

MISCELLANY.

A TIME TO DANCE.

"When Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod."—page 4.

A BALL having occurred in the parish of a worthy Minister, at a season of peculiar seriousness among the youth of his pastoral charge, and many of them, from conscientious motives, having declined to attend, their absence was attributed (erroneously) to the influence and interference of their Pastor, who, in consequence, received the following anonymous note.

"SIR—Obey the voice of Holy Scripture. Take the following for your text, and contradict it. Show in what consists the evil of that innocent amusement of dancing.—Eccles. iii. 4. 'A time to weep, and a time to laugh: a time to mourn, and a time to dance.'

"A TRUE CHRISTIAN, BUT NO HYPOCRITE."

The Minister immediately wrote the following reply, which, as the note was anonymous and without address, remained in his own possession for some time, when he communicated it to the public, thinking it might meet the eye and correct the opinions of the writer of the note and others.

MY DEAR SIR, Your request that I would preach from Eccles. iii. 4, I cannot comply with at present, since there are some Christian duties more important than dancing, which a part of my people seem disposed to neglect. Whenever I perceive, however, that the duty of dancing is too much neglected, I shall not fail to raise a warning voice against so dangerous an omission. In the mean time, there are certain difficulties in the text which you commend to my notice, the solution of which I should receive with gratitude from "a true Christian."

My first difficulty respects the time for dancing; for, although the text declares that there is a time to dance, yet when that time is, it does not determine. Now this point I wish to ascertain exactly, before I preach upon the subject; for it would be as criminal, I conclude, to dance at the wrong time, as to neglect to dance at the right time. I have been able to satisfy myself, in some particulars, when it is not "a time to dance." We shall agree, I presume, that on the Sabbath-day, or at a funeral, or during the prevalence of a pestilence, or the rocking of an earthquake, or the roaring of a thunder-storm, it would be no time to dance. If we were condemned to die, and were waiting in prison the day of execution, this would be no time for dancing; and if our feet stood on a slippery place beside a precipice, we should not dare to dance.

But suppose the very day to be ascertained; is the whole day, or only a part, to be devoted to this amusement? And if a part of the day only, then which part is "the time to dance?" From the notoriously pernicious effects of "night meetings," in all ages, both upon morals and health, no one will pretend that the evening is the "time to dance;" and perhaps it may not be immaterial which portion of the day-light is devoted to that innocent amusement. But allowing the time to be ascertained, there is still an obscurity in the text. Is it a command to dance, or only a permission? Or is it merely a declaration of the fact, that, as men are constituted, there is a time when all the events alluded to in the text do, in the providence of God, come to pass? If the text be a command, is it of universal obligation; and must "old men and maidens, young men and children," dance obedience? If a permission, does it imply a permission also to refrain from dancing, if any are disposed? Or, if the text be merely a declaration that there is a time when men do dance, as there is a time when they die; then I might as well be requested to take the first eight verses of the chapter, and show in what consists the evil of those innocent practices of hating, and making war, and killing men, for which, it seems from the text, there is "a time," as well as for dancing.

There is still another difficulty in the text, which just now occurs to me. What kind of dancing does the text intend? for it is certainly a matter of no small consequence to a "true Christian," to dance in a scriptural manner, as well as at the scriptural time.

Now, to avoid mistakes on a point of such importance, I have consulted every passage in the Bible which speaks of dancing; the most important of which permit me to submit to your inspection.

Exod. xv. 20. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all

the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." This was on account of the overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

Judges xi. 34. The daughter of Jephthah "came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances." This was also on account of a victory over the enemies of Israel.

Judges xi. 21. The yearly feast in Shiloh was a feast unto the Lord, in which the daughters of Shiloh went forth in dances. This was done as an act of religious worship.

2 Sam. vi. 14 and 20. "And David danced before the Lord with all his might." But the irreligious Michal "came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!" Dancing, it seems, was a sacred rite, and was usually performed by women. At that day, it was perverted from its sacred use by none but "vain fellows," "desistute of shame." David vindicates himself from her irony, by saying, "It was before the Lord;" admitting, that had this not been the case, her rebuke would have been merited.

1 Sam. xviii. 6. On account of the victory of Saul and David over the Philistines, "The women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing."

Psal. cxlix. 3. "Let them praise his name in the dance."—Psal. xxx. 11. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing." The deliverance here spoken of was a recovery from sickness, and the dancing an expression of religious gratitude and joy.

Exod. xxii. 19. "As soon as he came nigh unto the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing." From this it appears that dancing was a part also of idol worship.

Jer. xxxi. 4. "Oh virgin of Israel, thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and go forth in the dances of them that make merry." This passage predicts the return from captivity, and the restoration of the Divine favour, with the consequent expression of religious joy.

Matt. xi. 17. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." That is, neither the judgments nor the mercies of God produce any effect upon this incorrigible generation. They neither mourn when called to mourning by his providence; nor rejoice with the usual tokens of religious joy, when his mercies demand their gratitude.

Luke xv. 25. "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came, and drew nigh unto the house, he heard music and dancing." The return of the prodigal was a joyful event, for which the grateful father, according to the usages of the Jewish church, and the exhortation of the Psalmist, "praised the Lord in the dance."

Eccles. iii. 4. "A time to mourn and a time to dance." Since the Jewish church knew nothing of dancing, except as a religious ceremony, or as an expression of gratitude and praise, the text is a declaration, that the providence of God sometimes demands mourning, and sometimes gladness and gratitude.

Matt. xiv. 6. "But when Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod." In this case dancing was perverted from its original object, to purposes of vanity and ostentation.

Job xxi. 7. "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea are mighty in power?" Verse 11. "They send forth their little ones, like a flock, and their children dance. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of his ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him: and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" Their wealth and dancing are assigned as the reason of their saying unto God, "Depart from us," and of their not desiring the knowledge of his ways, and not delighting to serve him, or pray to him.

From the preceding quotations, it will sufficiently appear—

1. That dancing was a religious act, both of the true and also of idol worship.

2. That it was practised exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or great victories.

3. That it was performed by maidens only.

4. That it was performed usually in the day time, in the open air, in high-ways, fields, or groves.

5. That men who perverted dancing from a sacred use to purposes of amusement, were deemed infamous.

6. That no instances of dancing are found upon record in the Bible, in which the two sexes united in the exercise, either as an act of worship or amusement.

7. That there is no instance upon record, of social dancing for amusement, except that of the "vain fellows," devoid of shame; of the irreligious families described by Job, which produced increased impiety, and ended in destruction; and of Herodias, which terminated in the rash vow of Herod, and the murder of John the Baptist.

REMARKS ON THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY, IN IRELAND.

"As much is seen, as man a God can see,
In these astonishing exploits of power.
What order, beauty, motion, distance, size!
Concurrence of design, how exquisite!
How complicate in their Divine police!
Apt means! great ends! consent to general good!"

That which is denominated the "Giant's Causeway," is situated at the northern extremity of the island. It consists of about thirty thousand natural pillars, mostly in a perpendicular situation. At low water the Causeway is about six hundred feet long, and probably runs into the sea, as something similar is observed on the opposite coast of Scotland. It is not known whether the pillars are continued underground, like a quarry. They are of different dimensions, being from 14 to 20 inches in diameter, and from 15 to 36 feet in height; their figure is generally pentagonal or hexagonal. Several have been found with seven, and a few with three, four, and eight sides, of irregular sizes. Every pillar consists, as it were, of joints or pieces, which are not united by flat surfaces; for, on being forced off, one of them is concave in the middle, and the other is convex:—many of these joints lie loose upon the strand. The stone is a kind of basalt, of a close grit, and of a dusky hue; it is very heavy, each joint generally weighing two hundred and a half. It clicks like iron, melts in a forge, breaks sharp, and by reason of its extreme hardness, blunts the edge of tools; and by that means is rendered incapable of being used in building. The pillars stand very close to each other, and though the number of their sides differs, yet their contextures are so nicely adapted as to leave no vacuity between them; and every pillar retains its own thickness, angles, and sides, from top to bottom.—These kind of columns is continued, with interruptions, for nearly two miles along the shore. By its magnitude and unusual appearance, it forms altogether an object of great rarity, and is mostly visited by all strangers who have any curiosity. This amazing and stupendous production of nature is of a very uncommon kind; we know of few, if any, similar to it.

ABYSSINIAN CRUELTY.

"But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat."—Gen. IX. 4.

Mr. Bruce has given us an account of the manner of eating blood in Abyssinia. He says, that a small distance from its ancient capital he overtook three persons driving a cow; they had lances and shields in their hands, and appeared to be Soldiers. He saw these men trip up the cow and give her a rude fall upon the ground. One of them sat across her neck, holding her down head by the horns, another twisted a halter about her fore feet, while the third, who had a knife in his hand, getting across the poor creature, gave her a deep wound in the upper part of the buttock, and cut out two pieces of flesh, thicker and larger than our ordinary beef steak; which they spread upon the outside of one of their shields.—They then proceeded to care for the beast, and turning back the skin over the wound, they fastened it to the correspondent part by two or more small skewers or pins, and covered it with a cataplasm of clay. They then forced the animal to rise, and drove her on before them to furnish them with a fuller meal when they should meet their companions in the evening.

It appears that the Israelites in the days of Saul, had a strong propensity to this crime. After they had conquered the Philistines they flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and did eat them with the blood; that is, they cut of the