

# I See America Dancing

SELECTED READINGS,  
1685-2000

Edited by  
Maureen Needham



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## CHAPTER 14

### From the Ballroom to Hell (1894)

*Thomas A. Faulkner*

Since my conversion from a dancing master and a servant of the “Evil One” to an earnest Christian and a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, the question has been repeatedly asked me: “Is there any harm in dancing?”

And letters innumerable have been coming in with questions to the same effect.

Selected excerpts from T[homas]. A. Faulkner, *From the Ball-room to Hell* (Chicago: Church Press, 1894), pp. 7–28.



First dancing; then drinking, smoking, and sex, 1912. This illustration depicts the “tragedy” of the unmarried mother. Published in John Dillon, in *From Dance Hall to White Slavery: The World’s Greatest Tragedy* (Chicago: Charles C. Thompson, 1912), facing p. 62.

The more I mingle with people outside the dancing circle the more forcibly I am made to realize how many there are who are seeking to know the truth concerning the evil of dancing, and how many thousands more who, if they are not seeking that knowledge, certainly ought to have it.

Let me assure you in the first place that I am well aware that there are many church members and professing Christians who dance; but if on the strength of this you deem it a safe amusement, come with me for a few evenings, and when you have seen all that I can show you, let your judgment tell you, whether you can, with safety, place your pure beautiful daughter in the dancing academy or ballroom.

Let us first take an instance from the "select" dancing academy, and thus begin at the root of the matter.

Here is a beautiful young girl. Let me take her for an example.

She is the daughter of wealthy parents; they have been called to mourn the loss of two of their children; and this is their only remaining treasure, their darling, their idol almost, whom they love more than their own lives.

They wish to bestow upon her every accomplishment which modern society demands, so when it is announced that Prof. —— will open his select dancing academy they hasten to place her under his instruction.

At first she seems shocked at the manner in which he embraces her to teach her the latest waltz.

It is her first experience in the arms of a strange man, with his limbs pressed to hers, and in her natural modesty she shrinks from so familiar a touch. It brings a bright flush of indignation to her cheek as she thinks what an unladylike and indecent position to assume with a man who, but a few hours before, was an utter stranger, but she says to herself: "This is the position every one must take who waltzes in the most approved style—church members and all—so of course it is no harm for me." She thus takes the first step in casting aside that delicate God-given instinct which should be the guide of every pure woman in such matters.

She is very bright and learns rapidly, but a few weeks have passed before she is able to waltz well, and is surrounded by the handsomest and most gallant men in the room, who flatter her until her head is quite turned. She has entirely overcome her delicacy about being embraced in public for half an hour by strange men. In fact she rather likes it now. She wonders all day, before dancing school, if that handsome man who dances so "elegantly" and says such nice things to her, will ask her to dance with him tonight, and finds herself dreaming of how delightful it would be to feel his arm about her.

The evening at last comes; the uninteresting square dances are gone through

with, and the music of the waltz begins. Her partner is the Apollo of her day-dreams. He presses her close to his breast, and they glide over the floor together as if the two were but one.

When she raises her eyes, timidly at first, to that handsome but deceitful face, now so close to her own, the look that is in his eyes as they meet hers, seems to burn into her very soul. A strange, sweet thrill shakes her very being and leaves her weak and powerless and obliged to depend for support upon the arm which is pressing her to himself in such a suggestive manner, but the sensation is a pleasant one and grows to be the every essence of her life.

If a partner fails, through ignorance or innocence, to arouse in her these feelings, she does not enjoy the dance, mentally styles him a "bore," and wastes no more waltzes on him. She grows more bold, and from being able to return shy glances at first, is soon able to meet more daring ones until, with heart beating against heart, hand clasped in hand, and eyes looking burning words which lips dare not speak, the waltz becomes one long, sweet and purely sensual pleasure. . . .

She graduates from the academy and is caught into the whirl of society, and her life becomes what is called one round of pleasure—one round certainly of parlor dances, social hops and grand balls with champagne dinners and early goings home (early in the morning, *of course*).

This evening there is to be a ball of unusual grandeur. The last of the season of gaiety, and the closing of the dancing-school term. Our friend will surely be present. Let us attend. What a scene of beauty, gayety and splendor. . . .

But see, there is our friend of the dancing academy just entering on the arm of her devoted father. Three months have passed since we first met her. She is much changed, yet one can scarcely see in what the change consists. The face is the same, yet not the same. There is just the shadow of coarseness in it, a little less of frank innocence and true refinement, and a trace, not exactly of ill-health, but a want of freshness. This last is, however, well concealed by the use of cosmetics, and she is still a very beautiful girl, and the fond father's heart swells with pride as he sees the handsomest and most fashionable gentlemen of the ballroom press eagerly forward to ask her hand for the different dances of the evening.

Her father remains for a few of the square dances, but soon retires, knowing that his fair daughter will not want for attention from—gentlemen whose attentions he is sure must be desirable, certainly desirable, why not? Are these admirers not rich and handsome, and do they not move in the highest society? Ah, foolish father, how little he knows of the ways of ballroom society.

But let us turn our attention again to the dancers, at two o'clock next morn-

ing. This is the favorite waltz, and the last and most furious of the night, as well as the most disgusting. Let us notice, as an example, our fair friend once more.

She is now in the vile embrace of the Apollo of the evening. Her head rests upon his shoulder, her face is upturned to his, her bare arm is almost around his neck, her partly nude swelling breast heaves tumultuously against his, face to face they whirl on, his limbs interwoven with hers, his strong right arm around her yielding form, he presses her to him until every curve in the contour of her body thrills with the amorous contact. Her eyes look into his, but she sees nothing; the soft music fills the room, but she hears it not; he bends her body to and fro, but she knows it not; his hot breath, tainted with strong drink, is on her hair and cheek, his lips almost touch her forehead, yet she does not shrink; his eyes, gleaming with a fierce, intolerable lust, gloat over her, yet she does not quail. She is filled with the rapture of sin in its intensity; her spirit is inflamed with passion and lust is gratified in thought. With a last low wail the music ceases, and the dance for the night is ended, but not the evil work of the night.

The girl whose blood is hot from the exertion and whose every carnal sense is aroused and aflame by the repetition of such scenes as we have witnessed, is led to the ever-waiting carriage, where she sinks exhausted on the cushioned seat. Oh, if I could picture to you the fiendish look that comes into his eyes as he sees his helpless victim before him. Now is his golden opportunity. He must not miss it, and he does not, and that beautiful girl who entered the dancing school as pure and innocent as an angel three months ago returns to her home that night robbed of that most precious jewel of womanhood—virtue!

When she awakes the next morning to a realizing sense of her position, her first impulse is to self-destruction, but she deludes herself with the thought that her “dancing” companion will right the wrong by marriage, but that is farthest from his thoughts, and he casts her off—“*he wishes a pure woman for his wife.*”

She has no longer any claim to purity; her self-respect is lost; she sinks lower and lower; society shuns her, and she is today a brothel inmate, the toy and plaything of the libertine and drunkard. . . .

But how is it with her ballroom Apollo? Does society shun him? Does he pine away and die? Oh, no, he continues in the dancing school, constantly seeking new victims among the pure and innocent. . . .

This tragedy, my friends, was acted out in real life, and is only a sample of hundreds and hundreds of cases of which I have had personal knowledge.

“But,” some mothers say, “I know that I can trust my daughter. The waltz may be the means of leading astray some shallow, low-minded girls, and may

arouse the lower nature of some of those whose lower nature lies very near the surface, but such girls would go astray anyway. My daughter is a pure, high-minded girl, and I am sure she is trustworthy.”

I am glad she is. Keep her so, my friend, *keep her so*. Do not risk making her otherwise by placing her under the greatest temptation that can possibly come to a girl.

If you place her in the dancing academy or ballroom, she cannot and will not remain what you say she now is, and she has but a comparatively small chance of escaping ruin—comparatively only a small chance, I say.

It is a startling fact, but a fact nevertheless, that *two-thirds of the girls who are ruined fall through the influence of dancing*. Mark my words, I know this to be true. Let me give you two reasons why it is so. In the first place, I do not believe that any woman can or does waltz without being improperly aroused, to a greater or less degree. She may not, at first, understand her feelings, or recognize as harmful or sinful those emotions which must come to every woman who has a particle of warmth in her nature, when in such close connection with the opposite sex; but she is, though unconsciously, none the less surely sowing seed which will one day ripen, if not into open sin and shame, into a nature more or less depraved and health more or less impaired. Any woman with a nature so cold as not to be aroused by the perfect execution of the waltz, is entirely unfit to make any man happy as his wife, and if she be willing to indulge in such pleasures with every ballroom libertine, she is not the woman any man wants for a wife. It is a noticeable fact that a man who knows the ways of a ballroom rarely seeks a wife there. When he wishes to marry he chooses for a wife a woman who has not been fondled and embraced by every dancing man in town.

The second reason why so many dancing girls are ruined is obvious, when one considers how many fiends there are hanging about the dancing schools and ballrooms, for this purpose alone; some of them for their own gratification, and others for the living there is to be made from it. I am personally acquainted with men who are professional seducers, and who are today making a living in just this way. They are fine looking, good conversationalists and elegant dancers. They buy their admittance to the select (?) dancing school by paying an extra fee, and know just what snares to lay and what arts to practice upon the innocent girls they meet there to induce them to yield to their diabolical solicitations, and after having satisfied their own desires and ruined the girls they entice them to the brothel where they receive a certain sum of money from the landlady, rated according to their beauty and form.

Can you wonder when the degrading, lust-creating influence of the waltz

itself is united with the efforts of such vile demons of men as I have described, that two-thirds of the dancing girls are ruined.

It is a greater wonder that any of them escape. . . . Dancing and drinking invariably go together. One rarely finds a dance hall without a bar in it or a saloon within a few steps of it, and sooner or later those who dance will indulge in drink, which is the devil's best agent in the carrying on of the vile business transacted in, and in connection with, the dance hall.