greater and greater sensationalism has been repeatedly pointed out in this series of papers. The present article may perhaps suggest the conclusion that this tendency is now not far from the limit which a decent civilization will impose. The end of the path is being reached. A review of the entertainments of the past year affords evidence that, with dangerous rapidity, church entertainments are taking the nature of improper exhibitions. Ordinary buffoonery no longer draws. The more tempting attractions of the forbidden, the more spicy morsels of the variety theatre are demanded, and are being supplied.

Here again I would not be misunderstood. Healthy amusement, honest fun, is for human enjoyment. God has filled the world with good things, and we ought to use them. Good-natured nonsense is refreshing. Beautiful faces and graceful dances are joys in which we are wise to take pleasure. That there is a frank, though restrained, life of the senses possible as an attendant upon the highest spirituality, I believe to be the teaching of the Sacraments ordained by Christ. Over-squeamishness is not a necessary characteristic of earnest morality. Let us be human ; let us be hearty ; let us be, as we were made, men and women ; but, in Heaven's name ! let us insist that when people appear in, or for the benefit of, churches, they shall keep on their proper



clothes. The theatre and the music-hall, properly conducted, are not establishments upon which the Church has any war to wage. But the Church is not a system of theatres and music-halls. It is a divine institution with a definite, particular, and sacred office, distinct from that of all human agencies whatsoever. It is to teach the sacredness of life, by standing for the essentially sacred side of life. Its songs are not merry glees, but litanies of human hopes and sorrows, and chants of human hearts in winged aspirations seeking God. If there is in life anything pure, and virginal, and sweet,—God knows it is hard enough to keep the faith that there is!—where is there to be kept any place and expression for it, if what are called the houses of God are given over to immodesty? We expect certain things from Mr. Hardy and the Zolaists, but we are hurt and grieved when the *Galahad* of our storytellers descends to “Summer in Arcady.” It may be too much to look for cleanliness on the professional stage; but surely it is beyond pardon that any body bearing the name of a Church of Jesus, the undefiled Nazarene, should, by a doubtful exhibition, sully the mind of any pure lad or tender maiden committed to its care.

If there is anywhere any witness for innocence, any illustration of the seriousness, nobility, and dignity of life; if there is anywhere any institution to preserve faith in the world, to administer the Sacraments,—that one which has taught former generations as nothing else ever could have taught, or ever can teach, the essential brotherhood of men, and that other which preaches the real presence of God in His world; any power to maintain, against the attacks of the foes of order, the sanctity of marriage; if there is anywhere any organ of God to set right the judgments of society, to absolve whom He has absolved, but to whom men refuse pardon; anywhere any authority also to declare the eternal righteousness, to thunder the demands of justice, and make plain the practical duties of honesty, chastity, and mercy; anywhere, in this time of social travail, any witness to the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, bold to demand that it be set up in very truth upon this soil of earth; any corporate love to search out the poor, and minister to the sick, to pour upon the wounds of the victims of our social injustice the compassionate healings of its sympathy,—it is not easy to recognize it in an agglomeration of enfeebled sects which eke out miserable existence by pitifully entertaining a world which the Church is intended to minister to, to lead, to teach, and to save.

Christianity is not stronger to do its work because, in the churches of its professors, there is being substituted for the incense of prayer,

the aroma of the bean supper and the oyster stew. It is not more beautiful and winning because the congregations of its competing sects are growing adept in meretricious arts. Far otherwise. The divided Church is in humiliation and disgrace. Its impotence is perceived: it is despised. This is because it is trying to live in violation of its constitution. The Church is constituted in Unity, not in division; in Holiness, not in desecration, immodesty, vulgarity, and sensationalism; in Catholicity, not in the spirit of sectarianism. The Church will again wield its ancient sway over the hearts of men when, returning from its apostasy, absolved and regenerate, it again appears—One, Holy, and Catholic.

WILLIAM BAYARD HALE.

## RUDYARD KIPLING AS A POET.<sup>1</sup>

It has for a long time been plain that Mr. Kipling takes his work in verse quite as seriously as his work in prose; but his critics have for the most part obstinately declined to take it so. Not long ago one professor, I believe of English literature, was quoted as saying of another professor of that branch of the humanities that he had "disposed of himself" as a judge by naming the author of "Barrack-Room Ballads" as his second choice for the laureateship, then still ostensibly vacant. Last year Mr. William Henry Bishop contributed to these pages an interesting paper on "Mr. Kipling's Work, So Far," in which he thus summarily dismissed his author's poetical claims:—

"The verse—in the volumes devoted to that sister accomplishment—is often dangerously nigh to pure doggerel; the 'Barrack-Room Ballads' do not always rise above the concert-hall ballads which they distinctly take as a model."

Even if one resent Mr. Bishop's dismissal of a large part of Mr. Kipling's verse as "pure doggerel," he has to own that he sees what the critics mean. As Matthew Arnold says about Burns, the world of the "Barrack-Room Ballads" "is not a beautiful world," nor does the balladist endeavor to beautify it. Neither is the dialect of Thomas Atkins "poetical diction," and the balladist rigorously restricts himself to it. Sometimes the results of this Biblical plainness of speech are impossible to be promulgated at tea-parties, as indeed Thomas Atkins in person would not be an eligible guest at such an assemblage. There is one Biblical word, in particular, that is distinctly overworked in "The Seven Seas" which has not been printable in polite literature for more than a century.

This is an extreme and crucial instance of a wilfulness of which we need not turn many pages either of the "Ballads" or of the "Seven Seas" to find exemplifications. It is a defiance of conventions for the

<sup>1</sup> "Ballads and Barrack-Room Ballads." New edition with additional poems. By RUDYARD KIPLING. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896.

"The Seven Seas." By RUDYARD KIPLING, author of "Many Inventions," "Barrack-Room Ballads," "The Jungle Books," etc. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1896.