

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 6

LITERARY SOCIETIES; THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES

by Ellen G. White
(1MR 244-146)

The purpose and object for which literary societies are established may be good, but unless wisdom from above and continual reliance upon God is preserved by all, there will be a decided failure in its exerting a saving influence.

When God's professed people voluntarily unite with the world or give men of short religious experience the preeminence in these literary societies, they do not have a high estimate of eternal things. They step over the line in the very first movement. There may be boundaries, set rules and regulations made, but, notwithstanding all this, the worldly element will take the lead. Men on the enemy's ground, led and controlled by his power, will have a controlling influence, unless there is an infinite power to work against them. Satan uses men as his agents to suggest, to lead out, to propose different acts, and a variety of amusing things which give no strength to the morals or elevation to the mind, but are wholly worldly. Soon the religious element is ruled out, and the irreligious elements take the lead.

Men and women who will not be ensnared, who will move straightforward in the path of integrity, loyal and true to the God of heaven whom they fear, love, and honor, can have a powerful influence to hold the people of God. Such an influence will command respect. But this vacillating between duty and the world gives the world all the advantage and will surely leave its molding power, so that religion, God, and heaven, will scarcely enter the thoughts.

If youth, and men and women of mature age, should organize a society where Bible reading and Bible study should be made the prominent theme, dwelling upon and searching out the prophecies, and studying the lessons of Christ, there would be strength in the society. There is no book from the perusal of which the mind is so much elevated and strengthened and expanded as the Bible. And there is nothing that will so endow with new vigor all our faculties as bringing them in contact with stupendous truths of the Word of God, and setting the mind to grasp and measure those truths.

If the human mind takes a low level, it is generally because it is left to deal with commonplace facts and not called out and exercised to grasp lofty, elevated truths, which are enduring as eternity. These literary societies and lyceums are almost universally exerting an influence entirely contrary to that which they claim, and are an injury to the youth. This need not be the case, but because unsanctified elements take the lead, because worldlings want matters to go to please themselves, their hearts are not in harmony with Jesus Christ; they are in the ranks of the Lord's enemies, and they will not be pleased with that kind of entertainment which would strengthen and confirm the members of the society in spirituality. Low, cheap matters are brought in which are not elevating or instructive, but which only amuse.

The way these societies have been conducted leads the mind away from serious reflection, away from God, away from heaven. By attending them, religious thoughts and services have become distasteful. There is less desire for fervent prayer, for pure and undefiled religion. The thoughts and conversation are not on elevating themes, but dwelling upon the subjects brought up in these gatherings. What is the chaff to the wheat? The understanding will gradually bring itself down to the dimensions of the matters with which it is familiar, till the powers of the mind become contracted, showing what has been its food.

The mind that rejects all this cheapness, and is taxed to dwell only upon elevated, ponderous, deep, and broad truths will strengthen. A knowledge of the Bible excels all other knowledge in strengthening the intellect. If your lyceums and literary societies would be made an opportunity for searching the Bible, it would be far more an intellectual society than it can ever become through the attention being turned to theatrical performances. What high and noble truths the mind may fasten upon and explore in God's Word! The mind may go deeper and still deeper in its research, becoming stronger with every effort to comprehend truth, and yet there will be an infinity beyond.

Those who compose these societies, who profess to love and reverence sacred things, and yet allow the mind to come down to the superficial, to the unreal, to simple, cheap, fictitious acting, are doing the devil's work just as surely as they look upon and unite in these scenes. Could their eyes be opened, they would see that Satan was their leader, the instigator, through agents present who think themselves to be something. But God pronounces their life and character altogether lighter than vanity. If these societies should make the Lord and His greatness, His mercies, His works in nature, His majesty and power as revealed in inspiration, their study, they would come forth blessed and strengthened.—Ms 41, 1900, pp. 10-12. (“Commandment Keeping,” July 23, 1900.)

If we regard the advantages given to us as our own, to be used according to our pleasure, to make a display, and create a sensation, the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, is put to shame by the characters of His professed followers.

Has God given you intellect? Is it for you to manage according to your inclinations? Can you glorify God by being educated to represent characters in plays, and to amuse an audience with fables? Has not the Lord given you intellect to be used to His name's glory in proclaiming the gospel of Christ? If you desire a public career, there is a work that you may do. Help the class you represent in plays. Come to the reality. Give your sympathy where it is needed by actually lifting up the bowed down. Satan's ruling passion is to pervert the intellect and cause men to long for shows and theatrical performances. The experience and character of all who engage in this work will be in accordance with the food given to the mind.