

# SPECTACLES

by Tertullian

## CHAPTER 1

Learn, O you servants of God who are just now entering upon His service, and you who have already solemnly sworn allegiance to Him recall what principle of faith, what reason inherent in truth, what rule in our way of life forbid, along with the other errors of the world, also the pleasures of the spectacles, lest by ignorance or self-deception anyone fall into sin.

For so strong is the appeal of pleasure that it can bring about a prolongation of ignorance with a resulting facility for sin, or a perversion of conscience leading to self-deception.

In addition, some may perhaps be allured to either error by the opinions of the heathens who commonly use the following arguments against us in this matter: such comforting and merely external pleasures of the eyes and ears are not opposed to religion which is founded in man's mind and conscience; neither is God offended by a man's enjoying himself, nor is taking delight in such enjoyment in its proper time and place a sin as long as the fear of God and God's honor remain unimpaired.

But this is precisely what we intend to prove: that these things are not compatible with true religion and true obedience to the true God.

There are some who think that the Christians, a sort of people ever ready to die, are trained in that stubbornness of theirs that they more easily despise life, once its ties have been cut, as it were, and lose their craving for that which, as far as they themselves are concerned, they have already made empty of everything desirable; and thus it is considered a rule laid down by human design and forethought rather than by divine command.

It would, indeed, be loathsome for people continuing in the enjoyment of such delightful pleasures to die for God. On the other hand, if what they say were true, stubbornness in a rule of life so strict as ours might well submit to a plan so apt.

## CHAPTER 2

Moreover, there is no one of our adversaries who will not offer this excuse, too: that all things have been created by God and handed over to man--just as we Christians teach--and that they are undoubtedly good, as coming from a good Creator; and among them we must count all the various components that make up the spectacles, the horse, for instance, and the lion, the strength of body and the sweetness of voice. Accordingly, they say that a thing which exists by God's creation cannot be considered either foreign or opposed to God, nor must a thing which is not opposed to God, because it is not foreign to Him, be considered opposed to God's worshipers.

Obviously, they continue, the very structures of the places--the squared stones, unhewn stones, marble slabs and columns--also are all the handiwork of God who gave them to furnish the earth; indeed, the performances themselves take place under God's heaven. How clever in adducing proofs does human ignorance think itself, especially when it is afraid of losing some of these delights and enjoyments of the world!

Accordingly, you will find more people turned away from our religion by the danger to their pleasures than by the danger to their lives. For of death even a fool is not particularly afraid, feeling that it is a debt he owes to nature; but pleasure, inasmuch as it is born with man, even a sage does not despise, since both fool and sage have no other gratification in life but pleasure.

No one denies-- because everyone knows what nature of its own accord tells us--that God is the Creator of the universe, and that this universe is good and has been made over to man by its Creator.

But because they have no real knowledge of God--knowing Him only by natural law and not by right of friendship, knowing Him only from afar and not from intimate association--it is inevitable that they prove ignorant of His commands regarding the use of His creation. Likewise, must they be unaware of the rival power that by its hostile actions seeks to pervert to wrong uses the things of divine creation. For with such defective knowledge of God one cannot know either His will or His adversary.

We must, then, consider not only by whom all things were created, but also by whom they were perverted. For in this way it will become clear for what use they were created, once it is evident for what use they were not.

The state of corruption differs vastly from that of innocence, because there is an enormous difference between the Creator and the perverter. Why, every form of evil-doing--misdeeds which also the heathens forbid and punish as such--comes from things created by God.

You see murder committed by iron dagger, poison, or magic incantation: but iron, poisonous herbs, demons are all equally creatures of God. Yet, did the Creator design those creatures of His for man's destruction? Certainly not. He forbids man-slaying by the one summary commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.'

In like manner, gold, brass, silver, ivory, wood, and any other material used in the manufacture of idols--who has brought them into the world if, not God, the Maker of the world? Yet, has He done this that they may be made into objects of worship set up in opposition to Himself? Certainly not. For the most grievous sin in His eyes is idolatry. What is there that offends God and is not His own? But, when it offends God, it has ceased to be His; and when it has ceased to be His, it offends Him.

Man himself, the perpetrator of every kind of villainy, is not only the work of God, but also His likeness--yet, both in body and spirit he has fallen away from his Creator. For we did not receive the eyes for gratifying carnal appetite, the tongue for speaking evil, the ears for listening to slander, the gullet for indulging in the sin of gluttony, the belly to be the gullet's partner, the organs of sex for immodest excesses, the hands for committing acts of violence, and the feet to lead a roving life; nor was the spirit implanted in the body that it might become a workshop for contriving acts of treachery and fraud and injustice. I think not.

For if God, who demands innocence of us, hates all wickedness, even if it be only in thought, then it is certain beyond all doubt that it was never His intention in creation that whatever He created should lead to acts He condemns, even if those acts are done through the medium of His handiwork. The whole reason for condemnation is, rather, the misuse of God's creation by God's creatures.

We, therefore, in coming to know the Lord, have also looked upon His rival, and in learning the Creator, we have likewise detected the perverter; we ought, then, to feel neither surprise nor doubt. For man himself, God's handiwork and image, the lord of the whole universe, was hurled down in the very beginning from his

state of innocence by the power of that angel, perverter of God's creation and His rival; at the same time, that same perverter corrupted along with man the whole material world, man's possession, created like man for innocence, and turned it against the Creator. And in his anger that God had given it to man and not to him he intended to make man in this very possession guilty before God as well as establish his own power in it.

### CHAPTER 3

Armed with this knowledge against heathen opinion, let us now turn, instead, to the same excuses put forward by people in our own ranks. For there are some brethren who, being either too naive or overparticular in their faith, demand a testimony from holy Scripture, when faced with giving up the spectacles, and declare the matter an open question, because such a renunciation is neither specifically nor in so many words enjoined upon the servants of God.

Now, to be sure, nowhere do we find it laid down with the same precision as 'Thou shalt not kill,' 'Thou shalt not worship an idol,' 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' 'Thou shalt not commit fraud'--nowhere do we find it thus clearly declared: 'Thou shalt not go to the circus,' 'Thou shalt not go to the theater,' 'Thou shalt not watch a contest or show of gladiators.'

But we do find that to this special case there can be applied that first verse of David, where he says: 'Happy is the man who has not gone to the gathering of the ungodly, nor stood in the ways of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence.'

For, even though David seems to have praised that well-known just man, because he took no part in the gathering and meeting of the Jews deliberating on the killing of the Lord, divine Scripture admits always a broader interpretation wherever a passage, after its actual sense has been exhausted, serves to strengthen discipline. So, in this case, too, the verse of David is not inapplicable to the prohibition of spectacles.

For, if then he called a mere handful of Jews 'a gathering of the ungodly,' how much more such a vast crowd of heathen people? Are the heathens less ungodly, less sinners, less the enemies of Christ than the Jews were then?

Moreover, the other details also fit in well. For at the spectacles there is both sitting 'in the chair' (in cathedra) and standing 'in the way' (in via). For 'ways' (viae) they term both the gangways that run round the girding walls and the aisles that slope down the incline and divide the seats of the populace; in like manner is the very place for chairs in the curving gallery called 'chair' (cathedra).

And so, to take the converse of the verse of David, 'he is unhappy who has gone to any gathering whatsoever of the ungodly, stood in any way at all of sinners, and sat in any chair of pestilence.' Let us take, then, the general application, even when, besides the general, a special interpretation is conceded. For some things that are said with special intent have also a general meaning.

When God reminds the Israelites of discipline and upbraids them, His words apply undoubtedly to all men; and when He threatens destruction to Egypt and Ethiopia, He certainly cautions every sinful nation against judgment to come. Thus, if we reason from a special case to the general type that every sinful nation is an Egypt and Ethiopia, in the same manner we reason from the general class to a special case that every spectacle is a gathering of the ungodly.

## CHAPTER 4

Lest anyone think that I am avoiding the point in question, I shall now appeal to the prime and principal authority of our 'seal' itself. When we step into the water and profess the Christian faith in the terms prescribed by its law, we bear public witness that we have renounced the Devil and his pomp and his angels.

What, however, shall we call the chief and foremost manifestation by which the Devil and his pomp and his angels are recognized, if not idolatry? From this source, in a few words--because I will not dwell any longer on this subject--comes every unclean and evil spirit.

So, if it shall be proved true that the entire apparatus of the spectacles originates from idolatry, we will have reached a decision in advance that our profession of faith in baptism refers also to the spectacles, since they belong to the Devil and his pomp and his angels because of the idolatry involved.

We shall, therefore, set forth the origins of the various spectacles, explaining in what nurseries they grew up; next in order, the titles of some of them, that is, the names by which they are called; then their equipment and the superstitions observed in them; thereafter the places and the presiding spirits to whom they are dedicated; and finally the arts employed in them and the authors to whom they are ascribed. If, among these, we find anything that is not related to an idol, we shall declare it to be free from the stain of idolatry and, as a result, to have no connection with our renunciation.

## CHAPTER 5

Concerning the origins of the spectacles, which are somewhat obscure and, therefore, unknown among most of our people, we had to make a rather thorough investigation, our authority being none other than the works of pagan literature.

There are many authors who have published treatises on the subject. They give the following report on the origin of the games. The Lydians migrated from Asia and settled in Etruria, according to the account of Timaeus, under the leadership of Tyrrhenus, who, in the struggle for the kingship, had succumbed to his brother. In Etruria, then, they also introduced, along with their other superstitious customs, the spectacles in the name of religion. From that place, in turn, the Romans invited the performers, borrowing also the name, so that the 'performers' (ludii) were so called from the 'Lydians' (Lydii).

And though Varro derives "ludii" from "ludus," that is, from "lusus" ('the play'), as they used to call also the Luperci "ludii," because, as "ludendo" ('in play') indicates, they ran to and fro, this play of the youths belongs in his view to festal days, temples, and religious ceremonies.

But it is, after all, not the name that matters; the real issue is idolatry. For, since the games also went under the general name of Liberalia, they clearly proclaimed the honor of Father Liber. They were first held in honor of Liber by the country folk because of the blessing which they say he bestowed upon them by making known to them the delicious taste of wine.

Then came the games called Consualia, which originally were celebrated in honor of Neptune, because he is also called Consus. After that, Romulus consecrated the Ecurria, derived from "equi" (horses), to Mars, though they claim the Consualia as well for Romulus on the ground that he consecrated them to Consus, the god, as they will have it, of counsel, to wit, of that very counsel by which he arrived at the scheme of carrying

off the Sabine girls to be wives for his soldiers.

A noble counsel, indeed, even now considered just and lawful among the Romans themselves, not to say in the eyes of a god! For, also, this tends to stain their origin, lest you think something good that, had its origin in evil, in shamelessness, violence and hatred, in a founder who was a fratricide and the son of Mars.

Even now, at the first goal posts in the Circus, there is an underground altar dedicated to that Consus with an inscription that reads as follows: CONSUS MIGHTY IN COUNSEL, MARS IN WAR, THE LARES AT THE CROSSROAD. Sacrifice is offered on this altar on the seventh day of July by the priests of the state, and on the twenty-first of August by the Flamen of Quirinus and the Vestal Virgins.

On a later date, the same Romulus instituted games in honor of Jupiter Feretrius at the Tarpeian Rock, which, according to the tradition handed down by Piso, were called Tarpeian and Capitoline Games. After him, Numa Pompilius initiated games in honor of Mars and Robigo--for they invented also a goddess of "robigo" (mildew). Later still came Tullus Hostilius, then Ancus Martius and, in their order, the other founders of games. As to the idols in whose honor they instituted these games, information is found in Tranquillus Suetonius or in his sources. But this will suffice to prove the guilty origin of the games in idolatry.

## CHAPTER 6

The testimony of antiquity is confirmed by that of the succeeding generations. For the titles by which the games still go today betray the nature of their origin. In these titles there is clearly expressed for what idol and for what superstition of one kind or other they were designed.

For instance, the games of the Great Mother and Apollo, and also those of Ceres, Neptune, Jupiter Latiaris, and Flora are general festivals; the remaining trace their superstitious origin back to birthdays and commemorative celebrations of the emperors, to happy political events, and municipal feasts.

Among them are also the funeral games, established by bequests to render honor to the memory of private persons. This, too, is in accordance with ancient custom. For from the very beginning two kinds of games were distinguished: sacred and funereal; that is, games in honor of pagan deities and those in honor of dead persons.

But in the question of idolatry, it makes no difference to us under what name and title they are exhibited, as long as the matter concerns the same spirits that we renounce. Whether they exhibit these games in honor of their dead or in honor of their gods, they render the very same honor to their dead as to their gods. On either side you have one and the same situation: it is one and the same idolatry on their part, and one and the same renunciation of idolatry on our part.

## CHAPTER 7

Both kinds of games, then, have a common origin; common, too, are their names, inasmuch as the reasons for their being held are the same. Therefore, also, their equipment must be the same because of the common guilt of idolatry which founded them.

Somewhat greater pomp, however, is displayed in the spectacles in the circus to which the term is properly applied. The "pompa" 'procession'--which comes first, proves in itself to whom it belongs, with the long line of

idols, the unbroken train of images, the cars and chariots and conveyances for carrying them, the portable thrones and garlands and the attributes of the gods.

Moreover, how many sacred rites are observed, how many sacrifices offered at the beginning, in the course, and at the end of the procession, how many religious corporations, furthermore, how many priesthoods, how many bodies of magistrates are called upon to march in it--each is known to the inhabitants of that city where all the demons have gathered and taken up their abode.

And if in the provinces less care is given to management of the games because of less ample funds, all the spectacles in the circus everywhere must be considered as belonging to the model from which they are copied, and are contaminated by the source from which they are drawn. For also, the small brook from its spring, and the tiny shoot from its stem, contain in them the nature of their origin.

Let splendor and frugality look to it where they come from. The pomp of the circus, whatever its nature, offends God. Even if there be carried but a few idols in procession, it takes only one to have idolatry; even if there be driven but one chariot, it is Jupiter's car; every kind of idolatry, even one meanly or moderately equipped, is still rich and splendid because of its sinful origin.

## CHAPTER 8

In accordance with my plan, I shall deal next with the places. The circus is primarily consecrated to the Sun. His temple stands in the middle of it, and his image shines forth from the pediment of the temple. For they did not think it proper to worship beneath a roof a god whom they see above them in the open.

Those who maintain that the first circus show was exhibited by Circe in honor of the Sun, her father, as they will have it, conclude also that the name is derived from her. Plainly, the sorceress undoubtedly transacted the business in behalf of those whose priestess she was, namely, the demons and evil spirits. How many evidences of idol worship do you recognize accordingly in the decoration of the place?

Every ornament of the circus is a temple by itself. The eggs are regarded as sacred to Castor and Pollux by people who do not feel ashamed to believe the story of their origin from the egg made fertile by the swan, Jupiter. The dolphins spout water in honor of Neptune; the columns bear aloft images of Seia, so called from "sementatio" ('sowing'); of Messia, so called as deity of "messis" ('reaping'); and of Tutulina, so called as 'tutelary spirit' of the crops.

In front of these are seen three altars for the triple gods: the Great, the Potent, the Prevailing. They think these deities are Samothracean.

The huge obelisk, as Hermateles maintains, has been set up in honor of the Sun. Its inscription which, like its origin, is Egyptian, contains a superstition. The gathering of the demons would be dull without their Great Mother, so she presides there over the ditch.

Consus, as we have mentioned, keeps in hiding underground at the Murcian Goals. The latter are also the work of an idol. For Murcia, as they will have it, is a goddess of love to whom they have dedicated a temple in that part (of the valley).

Take note, O Christian, how many unclean deities have taken possession of the circus. You have nothing to

do with a place which so many diabolic spirits have made their own. Speaking of places, this is the appropriate occasion for throwing more light on the subject in order to anticipate a question that some may raise.

What will happen, you say, if I enter the circus at some other time? Shall I be then, too, in danger of contamination? There is no law laid down with regard to places as such. For not only these places where people gather for the spectacles but also the temples may be entered by the servant of God without peril to his rule of life, provided that he do so for an urgent and honest reason which has no connection with the business and function proper of the place.

Moreover, there is no place--whether streets or marketplace or baths or taverns or even our own homes--that is completely free of idols: Satan and his angels have filled the whole world.

Yet, it is not by our being in the world that we fall away from God, but by taking part in some sins of the world. Therefore, if I enter the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol or that of Serapis as a sacrificer or worshiper, I shall fall away from God, just as I do if I enter the circus theater as a spectator. It is not the places in themselves that defile us, but the things done in them, by which the places themselves, as we have contended, are defiled; it is by defiled that we are defiled.

It is for this reason that we remind you who those to whom places of this kind are dedicated to prove what takes place in them is the work of those to whom very places are sacred.

## CHAPTER 9

Next let us consider the arts displayed in the circus games. In times past, equestrian skill was simply a matter riding on horseback, and certainly no guilt was involved the ordinary use of the horse. But when this skill was pressed into the service of the games, it was changed from a gift God into an instrument of the demons.

Accordingly, t kind of exhibition is regarded as sacred to Castor and Pollux to whom horses were allotted by Mercury, as Stesichorus tells us. Also, Neptune is an equestrian deity, since the Greeks call him "Hippios" ('Lord of Steeds').

Moreover, concerning the chariot, the four-horse team was consecrated to the Sun; the two-horse team, to the Moon. But we also read: "Erichthonius first dared to yoke four steeds to the car And to ride upon its wheels with victorious swiftness." This Erichthonius, a son of Minerva and Vulcan, fruit of lust, in truth, that fell to earth, is a demon-monster, or, rather, the Devil himself, not a mere snake.

If, however, the Argive Trochilus is the inventor of the chariot, he dedicated this work of his in the first place to Juno. And if, at Rome, Romulus was the first to display a four-horse chariot, he, too, in my view, has been enrolled among the idols himself, provided that he is identical with Quirinus.

The chariots having been produced by such inventors, it was only fitting that they clad their drivers in the colors of idolatry. For at first there were only two colors: white and red. White was sacred to Winter because of the whiteness of its snow; red, to Summer because of the redness of its sun. But afterwards, when both love of pleasure and superstition had grown apace, some dedicated the red to Mars, others the white to the Zephyrs, the green to Mother Earth or Spring, the blue to Sky and Sea or Autumn.

Since, however, every kind of idolatry is condemned by God, this condemnation certainly applies also to that kind which is impiously offered to the elements of nature.

## CHAPTER 10

Let us pass on to the exhibitions on the stage. We have already shown that they have a common origin with those in the circus, that they bear identical titles, inasmuch as they were called "ludi" ('games') and were exhibited together with equestrian displays.

The pageantry is likewise the same, inasmuch as a procession is held to the theater from the temples and altars, with that whole wretched business of incense and blood, to the tune of flutes and trumpets, under the direction of the two most polluted masters of ceremonies at funerals and sacrifices: the undertaker and soothsayer.

And so, as we passed from the origins of the games to the spectacles in the circus, now we will turn to the performances on the stage. Because of the evil character of the place, the theater is, strictly speaking, a shrine of Venus. It was in that capacity, after all, that this type of structure gained influence in the world.

For many a time the censors would tear down theaters at the very moment they began to rise. In their solicitude for public morals, they foresaw, no doubt, the great danger arising from the theater's lasciviousness. In this occurrence already, then, the heathens have their own opinion coinciding with ours as evidence, and we have the foreboding situation of a merely human code of morality giving additional strength to our way of life.

So, when Pompey the Great, a man who was surpassed only by his theater in greatness, had erected that citadel of all vile practices, he was afraid that some day the censors would condemn his memory. He therefore built on top of it a shrine of Venus, and when he summoned the people by edict to its dedication, he termed it not a theater, but a temple of Venus, 'under which,' he said, 'we have put tiers of seats for viewing the shows.'

In this way he misrepresented the character of a building, condemned and worthy of condemnation, with a temple's name, and employed superstition to make sport of morality. Venus and Liber (Bacchus), however, are close companions. The two demons of lust and drunkenness have banded together in sworn confederacy.

Therefore, the temple of Venus is also the house of Liber. For they appropriately gave the name of Liberalia also to other stage performances which, besides being dedicated to Liber (and called Dionysia among the Greeks), were also instituted by him.

And, quite obviously, the arts of the stage are under the patronage of Liber and Venus. Those features which are peculiar to, and characteristic of, the stage, that wantonness in gesture and posture, they dedicate to Venus and Liber, deities both dissolute: the former by sex perversion, the latter by effeminate dress.

And all else that is performed with voice and melodies, instruments and script, belongs to the Apollos and the Muses, the Minervas and Mercuries. You will hate, O Christian, the things whose authors you cannot help but hate.

At this point we intend to make a few remarks concerning the arts and things whose authors we utterly detest



in their very names. We know that the names of dead men are nothing, even as their images are nothing. But we are not unaware of the identity of those who are at work behind those displayed names and images, who exult in the homage paid to them and pretend to be divine, namely, the evil spirits, the demons.

We see then, also, that the arts are consecrated to the honor of those who appropriate the names of the inventors of those arts, and that they are not free from the taint of idolatry when their inventors for that very reason are considered gods.

Even more, as far as the arts are concerned, we ought to have gone further back and take exception to all further arguments, on the ground that the demons, from the very beginning looking out for themselves contrived, along with the other foul practices of idolatry, also those of the shows in order to turn man from the Lord and bind him to their glorification, and gave inspiration to men of genius in these particular arts.

For no one else but the demons would have contrived what was going to redound to their advantage, nor would they have produced the arts at that time through the agency of anyone except those very men in whose names and images and fables they accomplished the fraud of consecration which would work out to their advantage. To follow our plan, let us now begin the treatment of the contests (agones).

## CHAPTER 11

Their origin is akin to that of the games. As a result, they, too, are instituted either as sacred or as funereal, and are performed in honor either of the gods of the Gentiles or of the dead. Accordingly, you have such titles as the Olympian contests in honor of Jupiter (these are called the Capitoline at Rome), the Nemean in honor of Hercules, the Isthmian in honor of Neptune; the rest are various contests to honor the dead.

What wonder is it, then, if the whole paraphernalia of these contests are tainted with idolatry--with unholy crowns, priestly superintendents, assistants from the sacred colleges, and last, but not least, with the blood of bulls?

To add a supplementary remark concerning the place: as you may expect from a place where the arts of the Muses, of Minerva, of Apollo, and even of Mars meet in common, with contest and sound of trumpet they endeavor to equal the circus in the stadium, which is no doubt a temple, too--I mean of the very idol whose festival is celebrated there.

The gymnastic arts also had their origin in the teaching of the Castors and Herculeses and Mercuries.

## CHAPTER 12

It still remains to examine the most prominent and most popular spectacle of all. It is called "munus" ('a obligatory service') from being an "officium" ('a duty'). For "munus" and "officium" are synonyms. The ancients thought they were performing a duty to the dead by this sort of spectacle after they had tempered its character by a more refined form of cruelty.

For in time long past, in accordance with the belief that the souls of the-dead are propitiated by human blood, they used to purchase captives or slaves of inferior ability and to sacrifice them at funerals.

Afterwards, they preferred to disguise this ungodly usage by making it a pleasure. So, after the persons thus procured had been trained--for the sole purpose of learning how to be killed!-- in the use of such arms as

they then had and as best as they could wield, they then exposed them to death at the tombs on the day appointed for sacrifices in honor of the dead. Thus they found consolation for death in murder.

Such is the origin of the gladiatorial contest. But gradually their refinement progressed in the same proportion as their cruelty. For the pleasure of these beasts in human shape was not satisfied unless human bodies were torn to pieces also by wild beasts. What was then a sacrifice offered for the appeasement of the dead was no doubt considered a rite in honor of the dead. This sort of thing is, therefore, idolatry, because idolatry, too, is a kind of rite in honor of the dead: the one and the other is a service rendered to dead persons.

It is, furthermore, in the images of the dead that the demons have their abode. To come to the consideration of the titles also: though this type of exhibition has been changed from being an act in honor of the dead to being one in honor of the living--I mean those entering upon quaestorships, magistracies, flaminates, and priesthoods--still, since the guilt of idolatry cleaves the dignity of the title, whatever is carried out in the name this dignity shares necessarily in the taint of its origin.

In the same way we must interpret the paraphernal which are considered as belonging to the ceremonies of the very offices. For the purple robes, the fasces, the fillets, and crowns--finally, also, the announcements made in meeting and on posters, and the pottage dinners given on the eve of exhibitions--do not lack the pomp of the Devil and the invocation of demons.

In conclusion, what shall I say about that horrible place which not even perjurers can bear? For the amphitheater is consecrated to names more numerous and more dreadful than the Capitol, temple of all demons as it is. There, as many unclean spirits have their abode as the place can seat men. And to say a final word about the arts concerned, we know that Mars and Diana are the patrons of both types of games.

### CHAPTER 13

I have, I think, adequately carried out my plan by showing in how many and in what ways the spectacles involve idolatry. I discussed their origins, their names, their equipment, their locations, and their arts--all that we may be certain that the spectacles in no way become us who twice renounce idols.

'Not that an idol is anything,' as the Apostle says, 'but because what they do, they do in honor of demons' who take up their abode there at the consecration of idols, whether of the dead, or, as they think, of gods.

It is for this reason, therefore, since both kinds of idols belong to one and the same category (the dead and the gods being the same thing) that we refrain from both types of idolatry.

Temples and tombs, we detest both equally; we know neither kind of altar, we adore neither kind of image, we offer no sacrifice, we celebrate no funeral rites. Nor do we eat of what is sacrificed, or offered at funeral rites, because 'we cannot share the Lord's supper and the supper of demons.'

If we keep, then, our palate and stomach free from defilement, how much more should we guard our nobler organs, our ears and eyes, from pleasures connected with sacrifices to idols and sacrificers to the dead--pleasures which do not pass through the bowels, but are digested in the very spirit and so with whose purity God is more concerned than with that of the bowels.

### CHAPTER 14

Having established the charge of idolatry, which itself should be reason enough for our giving up the spectacles, let us now treat the matter fully from another point of view, chiefly for the benefit of those who delude themselves with the thought that such abstention is not expressly enjoined.

The latter excuse sounds as if judgment enough were not pronounced on spectacles, when the lusts of the world are condemned. For, just as there is a lust for money, a lust for high station in life, for gluttony, for sensual gratification, for fame, so there is a lust for pleasure. The spectacles, however are a sort of pleasure.

In my opinion, under the general heading of lust, there are also included pleasures; similarly, under the general idea of pleasures, spectacles are treated as a special class.

## CHAPTER 15

Dealing with the matter of the places, we have already mentioned above that they do not contaminate us of themselves, but on account of what is done in them, that is, once these places have imbibed contamination by such actions, they spit it out again to the same degree on others. So much, then, as we have said, for the main charge: idolatry. Now let us also point out that the other characteristics of the things which are going on at the spectacles are all opposed to God.

God has given us the command both to deal with the Holy Spirit in tranquillity, gentleness, quiet, and peace, inasmuch as, in accordance with the goodness of His nature, He is tender and sensitive, and also not to vex Him by frenzy, bitterness of feeling, anger, and grief.

How, then, can the Holy Spirit have anything to do with spectacles? There is no spectacle without violent agitation of the soul. For, where you have pleasure, there also is desire which gives pleasure its savor; where you have desire, there is rivalry which gives desire its savor.

And where, in turn, you have rivalry, there also are frenzy and bitterness of feeling and anger and grief and the other effects that spring from them, and, moreover, are incompatible with our moral discipline.

For, even if a man enjoys spectacles modestly and soberly, as befits his rank, age, and natural disposition, he cannot go to them without his mind being roused and his soul being stirred by some unspoken agitation.

No one ever approaches a pleasure such as this without passion; no one experiences this passion without its damaging effects. These very effects are incitements to passion. On the other hand, if the passion ceases, there is no pleasure, and he who goes where he gains nothing is convicted of foolishness.

But I think that foolishness also is foreign to us. Is it, further, not true that a man really condemns himself when he has taken his place among those whose company he does not want and whom, at any rate, he confesses to detest?

It is not enough to refrain from such acts, unless we also shun those who commit them. 'If thou didst see a thief,' says holy Scripture, 'thou didst run with him.' Would that we did not live in the world with them! Still, we are separated from them in the things of the world. For the world is God's, but the things of the world are the Devil's.

## CHAPTER 16

Since, then, frenzy is forbidden us, we are debarred from every type of spectacle, including the circus, where frenzy rules supreme. Look at the populace, frenzied even as it comes to the show, already in violent commotion, blind, wildly excited over its wagers.

The praetor is too slow for them; all the time their eyes are rolling as though in rhythm with the lots he shakes up in his urn. Then they await the signal with bated breath; one outcry voices the common madness.

Recognize the madness from their foolish behavior. 'He has thrown it!' they shout; everyone tells everybody else what all of them have seen just that moment. This I take as a proof of their blindness: they do not see what has been thrown--a signal cloth, they think--but it is the symbol of the Devil hurled headlong from on high.

Accordingly, from such beginnings the affair progresses to outbursts of fury and passion and discord and to everything forbidden to the priests of peace. Next come curses, insults without any justified reason for the hatred, and rounds of applause without the reward of affection.

What are the partakers in all this --no longer their own masters--likely to achieve for themselves? At best, the loss of their self-control. They are saddened by another's bad luck; they rejoice in another's success. What they hope for and what they dread has nothing to do with themselves, and so their affection is to no purpose and their hatred is unjust.

Or are we, perhaps, permitted love without cause any more than to hate without cause? God who bids us to love our enemies certainly forbids us to hate even with cause; God who commands us to bless those who curse us does not permit us to curse even with cause.

But what is more merciless than the circus, where they do not even spare their rulers or their fellow citizens? If any of these frenzies of the circus become the faithful elsewhere, then it will be lawful also in the circus; but, if nowhere, then neither in the circus.

## CHAPTER 17

In like manner we are commanded to steer clear of every kind of impurity. By this command, therefore, we are precluded also from the theater, which is impurity's own peculiar home, where nothing wins approval but what elsewhere finds approval.

And so, the theater's greatest charm is above all produced by its filth--filth which the actor of the Atellan farces conveys by gestures; filth which the mimic actor even exhibits by womanish apparel, banishing all reverence for sex and sense of shame so that they blush more readily at home than on the stage; filth, finally, which the pantomime experiences in his own body from boyhood in order to become an artist.

Even the very prostitutes, the victims of public lust, are brought upon the stage, creatures feeling yet more wretched in the presence of women, the only members in the community who were unaware of their existence; now they are exhibited in public before the eyes of persons of every age and rank; their address, their price, their record are publicly announced, even to those who do not need the information, and (to say nothing of the rest) things which ought to remain hidden in the darkness of their dens so as not to contaminate the daylight.

Let the senate blush, let all the orders blush, let even those very women who have committed murder on their own shame blush once a year when, by their own gestures, they betray their fear of the light of the day and the gaze of the people.

Now, if we must detest every kind of impurity, why should we be allowed to hear what we are not allowed to speak, when we know that vile jocularities and every idle word are judged by God? Why, in like manner, should we be permitted to see that which is sinful to do? Why should things which, spoken by the mouth, defile a man not be regarded as defiling a man when allowed access by the ears and eyes, since the ears and eyes are the servants of the spirit, and he whose servants are filthy cannot claim to be clean himself?

You have, therefore, the theater prohibited in the prohibition of uncleanness. Again, if we reject the learning of the world's literature as convicted of foolishness before God, we have a sufficiently clear rule also concerning those types of spectacles which, in profane literature, are classified as belonging to the comic or tragic stage.

Now, if tragedies and comedies are bloody and wanton, impious and prodigal inventors of outrage and lust, the recounting of what is atrocious or base is no better; neither is what is objectionable in deed acceptable in word.

## CHAPTER 18

Now, if you maintain that the stadium is mentioned in the Scriptures, I will admit at once that you have a point. But as for what is done in the stadium, you cannot deny that it is unfit for you to see--punches and kicks and blows and all the reckless use of the fist and every disfiguration of the human face, that is, of God's image.

Never can you approve the foolish racing and throwing feats and the more foolish jumping contests; never can you be pleased with either harmful or foolish exhibitions of strength nor with the cultivation of an unnatural body, outdoing the craftsmanship of God; you will hate men bred to amuse the idleness of Greece.

Also, the art of wrestling belongs to the Devil's trade: it was the Devil who first crushed men. The very movements of the wrestler have a snakelike quality: the grip that takes hold of the opponent, the twist that binds him, the sleekness with which he slips away from him. Crowns are of no use to you; why do you seek pleasure from crowns?

## CHAPTER 19

Are we now to wait for a scriptural repudiation of the amphitheater, also? If we can claim that cruelty, impiety, and brutality are permitted us, let us by all means go to the amphi-theater. If we are what people say we are, let us take delight in human blood.

It is a good thing when the guilty are punished. Who will deny this but the guilty? Yet it is not becoming for the guiltless to take pleasure in the punishment of another; rather, it befits the guiltless to grieve that a man like himself, has become so guilty that he is treated with such cruelty.

And who is my voucher that it is the guilty always who are condemned to the beasts, or whatever punishment, and that it is never inflicted on innocence, too, through the vindictiveness of the judge or the

weakness of the defense or the intensity of the torture? How much better it is, then, not to know when the wicked are punished, lest I come to know also when the good are destroyed, provided, of course, that there is savor of good in them.

Certain it is that innocent men are sold as gladiators to serve as victims of public pleasure. Even in the case of those who are condemned to the games, what a preposterous idea is it that, in atonement for a smaller offense, they should be driven to the extreme of murder!

This reply I have addressed to Gentiles. Heaven forbid that a Christian should need any further instruction about the detestableness of this kind of spectacle. No one, however, is able to describe all the details at full length except one who is still in the habit of going to the spectacles. I myself prefer to leave the picture incomplete rather than to recall it.

## CHAPTER 20

How foolish, then--rather, how desperate--is the reasoning of those who, obviously as a subterfuge to avoid the loss of pleasure, plead as their excuse that no regulation concerning such an abstinence is laid down in Scripture, precise terms or in a definite passage, forbidding the servant of God to enter gatherings of this kind.

Only recently heard a novel defense offered by one of these devotees of games. 'The sun,' he said, 'nay, even God Himself, looks from heaven and is not defiled.' Why, the sun also sends rays into the sewer and is not soiled!

Would that God looked on at no sins of men that we might all escape judgment! But He looks on at robberies, He looks on at falsehood and adulteries and frauds and acts of idolatry and at the very spectacles. And it is for that reason that we will not look at them, lest we be seen by Him who looks on at everything.

My man, you are putting the defendant on the same footing as the judge: the defendant who is a defendant because he is seen, and the judge who, because he sees, is judge.

Do we, perhaps, indulge in frenzy also outside the confines of the circus, outside the gates of the theater give free play to lewdness, outside the stadium to haughty deportment, outside the amphitheater to cruelty, just because God has eyes also outside the covered seats and the tiers and the stage? We are wrong: nowhere and never is there any exemption from what God condemns; nowhere and never is there any permission for what is forbidden always and everywhere.

It is the freedom from the change of opinion and from the mutability of judgment that constitutes the fullness of truth and--what is due to truth--perfect morality, unvarying reverence, and faithful obedience. What is intrinsically good or evil cannot be anything else.

## CHAPTER 21

All things, we maintain, are firmly defined by the truth of God. The heathens who do not possess the fullness of truth, since their teacher of truth is not God, form their judgment of good and evil in accordance with their own opinion and inclination, making what is good in one place evil in another, and what is evil in one place good in another.

Thus it happens that the same man who in public will scarcely raise the tunic to ease nature will put it off in the circus in such a way as to expose himself completely to the gaze of all; and the man who protects the ears of his maiden daughter from every foul word will take her himself to the theater to hear such words and see the gestures which accompany them.

The same man who tries to break up or denounces a quarrel in the streets which has come to fisticuffs will in the stadium applaud fights far more dangerous; and the same man who shudders at the sight of the body of a man who died in accordance with nature's law common to all will in the amphitheater look down with tolerant eyes upon bodies mangled, rent asunder, and smeared with their own blood.

What is more, the same man who allegedly comes to the spectacle to show his approval of the punishment for murder will have a reluctant gladiator driven on with lashes and with rods to commit murder; and the same man who wants every more notorious murderer to be cast before the lion will have the staff and cap of liberty granted as a reward to a savage gladiator, while he will demand that the other man who has been slain be dragged back to feast his eyes upon him, taking delight in scrutinizing close at hand the man he wished killed at a distance--and, if that was not his wish, so much more heartless he!

## CHAPTER 22

What wonder! Such are the inconsistencies of men who confuse and confound the nature of good and evil through their fickleness of feeling and instability in judgment.

Take the treatment the very providers and managers of the spectacles accord to those idolized charioteers, actors, athletes, and gladiators, to whom men surrender their souls and women even their bodies, on whose account they commit the sins they censure: for the very same skill for which they glorify them, they debase and degrade them; worse, they publicly condemn them to dishonor and deprivation of civil rights, excluding them from the council chamber, the orator's platform, the senatorial and equestrian orders, from all other offices and certain distinctions.

What perversity! They love whom they penalize; they bring into disrepute whom they applaud; they extol the art and brand the artist with disgrace.

What sort of judgment is this--that a man should be vilified for the things that win him a reputation? Yes, what an admission that these things are evil, when their authors, at the very peak of their popularity, are marked with disgrace!

## CHAPTER 23

Since, then, man reflecting on these matters, even over against the protest and appeal of pleasure, comes to the conclusion that these people should be deprived of the benefits of posts of honor and exiled to some island of infamy, how much more will divine justice inflict punishment on those who follow such professions?

Or will God take pleasure in the charioteer, the disturber of so many souls, the minister to many outbursts of frenzy, flaunting his rostral crown as a priest wears his wreath, dressed up in gay colors like a pimp, attired by the Devil as a ludicrous counterpart of Elias to be swept away in his chariot?

Will God be pleased with the man who alters his features with a razor, belying his own countenance and, not

content with making it resemble that of Saturn or Isis or Liber, on top of that submits it to the indignity of being slapped, as if in mockery of the Lord's commandment?

The Devil, to be sure, also teaches that one should meekly offer his cheek to be struck. In the same way, he also makes the tragic actors taller by means of their high shoes, because 'no one can add a single cubit to his stature.' He wishes to make Christ a liar.

Again, I ask whether this whole business of masks is pleasing to God, who forbids the likeness of anything to be made--how much more of His own image? The Author of truth does not love anything deceitful; all that is counterfeit is a kind of adultery in His eyes.

Accordingly, He will not approve the man who feigns voice, sex, or age, or who pretends love, anger, groans, or tears, for He condemns all hypocrisy. Moreover, since in His law He brands the man as accursed who dresses in woman's clothes, what will be His judgment upon the pantomime who is trained to play the woman?

No doubt, also, the artist in punching will go unpunished. For those scars and wales, marks left by boxing gloves and blows, and those growths upon his ears he got from God when his body was being fashioned; God gave him eyes to have them blinded in fighting!

I say nothing of the man who pushes another to the lion lest he seem less a murderer than the fellow who afterwards cuts the same victim's throat.

#### CHAPTER 24

In how many ways are we expected to prove that none of the things connected with the spectacles is pleasing to God? Or, because it is not pleasing to God, befits His servant?

If we have shown that all these things have been instituted for the Devil's sake, and furnished from the Devil's stores (for everything which is not God's or which displeases God is the Devil's), then this represents the pomp of the Devil which we renounce in the 'seal' of faith.

No share, however, ought we to have, whether in deed or word, whether by beholding or watching, in what we renounce. Moreover, if we ourselves renounce and rescind the 'seal' by making void our testimony to it, does it remain, then, for us to seek an answer from the heathen? Yes, let them tell us whether it be permitted for Christians to attend a spectacle. Why, for them this is the principal sign of a man's conversion to the Christian faith, that he renounces the spectacles.

A man, therefore, who removes the mark by which he is recognized, openly denies his faith. What hope is there left for such a man? No one deserts to the camp of the enemy without first throwing away weapons, deserting his standards, renouncing his oath of allegiance to his leader, and without pledging himself to die with the enemy.

#### CHAPTER 25

Will the man, seated where there is nothing of God, at that moment think of God? He will have peace in his soul, I suppose, as he cheers for the charioteer; he will learn purity as he gazes with fascination at the mimic actors.



No, indeed, in every kind of spectacle he will meet with no greater temptation than that over careful attire of women and men. That sharing of feelings and that agreement or disagreement over favorites fan the sparks of lust from their fellowship.

Finally, no one going to a spectacle has any other thought but to see and be seen. But, while the tragic actor is ranting, our good friend will probably recall the outcries of some prophet! Amid the strains of the effeminate flute-player, he will no doubt meditate on a psalm! And while the athletes are engaged in combat, he is sure to say that a blow must not be struck in return for a blow!

He will, therefore, also be in a position to let himself be stirred by pity, with his eyes fixed on the bears as they bite, and the net-fighters as they roll up their nets. May God avert from His own such a passion for murderous delight!

What sort of behavior is it to go from the assembly of God to the assembly of the Devil, from sky to sty, as the saying goes? Those hands which you have lifted up to God, to tire them out afterwards applauding an actor? To cheer a gladiator with the same lips with which you have said 'Amen' over the Most Holy? To call out 'for ever and ever' to anyone else but to God and Christ?

## CHAPTER 26

Why, then, should such people not also be susceptible to demoniac possession? For we have the case of that woman--the Lord is witness--who went to the theater and returned home having a demon.

So, when in the course of exorcism the unclean spirit was hard pressed with the accusation that he had dared to seize a woman who believed, he answered boldly: 'I was fully justified in doing so, for I found her in my own domain.'

It is well known, too, that to another woman, during the night following the very day on which she had listened to a tragic actor, a shroud was shown in a dream, and a rebuke called out to her, mentioning the tragic actor by name; nor was that woman still alive after five days.

Indeed, how many other proofs can be drawn from those who, by consorting with the Devil at the spectacles, have fallen away from the Lord. For 'no man can serve two masters.' 'What fellowship has light with darkness?' What has life to do with death?

## CHAPTER 27

We ought to hate those gatherings and meetings of the heathen, seeing that there the name of God is blasphemed, there the cry to set the lions upon us is raised every day, there persecutions have their source, thence temptations are let loose.

What will you do when you are caught in that surging tide of wicked applause? Not that you are likely to suffer anything there at the hands of men (no one recognizes you as a Christian), but consider how you would fare in heaven.

Do you doubt that at the very moment when the Devil is raging in his assembly, all the angels look forth from heaven and note down every individual who has uttered blasphemy, who has listened to it, who has lent his tongue, who has lent his ears to the service of the Devil against God?

Will you, therefore, not shun the seats of Christ's enemies, that 'chair of pestilences', and the very air that hangs over it and is polluted with sinful cries? I grant you that you have there some things that are sweet, pleasant, harmless, and even honorable. No one flavors poison with gall and hellebore; it is into spicy, well-flavored, and mostly sweet dishes that he instills that noxious stuff. So, too, the Devil pours into the deadly draught he prepares the most agreeable and most welcome gifts of God.

Everything, then, you find there, whether manly or honorable or sonorous or melodious or tender, take it for drippings of honey from a poisoned cake, and do not consider your appetite for the pleasure worth the danger you run from its sweetness.

## CHAPTER 28

Let the Devil's own guests stuff themselves with sweets of that sort: the places, the times, and the host who invites are theirs. Our banquet, or marriage feast, has not yet come. We cannot recline with them at table, as they cannot with us. Things in this matter run their course in succession. Now they rejoice, and we are afflicted.

'The world,' holy Scripture says, 'will rejoice, you will be sad.' Let us mourn therefore while the heathen rejoice, that, when they have begun to mourn, we may rejoice: lest sharing their joy now, then we may be sharing their mourning too.

You are too dainty, O Christian, if you desire pleasure also in this world; nay, more, you are a fool altogether if you deem this pleasure.

The philosophers at least have given the name 'pleasure' to quiet and tranquillity; in it they rejoice, they find their diversion in it, they even glory in it. But you--why, I find you sighing for goal posts, the stage, dust, the arena.

I wish you would say plainly: 'We cannot live without pleasure!' Whereas we ought to die with pleasure. For what other prayer have we but that of the Apostle--'to leave the world and find our place with the Lord'? Our pleasure is where our prayer is.

## CHAPTER 29

And finally, if you think that you are to pass this span of life in delights, why are you so ungrateful as not to be satisfied with so many and so exquisite pleasures given you by God, and not to recognize them? For what is more delightful than reconciliation with God, our Father and Lord, than the revelation of truth, the recognition of errors, and pardon for such grievous sins of the past?

What greater pleasure is there than distaste of pleasure itself, than contempt of all the world can give, than true liberty, than a pure conscience, than a contented life, than freedom from fear of death?

To trample under foot the gods of the heathen, to drive out demons, to effect cures, to seek revelations, to live unto God --these are the pleasures, these are the spectacles of the Christians, holy, everlasting, and free of charge. In these find your circus games: behold the course of the world, count the generations slipping by, bear in mind the goal of the final consummation, defend the bonds of unity among the local churches, awake at the signal of God, arise at the angel trumpet, glory in the palms of martyrdom.

If the literary accomplishments of the stage delight you, we have sufficient literature of our own, enough verses and maxims, also enough songs and melodies; and ours are not fables, but truths, not artful devices, but plain realities.

Do you want contests in boxing and wrestling? Here they are --contests of no slight account, and plenty of them. Behold impurity overthrown by chastity, faithlessness slain by faith, cruelty crushed by mercy, impudence put in the shade by modesty. Such are the contests among us, and in these we win our crowns. Do you have desire for blood, too? You have the blood of Christ.

### CHAPTER 30

Moreover, what a spectacle is already at hand--the second coming of the Lord, now no object of doubt, now exalted, now triumphant! What exultation will that be of the angels, what glory of the saints as they rise again! What a kingdom, the kingdom of the just thereafter! What a city, the new Jerusalem!

But there are yet other spectacles to come--that day of the Last Judgment with its everlasting issues, unlooked for by the heathen, the object of their derision, when the hoary age of the world and all its generations will be consumed in one file.

What a panorama of spectacle on that day! Which sight shall excite my wonder? Which, my laughter? Where shall I rejoice, where exult--as I see so many and so mighty kings, whose ascent to heaven used to be made known by public announcement, now along with Jupiter himself, along with the very witnesses of their ascent, groaning in the depths of darkness? Governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the name of the Lord, melting in flames fiercer than those they themselves kindled in their rage against the Christians braving them with contempt?

Whom else shall I behold? Those wise philosophers blushing before their followers as they burn together, the followers whom they taught that the world is no concern of God's whom they assured that either they had no souls at all or that what souls they had would never return to their former bodies? The poets also, trembling, not before the judgment seat of Rhadamanthus or of Minos, but of Christ whom they did not expect to meet.

Then will the tragic actors be worth hearing, more vocal in their own catastrophe; then the comic actors will be worth watching, more lither of limb in the fire; then the charioteer will be worth seeing, red all over on his fiery wheel; then the athletes will be worth observing, not in their gymnasiums, but thrown about by fire--unless I might not wish to look at them even then but would prefer to turn an insatiable gaze on those who vented their rage on the Lord.

'This is He,' I will say, 'the son of the carpenter and the harlot, the sabbath-breaker, the Samaritan who had a devil. This is He whom you purchased from Judas, this is He who was struck with reed and fist, defiled with spittle, given gall and vinegar to drink. This is He whom the disciples secretly stole away to spread the story of His resurrection, or whom the gardener removed lest his lettuces be trampled by the throng of curious idlers.'

What praetor or consul or quaestor or priest with all his munificence will ever bestow on you the favor of beholding and exulting in such sights? Yet, such scenes as these are in a measure already ours by faith in the vision of the spirit. But what are those things which 'eye has not seen nor ear heard and which have not entered into the heart of man'? Things of greater delight, I believe, than circus, both kinds of theater, and any

stadium.