

## A SERIOUS ADDRESS TO THE FREQUENTERS OF THEATRES.

BY A CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

[Concluded.]

Now I think the opinion of so many judicious and holy men ought to have great weight to lead you to suspect your own judgment, or your own piety, if you are otherwise minded; and the rather, as you will grieve pious ministers and fellow Christians, which ought to have some weight with you. As men are very expert in finding excuses for walking in the ways of their hearts, and following the fashions; and prone to satisfy themselves with those which are weak and insufficient; I shall consider the principal pleas which are offered for attending the play-house. Many plead that it is a diversion: they say, 'that God and religion allow recreation.' This I readily acknowledge; but, consider the end of diversion; as the very word imports, to give the mind a little relaxation from important cares—to refresh the spirit, and fit us for returning, with great ability and relish, to the common business of life, and to religion. Every recreation that does not answer these ends is an unlawful one:—Now I think it cannot be reasonably said of the Theatre, that it answers these ends: there is too much time spent there for it to be an innocent diversion. If it deeply fixes the attention, and strongly interests the heart, it not only excites those passions which Christianity was designed to restrain, but actually becomes a fatigue. Besides as I hinted above, exercise is the proper recreation of those whose business very much confines them at home, or to a sitting posture; and reading and conversation should be the recreation of others. Further, are there not other diversions to be found, less hazardous to virtue, less suspicious, more safe, innocent, and honourable, more becoming Christians?—Can you say, that you go the Play-house to glorify God? that you do it heartily as to the Lord, with good intentions, conscientious views, under a sense of God's presence, and with a desire to please him? In short, can you say that you go thither to answer any good end, which may not be better and more safely attained another way? Can you seriously and solemnly ask the blessing of God on this diversion? If you cannot, it is far from being innocent: and any improvements which you may there be supposed to make in politeness, and the knowledge of the world, will be but a small equivalent for risking your virtue and the seriousness of your spirits.—You may, perhaps, plead that many others attend it, that they generally do; but this is, indeed, the weakest of all arguments. God commands us, not to follow a multitude to do evil. There are many things in which you must dare to be singular, and for which you must bear to be hattered, if you will be Christians, and lay hold on eternal life. Yet custom, and fashion, and the fear of sneers, frighten out of their principles and their souls, and they are ashamed of being thought singularly wise and good. If any persons laugh at you for sober and honourable singularity, look upon them as your enemies, keep out of their company, and even scorn the scorners, Prov. iii. 34. But you may plead that many good people frequent the Theatre. You would probably think me uncharitable if I were to dispute this assertion: but good people is a very loose term, and if, instead of good, you will put that old-fashioned term holy, or godly, and will judge of men, not by the relaxed and fashionable morality of the present age, but by the word of God, it will be found that few, if any, truly holy and godly men frequent it; or if they do, it is no part of their goodness; but this plea is still nothing to the purpose: the question is, not what others do, but what is right and lawful in itself; what is most consistent with, and agreeable to a profession of godliness. By far the majority of good men decline going to the Theatre, and strongly advise others against it; but no openly vicious man or woman declines going upon principle. In this case, examine, not a particular character, but the prevailing part. The worst men and women show, in general, a great fondness for this diversion; the most wise and pious, of both sexes, an aversion to it. And is this a recommendation to you? Consider among your acquaintance, whether those who are most eager for it, or those who shun and disapprove it, appear to fear God and mind religion; and with which of them would you choose to have your eternal lot and portion? Let me add, that since this plea is so often urged, all

who make a creditable profession of religion should be careful not to give occasion for it, and lead others into sin by their example; for any one to plead that he must attend the Play-house on account of his business, and interest, is very trifling. The man who fears God, and reverences his own conscience, will first consider whether it be lawful and innocent in itself, or may not do mischief to himself or to others, who may be ensnared by his example. He will trust Providence with his secular interest in the way of duty, whomsoever he may be likely to disoblige by walking in it; he will never run the risk of losing his soul for the gain of the whole world. Besides, an upright, conscientious, and consistent Christian, will be esteemed for his steadiness, and lose nothing upon the whole by it.—If the Theatre be a School of Virtue, as some have asserted, it is surprising that the most holy men, in every age should have condemned it, and that the Scriptures should never recommend it in this view. If it be a dangerous amusement in general, no pretence of receiving instruction by it will warrant a concurrence in it: so that when these arguments are weighed, and the vanity of these pleas duly considered, I think this diversion must be pronounced unlawful; and that every Christian who values the favour of God, the purity and peace of his own conscience, and the honour of his profession, will abstain from it, however fashionable it may be, and however strongly he may be solicited or inclined to attend it.—But if persons will give themselves no trouble to consider whether it be lawful and proper or not, but will run with the crowd, I must leave them to the 'Judgment of God, which is according to truth.' Upon the whole, I think it will appear to every candid inquirer, that from what hath been said, there is, at least, room to hesitate about this amusement, and to doubt the lawfulness of it. Now, if you are brought to this state of mind, then for you to attend upon it is unlawful, for thus St. Paul hath expressly determined: 'He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin'; that is, it is a wicked thing; for a person to do that which he doubteth the lawfulness of, he will be condemned of God as a sinner, if he ventures out of complaisance, false shame, or any other principle, to do what he knows, or even suspects, that God hath forbidden. Allow me to ask those who attend this diversion, Do you think a dying bed will be made easy and comfortable by the remembrance of your attachment to it? Will it afford any satisfaction then, that you have taken, what you now call innocent liberties? Or rather, will it not give you (as I know it hath given some others) much pain and terror, when you are entering on the eternal world?\*

Indulge me, while I ask once more, whether you think that the pleas with which you now make a shift to satisfy your minds will bear you out at the tribunal of God? Will he admit them as sufficient? Dare you venture your present comforts and everlasting salvation upon them? You had need be very clear where so much depends. It is good to be sure, where your eternal interest is at stake.—Forbearance is certainly safest, and we cannot be too safe where sin and duty, heaven and hell, are concerned! 'Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.' But I know, by painful observation and experience, how little arguments and remonstrances of this kind are regarded, especially by persons of the higher ranks, when the fashion of the age, and the place where they live, and their own inclinations draw the other way. So great however is my regard for your best interest, that, methinks, I would not have you go even to the play-house, without learning something good and useful there. Let me, therefore, recommend it to you, who, after all, choose to attend it, that before the play begins,

\* A Lady travelling in a stage coach with the Rev. James Hervey, was largely exulting on theatrical amusements, as superior to all other entertainments. Among other things she observed, that there was the pleasure of thinking on the play before she went—the pleasure of attending it, and the pleasure of reflecting upon it after her return. Mr. Hervey told her, that there was one pleasure she had not mentioned. The lady inquiring eagerly what that was, he answered, "Meditation of the pleasure it will give you on your death-bed." The lady was so much struck with the well-timed hint, that she forsook the Play-house, and set herself to pursue and enjoy those pleasures which would afford her comfortable reflections on her death-bed.

or between the acts, you dwell a little upon such reflections as these. You are acting a part on the great stage of life: a part assigned you by the infinite, Eternal Jehovah, your Creator, Governor, Benefactor, and Judge:—That he sits behind the scenes, and though you see him not, he sees you, and observes and records all your actions, words, and thoughts: that he is too wise a Being to be deceived, and too holy and awful a Being to be trifled with. That you may, in a moment, even while you are seeing the play, be called off the stage of life to appear before your Judge. That you must give an account to him of all things done in the body—of your time and your money—your thoughts and imaginations—of the principles on which you have acted in life—of the encouragement and countenance which you have given to religion or to vice; and the good or injury which you have done to the souls of others by your converse and example. If it shall then appear that you have acted your part well, and kept yourselves pure, you will receive the applause of your Judge: all his saints and angels will concur in it, and you will be for ever happy; but if you have acted your part ill, he will most certainly and awfully condemn you; and you will have your portion, your everlasting portion, with the devil and his angels, in everlasting fire!—Matt. xxv. 41.

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A DESCRIPTION OF THE PEAK IN DERBYSHIRE.  
From Moritz's Travels.

Having arrived in Derbyshire, a distance of 170 miles from London; the author thus describes the town of Castleton, in which the Peak is situated:—

"I ascended one of the highest hills, and all at once perceived a beautiful vale below me, which was traversed by rivers and brooks, and inclosed on all sides by hills. In this vale lies Castleton, a small town, with low houses; so named from an old castle, whose ruins are still to be seen here.

"A narrow path, which wound itself down the side of the rock, led me through the vale into the street of Castleton, where I found an inn, and dined. After dinner, I made the best of my way to the cavern.

"A little rivulet, which runs through the middle of the town, led me to its entrance.

"I stood here a few moments, full of wonder and astonishment at the amazing height of the steep rock before me, covered on each side with ivy and other shrubs. At its summit are the decayed walls and towers of an ancient castle, which formerly stood on this rock; and at its foot the monstrous aperture, or mouth to the entrance of the cavern; where it is totally dark, even at mid-day.

"As I was standing here full of admiration, I perceived at the entrance of the cavern, a man of a rude and rough appearance, who asked me if I wished to see the Peak; and an echo strongly reverberated his course voice.

"Answering him in the affirmative, he next inquired if I should want to be carried to the other side of the stream; telling me at the same time what the sum would be which I must pay for it.

"This man had, along with his black stringy hair, and his dirty and tattered clothes, such a singularly wild and infernal look, that he actually struck me as a real Charon: his voice, and the questions he asked me, were not of a kind to remove this notion, so far from its requiring any effort of imagination, I found it not easy to avoid believing, that at length I had actually reached Averna,—was about to cross Acheron,—and to be ferried by Charon!

"I had no sooner agreed to his demand, than he told me, all I had to do was boldly to follow him,—and thus we entered the cavern.

"In the entrance of the cavern lay the trunk of a tree that had been cut down, on which several boys of the town were playing.

"Our way seemed to be altogether on a descent, though not steep; so that the light, which came in at the mouth of the cavern near the entrance, gradually forsook it; and when we had gone forward a few steps farther, I was astonished by a sight, which, of all others, I here the least expected; I perceived to the right, in the hollow of the cavern, a whole subterranean village, where the inhabitants, on account of its being Sunday, were resting from their work, and with happy and cheerful looks were sitting at the doors of their huts along with their children.