

March 6, 1863 - "Colored Church and Ball-Rooms"



A few days ago we devoted a paragraph to the colored population, in which we stated that the churches have of late become sadly neglected. Various reasons are assigned for this, one of which is, that the boys and girls are afraid to turn out on Sunday, because many of them have been pressed into Government service in their Sunday clothes and compelled to work in them. This might be obviated by procuring passes exempting those attending church from being pressed on Sunday. Such passes would readily be given by the Commander of the Post. But that is not the reason; there are others more cogent: namely, the bad example of negroes from the free States, and contrabands. Hundreds of these may be seen upon the streets all day Sunday, when the weather is fine; and when rainy they may be found congregated in the various lodging places, devoting the day to dissipation, debauchery, gaming, etc. A heavy responsibility rests upon our colored preachers at this time; they might and ought to be materially aided by the military, if the latter feel disposed to consider that the morals of the negro are worth preserving, and believe that religion has precisely the same effect upon them as upon white people, viz., in making and keeping them honest, sobers, industrious, and well conducted in all respects.

Their being religious and regularly attending church does not necessarily deprive them of innocent amusements-indeed, it adds to their ability to enjoy rationally the social gatherings they so much delight in-their balls and parties, which were formerly conducted in the most unobjectionable manner by our Nashville boys, but many of which have the past winter degenerated into places of assignation, drunkenness and general disorderly conduct. So low, indeed, had they become, as we are credibly informed, that few of our Nashville girls and boys would attend them

On Wednesday last [4th] we were informed that the colored gentlemen of Nashville were to give a ball on that night at the City Hotel, to which no "disreputable" contrabands of soldiers were to be admitted, and we determined at once to be there to see how things went on. The following is a copy of the neatly printed ticket:-"Cotillion Party, to be given at the City Hotel, on Wednesday, March 4th, 1863. James Thomas and K. Douglas, Managers. Music by Bill Porter's String Band. No Ladies admitted without a Gentleman. Admission, \$1."

The bell had just tolled the hour of 9 p. m. as we wended our way across the Square, and in fifteen minutes thereafter we introduced ourselves to Mr. Thomas, whom we found guarding the entrance. Bill Porter had just seated himself upon his elevated seat, and while tuning his violin (a valuable one, by the way, was informing an impatient youth that no fashionable ball commences before 9 or 10 o'clock. Bill had two assistants-a second and base, and discoursed music sweet, eloquent, and spirited, and all being in readiness for the dance Bill called out-

"Gents will please take of dar has, and put 'em in dar pockets, or somewhar else. Better put 'em in yer pockets; I see some white gentlemen here. [Bill has considerable native humor in him, which he occasionally dispenses gratuitously.]



The sets were formed, and all stood looking at Bill with eager anxiety, waiting for the command- "*First* four right, and left-*Back* to your places-*Bal* an ce - *Turn* your partners -*Swing* corners and do it good-*Ladies* chain-*Half* promenade," etc. to the end of the chapter, when Bill told them to "*Promenade* all," but before he had well got them in motion, he called out- "*Swap* partners, an' get *better* ones," adding, "You mustn't dance all night with one lady bekas shes putty."



During the dance and afterward, we had an opportunity of seeing and observing nearly all in the room. There were nearly one hundred present, male and female being about equally represented; all, or nearly all, were dressed in their best, and *all* were clean. The boys were generally neatly attired; only one being clad in that extravagant style so universally adopted by negro representatives upon the stage; the one alluded to had on a neat black suit, with a full bosom ruffled shirt of the largest dimensions, extending out in front several inches, and flapping upon the right of his breast, on the left lappel of his coat he wore a white satin ribbon, of large dimensions, not less that sixteen inches in diameter. The girls wore dresses of every conceivable variety, but white skirts prevailed, with bodies (or waists, or whatever they may be called) of all shades, from drab to black, and generally of silk. Some two or three wore their hats, and one wore a wreath of artificial flowers. . . the best dancer was Lizzie Beach; she was dressed in white muslin, without any ornaments but a neat pin, she is tall, graceful, and danced an infinite variety of steps-enough to astonish an Elsaler, but all in good time, and modestly executed. She had for a partner a boy in military overcoat, who seemed well up in the Terpsichorean art, but was scarcely a match for Lizzie, we would like to see them with the floor to themselves, and would expect a rich treat.



Time wore on, and several steles were danced, when Bill requested the boys to "*Treat* your partners, all you boys that's got money; and you that hasn't, run you face. Them that hain't got no money, nor a good face, can try if there's a lady that'll have pity on 'em, and dance the *next* quadrille. The aristocracy then retired to supper, and the remainder kept up the dance.

The refreshment table was extremely neat, and well filled with all the delicacies the market affords, and up to the hour our leaving, there was naught hut incessant mirth prevailing, echoed by the "had-had, ha-a-a-hui!"

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