

Sermon on evils of dance had little impact in 1903

Mother beware! The streets of our large cities tonight will be walked by hundreds of girls as pure as yours. The house of sin and shame will reek tonight with the laughter of revelry of the darkest sin and be filled with "somebody's daughters" who were once pure like yours and who, but for the dance, would be pure and noble still.

— *Bloomington Courier*, April 24, 1903.

Protection of innocent young females was uppermost in the mind of the Rev. C. Fenwick Reed as he stepped up to the pulpit of the College Avenue Methodist Church on April 23, 1903. The evangelist was in town for a series of revival meet-



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By Rose McIlveen

ings, and dancing was one of the topics he intended to preach about during his visit to Bloomington.

The title of his sermon, "He That Soweth to the Flesh Shall of the Flesh Reap Corruption," was certainly an attention-getter for a generation who were still a part of the Victorians. *The Courier* reported

that the folding chairs were put up in the aisles to accommodate the crowd which included some 400 Indiana University students.

As the Rev. Reed launched into his subject, he declared, "I unflinchingly, and without fear or favor, denounce the dance. Be it clearly understood at the outset I speak of the dance and not of the dancer."

Then the preacher began to enumerate the reasons why dancing is one of the evils in the world. First, he said, it is injurious to health. "It is practiced after the day toil is over, and often after extra rush and work to be at liberty to attend. It is invariably carried on quite late, often until midnight, and sometimes

until morning."

Reed had done some research, explaining that he had discovered that during a waltz the participants covered the distance of nearly two miles, "and at a rapid gait." In fact, he continued, "An English exchange (whatever that was) states that a careful calculator, estimating the space covered by a dancer, finds that in a program of 20 waltzes, four polkas, two quadrilles, a good dancer would cover close to 12 miles."

Keeping to the health theme, Reed said that dancing was also unhealthy because it was practiced in heated rooms, and ladies tended to dress in a way that was decidedly injurious to health. He elaborated

on that point. "It seems that some (ladies) will not be satisfied until their waist is small enough to button a collar around." (He was undoubtedly referring to the fashion of corsets that laced up to give the wearer as tiny a waist as possible.)

Then Reed brought up the financial aspect of dancing, saying, "It creates needless expense. It is patent to all that many a family suffers in their effort to keep up with the style and the dance."

Another point made by the preacher was that those who enjoy dancing often have the attitude that it is the only form of entertainment.

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