

Indeed, her motive for desiring an introduction to the circles of fashion was not a calculating worldly principle, which seeks it only as the means of rising in the world. The fawning sycophant, creeping along this path, begins and goes on with coolness and deliberation. He has no feelings or opinions of his own apart from his patrons. He assents to their absurdities. He flatters them in their follies and sins, and there is no degree of error or crime which he will not palliate and excuse. His reigning motive is self-interest, and those means which are to raise him to distinction are kept ever in view. Such a man must needs progress in his course of life, but his progress, like that of a snail which crawls across a marble monument, is marked throughout by the slime of his adulation. Mrs. More, in seeking the society of the great, sought it because they had come up to her own standard, rather than because they held one higher and more desirable than her own. To strengthen their own hands, and, in many instances, to cover their nakedness, the rich and the noble thought fit to patronise literary men; and it was only because Johnson and Burke and such men were found within their circles that Mrs. More solicited admission. Accordingly we nowhere perceive, in any of her letters written at this period, so trying to the virtues of an authoress, aught that manifests a mean or disingenuous spirit. Doubtless she was where she ought not to have been, still she was preserved from the contamination. She was saved from the sweeping flood of dissipation, into which thousands drop and are soon beyond the hope of recovery. Accordingly we find her making a remark which would be of small account in itself, were it not that it indicated the kind of people who had the better part of her affections:—

“I have long ago found out,” she says, “that hardly any but plain, frugal people ever do generous things; our cousin, Mr. Cotton, who I daresay is often ridiculed for his simplicity and frugality, could yet lay down two hundred pounds, without being sure of ever receiving a shilling interest, for the laudable purpose of establishing a man of merit, to whom he is still a very considerable contributor.”

It was about this time (1777) that Mrs. More brought out her tragedy of Percy. The player Garrick seems to have done his utmost to make it take with the public. The success was beyond both her and her friend's expectation. It was acted for twelve nights with great applause.—The following passage, from one of her letters, refers to this matter:—

“Last night was the ninth night of Percy. It was a very brilliant house, and I was there. Lady North did me the honor to take a stage box. I trembled when the speech against the wickedness of going to war was spoken,* as I was afraid my Lord was in the house, and

that speech, though not written with any particular design, is so bold, and always so warmly received, that it frightens me, and I really feel uneasy till it is well over.”

The theatre has had many apologists, and not a few of them have gone so far as to speak of it as teaching virtue; but, alas, the virtue which is there taught is not that holy and self-denying principle which is inculcated in the New Testament. It may bring tears from the eyes of the worldling, whose sole aim is the aggrandisement of self; but these tears only serve to rivet his own avarice more strongly. He can weep at a tale of woe, but he will not stretch out his hand in deeds of charity. Do such persons contribute of their substance to convey the gospel to the heathen, or do they aught to purchase a tract or a Bible for the needy and afflicted? What is the society which surrounds them? Are they men who worship God in their families? Is their zeal for virtue so strong that they frown away from them the dissipation of actors? The truth is, the theatre, in its very nature, is a vicious thing. Here youth are taught pride, and vain glory; and the first step in a young man's progress to dissipation is when he becomes a frequenter of these establishments. He is taught—it is asserted a knowledge of the world, but it would be more consistent with truth to say, that he is taught the knowledge of its sinful ways. And surely, if it be true that “evil communications corrupt good manners,” it is the height of folly to purchase such knowledge at the expense of purity of heart. It is no argument to say that eminent men have patronised the stage by writing plays. The question still remains to be answered, what is their tendency? If they countenance what scripture condemns—if they give encouragement to revenge, railings, foolish talkings and jestings, which are not convenient, then, though these performances were written by angels and not by men, they are only the more to be disapproved, because more dangerous. Mrs. More, at this period, was a favorer of the stage; but when she tried it, as she afterwards did, by the balance of the sanctuary, her pen was no longer employed in its service; and when invited by a friend, several years afterwards, to visit the theatre to hear her own tragedy acted, she declined the invitation.

We often find in biographies incidents detailed, whose interest is much diminished, by the consideration that the evidence for their truth is wanting, and it well may be, seeing, if they are fictitious, all we can be expected to feel, is admiration of the wit or ingenuity of their author. The following may be relied on, from the particulars referred to. It records the heroism of a negro; and is enough to bring honor on the whole race of his sable brethren.

* At this time the war with our American Colonies was a subject of popular discussion.