

THE STAGE AND THE PULPIT.

Fancy the thrilling effect of the Scriptures, if read as Kean reads Shakespeare, or recites Macaulay ! And why should we not have it so ? Is it right and proper that every book for public reading should have justice done to it except the Bible ? and that while every other subject is allowed the advantage of a natural and impressive delivery, religion—which is the most important subject of all—should be denied it ? The monstrous fallacy with which well-meaning but obtuse people have been beguiled, or have beguiled themselves, is, that such reading and recitation would be “theatrical,” and that theatrical exhibitions are not becoming in the house of God. To this hollow and ridiculous fallacy may be traced most of the execrable pulpit reading and delivery that rob the Scriptures of half their power, and have made the dullness of a sermon proverbial. Set Kean to read the song of Miriam, or the fight between David and Goliath, or the story of the Prodigal Son, or Christ’s denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, or to recite one of Chalmers’s sermons, and you will see the people who had begun adjusting themselves in the corners of their seats for their accustomed snooze, sit up and listen to the very close with eager eye and bated breath. And this, simply because Kean would do the piece justice—that is, read it naturally, and as it claims to be read. On what possible ground, either of common sense or good taste, can objection be taken to the natural delivery of at least the sermon ? If Garrick could set even the grim soldier, who was on duty at the corner of the street, blubbering like a child ; and if Mrs. Siddons could so overpower the eminent tragedian, Young, that he could not refrain from sobbing aloud, though he was himself on the stage acting the villain of the piece at the time—and all this while merely uttering the words of a fictitious character—what overwhelming effects in the way of awakening sinners, and pressing home the message of the Gospel, might not be produced by men who are giving utterance, in their own character, to the most sublime and soul-stirring truths.—*Anon.*

The above has been going the rounds of the religious press until our imagination is positively exhausted in fancying the thrilling effect of such reading as is here commended. Now we have never heard “Kean read Shakespeare, or recite Macaulay ;” we suppose the writer and the editors who have copied the extracts have. But our conviction is, from what we have heard of that kind of performance, by men thought to be very excellent readers of the drama, that one very “thrilling effect” of reading the Scriptures in the style of Kean, Garrick, or Mrs. Siddons, would be that every devout and sensible person in the audience would put on his hat and leave the church. No doubt the defects in pulpit elocution are many and great, especially as seen by the admirers of the theatre ; but we question very much if the writer has yet put us on the right track for improving them.

The truth is, there are two mistakes underlying his criticism ; one is, in supposing that all play-actors are Keans, or Garricks. Perhaps if we were to compare the *best* style of Scripture-reading with the best performances on the stage, the pulpit might not be so far behind the theatre in a certain “thrilling effect” of its own kind. To contrast the performances of the *masters* of the drama, who were men of ten thousand, even in their own profession, with the “execrable” and *ordinary* readers among the ministry, is manifestly unfair.

And another is, to suppose that the Holy Scriptures are to be read as one might read Shakespeare, or recite Macaulay. No doubt Kean