

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 21

Seventh-day Adventists and the Theater

Part V

(F. M. Wilcox, *Review and Herald*, April 15, 1937)

I had intended to conclude these talks relative to theatrical entertainments with the article in last week's paper. I do not feel free, however, to do this until I place before the readers of the REVIEW the very definite instruction which has come to us from the messenger of the Lord relative to the question of entertainments in our institutions.

This was addressed to the sanitarium in early days. The managers of that institution felt that in order to divert the minds of their patients from their maladies and ills, there must be furnished them exhilarating entertainment. The sanitarium could not make use of the moving picture, because it had not yet come into the world of invention. But the managers were led to present theatrical plays of the same character as those which are depicted upon the screen at the present time.

This brought from the messenger of the Lord very earnest protest. In this protest she enunciates certain principles which are as applicable today as when they were uttered. They have been printed through the years in the "Testimonies for the Church," but as many of the readers of the REVIEW do not have the "Testimonies" in their homes, we reproduce the instruction in this connection:

Amusements to Be Guarded

Those who bear the responsibility at the sanitarium should be exceedingly guarded that the amusements shall not be of a character to lower the standard of Christianity, bringing this institution down upon a level with others, and weakening the power of true godliness in the minds of those who are connected with it. Worldly or theatrical entertainments are not essential for the prosperity of the sanitarium or for the health of the patients. The more they have of this kind of amusements, the less will they be pleased unless something of the kind shall be continually carried on. The mind is in a fever of unrest for something new and exciting, the very thing it ought not to have. And if these amusements are once allowed, they are expected again, and the patients lose their relish for any simple arrangement to occupy the time. But repose, rather than excitement, is what many of the patients need.

As soon as these entertainments are introduced, the objections to theater going are removed from many minds, and the plea that moral and high-toned scenes are to be acted at the theater, breaks down the last barrier. Those who would permit this class of amusements at the sanitarium would better be seeking wisdom from God to lead these poor, hungry, thirsting souls to the Fountain of joy, and peace, and happiness.

When there has been a departure from the right path, it is difficult to return. Barriers have been removed, safeguards broken down. One step in the wrong direction prepares the way for another. A single glass of wine may open the door of temptation which will lead to habits of drunkenness. A single vindictive feeling indulged may open the way to a train of feelings which will end in murder. The least deviation from right and principle will lead to separation from God, and may end in apostasy. What we do once, we more readily and naturally do

again; and to go forward in a certain path, be it right or wrong, is more easy than to start. It takes less time and labor to corrupt our ways before God than to engraft upon the character habits of righteousness and truth. Whatever a man becomes accustomed to, be its influence good or evil, he finds it difficult to abandon....

Our Institutions to Be Beacon Lights

If physicians and workers flatter themselves that they are to find a panacea for the varied ills of their patients by supplying them with a round of amusements similar to those which have been the curse of their lives, they will be disappointed. Let not these entertainments be placed in the position which the living Fountain should occupy. The hungry, thirsty soul will continue to hunger and thirst as long as it partakes of these unsatisfying pleasures. But those who drink of the living water will thirst no more for frivolous, sensual, exciting amusements. The ennobling principles of religion will strengthen the mental powers, and will destroy a taste for these gratifications. —*Testimonies*, Vol. IV, pp. 577-579.

God designed that the sanitarium which He had established should stand forth as a beacon of light, of warning and reproof. He would prove to the world that an institution conducted on religious principles as an asylum for the sick, could be sustained without sacrificing its peculiar, holy character; that it could be kept free from the objectionable features that are found in other institutions of the kind. —*Id.*, p. 582.

Friendship With the World

Messages were borne not only to our sanitarium, but to our college as well. Into that institution worldly entertainments were brought in order to furnish the students with change and recreation. These entertainments were of a worldly character, and the servant of the Lord bore positive testimony relative to the danger of thus linking with the world. I quote from the chapter entitled, "Our College," in "Testimonies," Volume V, page 33:

The object of God in bringing the college into existence has been lost sight of. Ministers of the gospel have so far shown their want of wisdom from above, as to unite a worldly element with the college; they have joined with the enemies of God and the truth, in providing entertainments for the students. In thus misleading the youth, they have done a work for Satan. That work, with all its results, they must meet again at the bar of God.

Those who pursue such a course, show that they cannot be trusted. After the evil work has been done, they may confess their error; but can they easily gather up the influence they have exerted? Will the "Well done" be spoken to those who have been false to their trust? These unfaithful men have not built upon the Eternal Rock. Their foundation will prove to be sliding sand. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Lyceum Courses in Our Institutions

A number of our institutions arrange lyceum courses each year for the benefit of students and workers. I think this is commendable practice. I have often wondered why, instead of securing talent entirely from the world, more could not be done in the way of bringing onto our institutional platforms men and women from our own ranks. Some of our schools have endeavored to do this.

The Washington Missionary College, in its lyceum course for this year, under the direction of Prof. S. W. Tymeson, secured talent for four of its evenings from our own church workers. Miss

Grace Washburn, a radio artist of excellent ability, devoted one evening to a vocal concert. Mr. George Wargo, a violist, assisted by Miss Sylvia Meyer, harpist in the National Symphony Orchestra, gave another musical evening. Another evening was occupied by the Alabama Singers, young men students from our Oakwood Junior College. And the closing evening of the course is to be used by the College Glee Clubs in their annual recital, under the direction of Prof. William Shadel. These numbers of the course have been received with as great appreciation as has ever been accorded to outside talent.

I speak of this particular lyceum course for the reason only that I am personally acquainted with its work. No doubt others of our schools have followed the same plan, and have presented as fine courses of wholesome entertainment. I recognize, however, that for lyceum work the talent in our own church is limited. There are many workers among us who can preach the truth most acceptably and engage the attention of large congregations, and yet many of these workers could not render acceptable service on a lyceum program such as is required today of this class of talent. But I believe this home field should be explored and utilized as far as is consistently possible.

It would seem, for the present, that outside talent must be employed in conducting these lyceum courses, and excellent talent is oftentimes available. However, there is bound to be disappointment in individual instances. However highly some popular lecturer may be recommended, and however carefully his record may be investigated, it is found oftentimes that what he presents is not appropriate to our lecture courses. We should, therefore, give great care about condemning the committee which had the program in charge. We must recognize that the committee did the best it could with the information available, and that the disappointment of the committee is probably as great as that of any in the audience, if not greater.

I have great confidence in the management of our training schools. I know that the managing boards and the school faculties are made up of men and women of God, who are doing all they can to safeguard the interests of our youth and to train them for work in the Master's vineyard. Let us give, therefore, to those bearing these heavy burdens, our sympathetic and prayerful support.