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A

D I S C O U R S E

O N

STAGE ENTERTAINMENTS.



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A
DISCOURSE
ON
STAGE ENTERTAINMENTS.

By the Rev^d. DAVID SIMPSON, M. A.

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BIRMINGHAM:
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TO

JOHN VOCE, ESQUIRE, MAYOR;

DAVID HALL,

THOMAS LEGH,

AND

SAMUEL LANGFORD,

} ESQUIRES,

JUSTICES OF THE PEACE OF THE BOROUGH
OF MACCLESFIELD,

THIS

DISCOURSE UPON STAGE ENTERTAINMENTS,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR VERY SINCERE AND AFFECTIONATE

FRIEND,

AND HUMBLE SERVANT,

The Author.

“ ONE Play-House ruins more souls than fifty churches are able to save.”

*Bulstrode's Charge to the Grand Jury of Middlesex,
April 21st, 1718.*

“ Quod
Æquè pauperibus prodest, locupletibus æquè.
Æquè neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit.”

Horace.

Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

Jesus Christ.

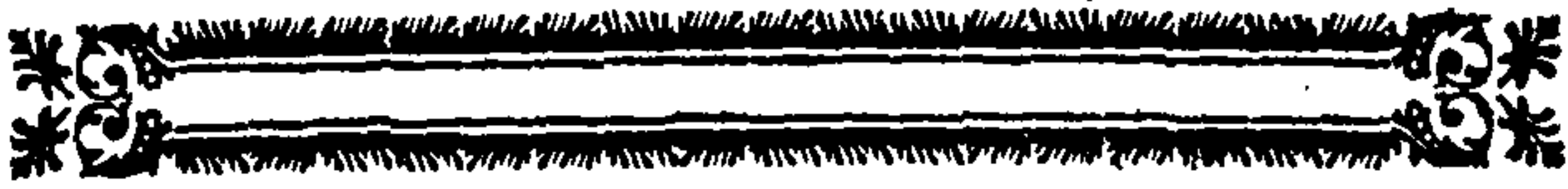
She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

Despisers of those that are good; heady, high-minded, proud; lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

St. Paul.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the World is the enemy of God.

St. James.



P R E F A C E.

T H I S Discourse was originally delivered in one Sermon in the Year 1780. It has lain by the Author ever since, without the smallest View to Publication. The same Event, however, which gave Occasion to the first Composition of it, having again occurred, he has been induced to revise, enlarge, and lay it before the Public. Collier, and others who have written upon the Stage, have been consulted, and, whatever he found suitable to his Purpose, he hath selected from them. This general Acknowledgment, he hopes, will be a sufficient Apology for
the

the Liberty. In short, Plainness and Perspicuity, rather than Elegancy of Composition, have been studied. And if, upon the whole, the Discourse is calculated to inform the Ignorant; to deter the Froward; to reclaim the Wandering; to establish the Wavering; and to encourage the sincere Christian in his Opposition to the Spirit of the World, and his Adherence to the Gospel of Christ; let God have all the Praise.

A DIS-

 E R R A T A.

Page	Line	For	Read
12	20	fœcibus	fœcibus
17	15	lircus	circus
18	10	numerus	numeris
54	5	Shews	Stews
68	25	loryphæi	coryphæi

A

D I S C O U R S E, &c.

JOB xxxii. 17.

I also will shew mine opinion.

A Company of Comedians being in town, and meeting with considerable encouragement from all ranks of people; it may not be foreign to the business of this place, and to the sanctity of this day, to spend a little time in considering, whether the entertainments of the Play-House, as they are usually conducted, can be consistent with the nature and design of the gospel of Christ: and whether any truly pious and religious persons can give them the sanction of their presence, without offending God, their best friend, and bringing dishonour upon their Christian profession. The persons concerned will have no reason to complain of being injured, in a pecuniary view at least, as there is some cause to believe, that a spirit of opposition will be stirred up hereby, and they will be favoured with fuller houses than ordinary.

B nary.

nary. “The passions of the generality of mankind
 “are much more alive than their judgments.” If
 it were possible to speak like an angel upon the
 subject, and to advance the most powerful reasons
 imaginable against a fashionable and favourite
 entertainment, I well know it would be to very
 little purpose, with the great bulk of mankind.
 The language of the multitude always was, and
 always will be, “We have loved pleasures, and
 “after them we will go, whatever is the con-
 “sequence: we will gratify *the lusts of the flesh, the*
 “*lusts of the eye, and the pride of life*, in spite of all
 “that reason, and religion can say to the con-
 “trary.” There is a pleasure, however, my bre-
 thren, in doing one’s duty. And what shall be
 said upon the subject of the Play-House, may pos-
 sibly inform the judgments of some; satisfy the
 doubts of others; confirm those that are wavering,
 and in danger of being carried away with the mul-
 titude; and put them upon thinking and acting
 for themselves. *I also will shew mine opinion; for*
I am full of matter; the spirit within me constraineth
me. I will speak that I may be refreshed: I will open my
lips and answer. Let me not, I pray you, accept any
man’s person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man.
For I know not to give flattering titles: in so doing my
Maker would soon take me away. Job xxxii. 17—22.

If we, in the first place, examine the history of
 the Stage, we shall find it to be undoubtedly
 of Pagan original, and invented for the honour
 and worship of demons. The entertainments of
 it are usually divided into two kinds, one of
 which

which is called Tragedy, and the other Comedy.

“ A Tragedy is a dramatic poem, representing
“ some signal action performed by illustrious per-
“ sons, and which has generally a fatal issue or
“ end.”—“ Comedy is a dramatic piece, repre-
“ senting some agreeable and diverting transaction:
“ or an allegorical representation of something in
“ private life, for the amusement and instruction
“ of the audience.” The first rise of Tragedy is
said to have been the following :

Icarius, the son of Œbalus, king of Attica in Greece, about 1300 years before the coming of our Saviour, having taken an he-goat that had ravaged his vineyard, sacrificed it to Bacchus, the god of wine. During that ceremony, the people danced about the altar, singing the praises of the drunken god. This practice was afterwards observed every year, and called Trigody, a vintage song, and afterwards Tragody, which we pronounce Tragedy, from the Greek words *Τραγος* a goat, and *Ωδη* a song : so that the original of Tragedy is no other than a goat-song ; or a song in praise of Bacchus when a goat was annually sacrificed in honour of that filthy god.

Comedy comes from the Greek words *Κωμη* a village, and *Ωδη* a song ; so that it was originally a kind of village song or entertainment, practised yearly by the country people of Greece in honour of their gods.

Some ages afterwards, when learning had begun to diffuse itself more generally, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides arose, and improved and

refined the stage, and brought that kind of entertainment to a state of very considerable perfection. From the Greeks the Romans received dramatic compositions, and, in the early periods of their commonwealth made them a part of their devotion. An Actor was a kind of priest, the Play-House a temple; and to frequent the Stage was, on some occasions, a sort of worship paid to their gods, and the souls of departed heroes.

Horace indeed ascribes the invention of Tragedy to Thespis, a Grecian. Before his time Tragedy was only an entertainment of musicians and dancers; but he introduced Actors who recited a part between every two songs, with their faces daubed with dregs of wine, or painted with ceruse and vermilion, in imitation of the Satyrs, who are represented with a ruddy visage.

“ *Ignotum tragicæ genus invenisse Camenæ
Dicitur, et plaustris vexisse poemata Thespis
Qui canerent agerentque, peruncti fœcibus ora.*”

Thespis, inventor of the tragic art,
Carried his vagrant players in a cart:
High o'er the crowd the mimic tribe appear'd,
And play'd and sung, with lees of wine besmear'd.

Such were the rude beginnings of dramatic poetry and stage entertainments!

Since those times many changes and improvements have taken place; but yet, upon the whole, they have always been looked upon, by the religious part of mankind, as prejudicial to the best interests of society, and totally inconsistent with the spirit and genius of the gospel. Yet it must be

be confessed, that both among the Greeks and Romans, there were several persons of learning, who rendered themselves famous by their dramatic compositions. Among the former were Thespis, Menander, Euripides, Aristophanes, Æschylus, Sophocles, and others: among the latter Plautus, Terence, Seneca, and several more. Many Christian poets, struck with the beauties of these fine originals, have endeavoured to tread in the same steps, and have thought it their highest honour to rival the excellence of these Pagan models. Among the French they have Corneille, Racine, Moliere, and Voltaire, who are most in estimation. We have Shakespeare, Johnson, Dryden, Row, and many others that are excellent in their way. But then, though we must allow, that the Plays of several of these authors, and more especially those of Shakespeare, abound with much sterling wit and good sense: though they contain some fine moral sentiments, yet, upon the whole, they abound with so many thoughts and expressions of a different kind, that the representation of them debauches and corrupts the minds of men, loosens the reins of virtue, gives a licentious and dissipated turn to the inclinations of those who most frequently attend them, and is utterly inconsistent with the best interests of civil society, and with the genuine dictates of our pure and holy religion. I will not say but there may be some few Plays that are chaste and moral throughout; but then the number is exceedingly small, and they are seldom brought upon the

stage. The taste of the times indeed is such, that if only those plays were represented, which are really good, pure, and moral throughout, the Play-House would soon be forsaken, and the Actors compelled to earn their bread in some more honourable way. They are obliged, therefore, to bring forward such dramatic pieces as contain something droll, quere, ridiculous, soft, laughable. They must exhibit such Plays as abound with love-tales, and extravagant amours, and gallant adventures, such as the world never saw, in order to draw company and support themselves in that unworthy calling. Kick off vice from the Stage, and let nothing be represented there but virtue and goodness, or what has a tendency to make men virtuous and good, and we shall speedily see an end of the Play-House.

But without enlarging more fully upon the original, nature and tendency of the Stage, give me leave to lay before you, my brethen, the sentiments of some of the greatest, wisest, best, and most religious part of mankind, both Heathens and Christians; both Ancients and Moderns: and from hence we shall easily discover, that the Play-House has been looked upon as a public nuisance in all ages.

I. PAGANS.

We will begin our testimonies with the Pagans, the most learned and excellent of whom abominated Play-Houses as so many seminaries of vice and debauchery.

1. Socrates,

1. Socrates, who was pronounced by the Oracle, the wisest of men, looked upon Plays, not only as lying, unprofitable diversions, but unbecoming and pernicious pastimes. *See his Life.*

2. Plato tells us, that Plays raise the passions, and pervert the use of them, and by consequence are dangerous to morality. For this reason he banishes these diversions his Commonwealth.

See the 10 book of his Republic.

3. Xenophon, who was both a man of letters and a great general, commends the Persians for the discipline of their education. "They will not," says he, "so much as suffer their youth to hear any thing that is amorous or tawdry."

See his Cyropædia.

4. Solon, one of the seven wise men of Greece, condemned plays as evils not to be suffered in a city.

See his Life.

5. Isocrates, the famous Greek orator, exclaims against all Actors and Players as scurrilous and mischievous, and intolerable plagues to a city.

See his Orat. ad Nic. et de Pace.

6. Plutarch, in his Morals, condemns Plays as lascivious vanities, and contagious evils.

7. Cicero, the celebrated Roman orator, declares against Plays and licentious poems as the plague of society; and in particular against Comedies, that subsisted only by lewdness. He complains also of Tragedy, how, in many instances, it baffled the force of virtue.

See Tus. Quest. and De Leg.

8. Livy,

8. Livy, the historian, who lived in the time of our Saviour, says, that Plays were brought in upon the score of religion to appease the gods in time of a plague; but the remedy proved worse than the disease, and the atonement more infectious than the plague; for the Plays did more hurt to the mind than the pestilence to the body.

See his History.

9. Valerius Maximus, who lived about the same time with Livy, having described the rise, progress, and decorations of the theatre, tells us how fatal the performances of it were to religion; and how the Romans, as they grew rich, added pomp and magnificence to the Plays, the toleration of which he looked upon as a blemish to the Roman state.

See his History.

10. Seneca, who lived soon after our Saviour's crucifixion, complains how the Roman youth were generally corrupted by the countenance which Nero gave to the Stage, and to all those acts that indulged the sensitive part. He tells us farther, that in Stage-Plays vice gets an easy passage to the heart, and that the Play-House is the high road to the Brothel-House; he advises Lucilius to avoid all Plays, and laments the frequent concourse of the Roman youth to them.

See his Epistles.

11. Tacitus, the historian, complains much how the Roman virtue and discipline had been corrupted by the Stage, and inveighs against Nero for introducing all kinds of vice by Stage-plays. *See his Annals.*

13. Propertius, a very loose and obscene poet, cries out against the Theatres as the instruments of his ruin. "Oh nimis exitio nata Theatra meo!"

See his Works.

14. C. Plinius Secundus, stiles Stage-Plays effeminate arts, altogether unbecoming men, and intolerable mischiefs. *Paneg. Trajan.*

15. Ovid, that wanton poet, informs Augustus, that Play-Houses are the nurseries of all wickedness, the congress of Adulteries, and therefore advises him to demolish them :

" Ut tamen hoc fateor, ludi quoque femina præbent

—— " Nequitia: tolli tota Theatra jube.

" Peccandi causam quam multis sæpe dederunt

—— " Tollatur lircus."

DE TRISTIBUS, l. 2.

In his poem *De Arte Amandi*, he tells his lecherous associates, that the Play-Houses were the best fairs for unchaste bargains, the most commodious haunts for amorous fellows, and the only places for panders and whores :

" Sed tu præcipue curvis venare Theatris

" Hæc loca sunt votis fertiliora tuis

" Illic invenies quid ames—

" Notat sibi quisquam puellam.

—— " Ruit ad celebres cultissima fœmina ludos;

" Copia judicium sæpe morata meum est.

" Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsæ;

" Ille locus casti damna pudoris habet."— l. 1.

He afterwards adds, that it was impossible for parents, or husbands, to keep their children and wives chaste, while so many Play-Houses were suffered in the city :

Quid

Quid faciet custos cum sint tot in urbe Theatra? l. 3.

In another place he advifes all thofe who would live chafte, to withdraw from the Play-Houfe, and to throw away all Play-Books, amorous poems, efpecially Tibullus and Callimachus, yea and his own wanton verfes :

“ At tanti tibi fit non indulgere Theatris

“ Dum bene de vacuo pectore cedat amor.

“ Enervant animos citharæ, cantusque, lyraque,

“ Et vox, et numerus brachia mota fuis.

“ Illic affiduè ficti faltantur amantes,

“ Quid caveas, actor, quid juvet, arte docet.

—— “ Teneros ne tangas poetas—Callimachum fugito—

“ Carmina quis potuit tutò legiffe Tibulli?”

DE REMED. AM. l. 2.

16. Marcus Antoninus, the Emperor of Rome, in his Commentaries, informs us, that he had to thank his great grand-father for not running the risk of a public education, and for providing him mafters at home, from whom he learnt not to overvalue the diverfions of the Theatre.

Many more Heathen testimonies might be produced, if it were neceffary; but thefe are fufficient to fhew in what repute virtue was held among fome of them, and how they abhorred the Stage as an enemy to all good. And fhall we, my brethren, who call ourfelves Chriftians, and who pretend to be the lovers, and followers, and imitators of the pure, and holy, and meek, and lowly, and mortified Jesus, countenance thefe Theatrical entertainments, which even the wifer Heathens cenfured as the plague of focieties, and the ruin of common morality?

morality? We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. There are many of us that can find a shilling or two to go to the Play, who can very seldom find an inclination to give the same pittance to relieve the wants of a poor distressed fellow-creature: or if we are now and then constrained to give a trifle, it comes from us like our heart's blood. Many a poor young man and woman labours hard to save sixpence to go to the Play with, to have their fancies pleased and their passions thrown into tumult, who never gave sixpence to a miserable object in the whole course of their lives, and who are in debt at the same time in half the shops in the town. Yea, instances might be produced of persons, who go and buy bread upon credit, and sell it again at an inferior price, to enable them to purchase a ticket for the play, that they may have the blessed privilege of hearing a parcel of mock-heroes and romantic lovers discoursing one with another! Surely ministers and magistrates ought to use all the power and influence they are possessed of, especially in country trading towns, to prevent such mischiefs. But alas! it may be said of us with too much propriety as of the Jewish polity: *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.*

Permit me still further to require your attention while I lay before you the opinions of the holy Fathers in the first and purest ages of the Christian church. They looked upon the Stage, not only as a scene of folly, but impiety, and therefore the Christians in
those

those days durst not attend the public Shews that were exhibited in different places for the entertainment and diversion of the people. This is so notorious that the Heathens objected it as a great crime against the Christians that they would not attend them. This appears from Minutius Foelix, a famous Roman lawyer, who flourished about two hundred years after Christ, and with whose testimony I begin.

II. CHRISTIAN FATHERS.

1. "The Romans," says Cæcilius, the Heathen, in Minutius, "govern and enjoy the world, while
 " you Christians are careful and mopish, abstain-
 " ing even from lawful pleasures; you visit not
 " Shews, nor are present at the Pomps: you
 " abhor the holy Games—a melancholy ghastly
 " people ye are."—

"True," says Octavius, "we Christians re-
 " frain from the Play-House, because of its in-
 " tolerable corruptions.—We cannot be present
 " at the Plays, without great sin and shame."—

2. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, who flourished about the year 170, in his book to Autolicus has these words:—"It is not lawful for us to be
 " present at the prizes of your gladiators, lest by
 " this means we should be accessaries to the mur-
 " ders there committed. Neither dare we presume
 " upon the liberty of your other Shews, lest our
 " senses should be tainted and disobliged with
 " indecency and profaneness. The tragical dis-
 " tractions of Tereus and Thyestes are nonsense
 " to us. We are for seeing no representations of
 lewdness.

“ lewdness.—God forbid that Christians, who are
 “ remarkable for modesty and reservedness ; who
 “ are obliged to discipline, and trained up in
 “ virtue, God forbid, I say, that we should dis-
 “ honour our thoughts, much less our practice,
 “ with such wickedness as this!”

3. Tertullian, who flourished in the same cen-
 tury, is copious upon this subject.—“ We Chris-
 tians have nothing to do with the frenzies of the
 Race-Ground, the lewdness of the Play-House,
 or the barbarities of the Bear-Garden.”—

“ Some people’s faith is either too full of scru-
 ples or too barren of sense. Nothing will serve
 to settle them but a plain text of Scripture.
 They hover in uncertainty, because it is not
 said as expressly, *Thou shalt not go to the Play-
 House, as it is, Thou shalt not kill.* But this
 looks more like fencing than argument. For
 we have the meaning of the prohibition though
 not the sound in the first psalm: *Blessed is the
 man that walks not in the council of the ungodly, nor
 stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of
 the scornful.*”

“ Since human prudence has thought fit to de-
 grade the Stage, notwithstanding the diverting-
 ness of it: since pleasure cannot make them an
 interest here, nor shelter them from censure:
 how will they be able to stand the shock of di-
 vine justice ; and what reckoning have they rea-
 son to expect hereafter?”

“ All things considered, it is no wonder such
 people should fall under possession. God knows

we

“ we have had a sad example of this already. A
 “ certain woman went to the Play-House, and
 “ brought the devil home with her. And when
 “ the unclean spirit was pressed in the exorcism,
 “ and asked how he durst attack a Christian: I
 “ have done nothing, says he, but what I can jus-
 “ tify: for I seized her upon my own ground.
 “ Indeed, how many instances have we of others
 “ who have apostatized from God by this correspon-
 “ dence with the devil? *What communion has light*
 “ *with darkness?* *No man can serve two masters,* nor
 “ have life and death in him at the same time.”

“ Will you not then avoid this seat of infection?
 “ The very air suffers by their impurities, and
 “ they almost pronounce the plague. What tho’
 “ the performance may be in some measure pretty
 “ and entertaining? What though innocence, yea,
 “ and virtue too, shines through some part of it?
 “ It is not the custom to prepare poison unpalatable,
 “ nor make up ratsbane with rhubarb and
 “ senna. No. To have the mischief speed they
 “ must oblige the sense, and make the dose pleasan-
 “ tant. Thus the devil throws in a cordial drop
 “ to make the draught go down; and steals some
 “ few ingredients from the dispensatory of heaven.
 “ In short, look upon all the engaging sentences
 “ of the Stage; their flights of fortitude and phi-
 “ losophy, the loftiness of their style, the music
 “ of their cadence, and the fineness of the con-
 “ duct: look upon it, I say, as honey dropping
 “ from the bowels of a toad, or the bag of a spi-
 “ der:

“ der: let your health over-rule your pleasure,
 “ and don't die of a little liquorishness.”

“ In earnest, Christian, our time for entertain-
 “ ment is not yet: you are too craving and ill-
 “ managed if you are so violent for delight; and
 “ let me tell you, no wiser, than you should be,
 “ if you count such things satisfactions. Some
 “ philosophers placed their happiness in bare tran-
 “ quillity. Easiness of thought, and absence of
 “ pain, was all they aimed at. But this it
 “ seems will not satisfy thee. Thou liest sighing
 “ and hankering after the Play-House. Prithee
 “ recollect thyself. Thou knowest death ought to
 “ be our pleasure; and therefore I hope life may
 “ be a little without it. Are not our desires the
 “ same with the apostle's, *to be dissolved and to be*
 “ *with Christ*. Let us act up to our pretensions,
 “ and let pleasure be true to inclination.”

“ But if you cannot wait for delight; if you
 “ must be put into present possession, we will cast
 “ the cause upon that issue. Now were you not
 “ unreasonable, you would perceive the liberali-
 “ ties of Providence, and find yourself almost in
 “ the midst of satisfaction. For what can be more
 “ transporting than the friendship of heaven, and
 “ the discovery of truth; than the sense of our
 “ mistakes, and the pardon of our sins? What
 “ greater pleasure can there be than to scorn being
 “ pleased? to contemn the world? and to be a
 “ slave to nothing? It is a mighty satisfaction I
 “ take it to have a clear conscience; to make life
 “ no burden, nor death any terror! to trample
 “ upon

“ upon the Pagan deities; to batter principalities
 “ and powers, and force the devils to resign!
 “ These are the delights, these are the noble en-
 “ tertainments of Christians: and besides the ad-
 “ vantage of the quality, they are always at hand,
 “ and cost us nothing. *Works, passim.*

Clemens Alexandrinus, who lived about the year 200, affirms, that the Circus and Theatre may not improperly be called the “ Chair of Pestilence.”—
 “ Away then with these lewd, ungodly diversions,
 “ and which are but impertinence at the best.
 “ What part of impudence either in words or
 “ practice is omitted by the Stage? Don't the
 “ buffoons take almost all manner of liberties, and
 “ plunge through thick and thin to make a jest?
 “ Now those who are affected with a vicious satis-
 “ faction, will be haunted with the idea and spread
 “ the infection. But if a man is not entertained,
 “ to what purpose should he go thither? Why
 “ should he be fond where he finds nothing, and
 “ court that which fleeps upon the sense? If it is
 “ said these diversions are taken only to unbend
 “ the mind and refresh nature a little. To this I
 “ answer, that the spaces between business should
 “ not be filled up with such rubbish. A wise man
 “ has a guard upon his recreations, and always
 “ prefers the profitable to the pleasant.”

De Pædag. Lib. 3.

5. St. Cyprian, who lived in the third century, has spoken at large upon the Stage, and after having described the diversions of the Play-House, he expostulates in this manner:

“ What

“ What business has a Christian at such places
“ as these? a Christian who has not the liberty so
“ much as to think of an ill thing? Why does he
“ entertain himself with lewd representations?
“ Has he a mind to discharge his modesty that he
“ may sin afterwards with the more boldness?
“ Yes: this is the consequence. By using to see
“ these things, he will learn to do them.—Why
“ need I mention the levities and impertinence in
“ Comedies, or the ranting distractions of Trage-
“ dy?—The folly of them is egregious and un-
“ becoming the gravity of Believers.”—

“ As I have often said, these foppish, these per-
“ nicious diversions, must be avoided. We must
“ set a guard upon our senses, and keep the centi-
“ nel always upon duty. To make vice familiar
“ to the ear is the way to recommend it. And
“ since the mind of man has a natural bent to ex-
“ travagance; how is it likely to hold out under
“ example and invitation? If you push that
“ which totters already, whither will it tumble?
“ In earnest; we must draw off our inclinations
“ from these vanities. A Christian has much bet-
“ ter sights than these to look at. He has solid
“ satisfactions in his power, which will please and
“ improve him at the same time.”

“ Would a Christian be agreeably refreshed?
“ Let him read the Scriptures. Here the entertain-
“ ment will suit his character, and be big enough
“ for his quality.—Beloved, how noble, how mov-
“ ing, how profitable a pleasure is it to be thus
“ employed?”

“ employed? To have our expectations always in
 “ prospect, and to be intent on the glories of
 “ heaven?” *Works, passim.*

6. Lactantius's testimony, who lived in the same century, shall come next. This eloquent author in his *Divine Institutions*, which he dedicates to Constantine the Great, cautions the Christians against the Play-House, from the disorder and danger of those places. For, as he observes,

“ The debauching of virgins, and the amours of
 “ strumpets are the subject of Comedy. And here
 “ the rule is, the more rhetoric the more mischief.”
 “—At last he concludes with this advice :

“ Let us avoid therefore these diversions, lest
 “ somewhat of the malignity should seize us. Let
 “ us avoid these pleasures, not only that vice may
 “ not make an impression on our minds, which
 “ disturbs the peace and tranquillity of our hearts,
 “ but that we may not suffer ourselves, in com-
 “ pliance with the custom of the world, to be
 “ transported by the attractions of pleasure, which
 “ take us off from God, and from the good works
 “ which we ought to do.”—

“ Fine verses and agreeable discourses gain the
 “ mind and carry it whither they will: therefore
 “ he who seeks truth and would not deceive him-
 “ self, ought to reject these pernicious pleasures to
 “ which the soul abandons itself, as the body to
 “ delicious food, however destructive to it. We
 “ must prefer real things to appearances, the use-
 “ ful to the agreeable, and eternal things to those
 “ which pass away. Take no pleasure in looking

“ on any other actions but what are just and pious,
“ or in hearing any thing but what nourishes the
“ soul and may render you better. Take care not
“ to make an ill use of that sense which was given
“ us to hearken to the instructions of God. If then
“ you delight in verses and songs, let your plea-
“ sure be to sing, or hear others sing, the praises
“ of God. True pleasure is that which is accom-
“ panied with virtue, a pleasure that is not tran-
“ sitory and perishable, as those others are, which
“ are sought by such persons who, like the beasts,
“ follow the inclinations of the body; but it is
“ perpetual and always satisfactory. He who passes
“ this bound, and seeks pleasure merely for its
“ own sake, procures death to himself. For as
“ virtue leads to eternal life, so does pleasure lead
“ to death: for he that fixes himself to temporal
“ things must lose the eternal: he that places his
“ affection on earthly things, can have no part in
“ the delights of heavenly. As it is by virtue, by
“ labour and sufferings, that God calls us to life:
“ so by pleasure the devil leads us to death: as
“ real happiness is acquired by seeming evils, so
“ real misery is procured by apparent good. Let
“ us then shun pleasures, as snares and nets, lest
“ by engaging ourselves in softness and luxury,
“ and becoming slaves to the body, we fall with it
“ under the power of death.”

7. St. Cyril, who lived in the fourth century, in his Catechism for the newly baptized, has these words:

“ You have said at your baptism, I renounce
 “ thee, O Satan; I renounce all thy works and
 “ all thy pomps. The pomps of the devil are the
 “ diversions of the theatre, and all other the like
 “ vanities; from which holy David begs of God
 “ to be delivered: *Turn away mine eyes*, says he,
 “ *that they behold not vanity*. Do not then suffer
 “ yourself to be led away by a fondness for the
 “ entertainments of the Stage, to behold there the
 “ extravagancies of Plays full of wantonness and
 “ impurity.”

8. St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, in the same
 century, in his treatise on the Transitoriness of the
 World, tells us, that “ the Circus is but vanity;
 “ the Horse-Races are vanity, being of no use to
 “ salvation: the Theatre and all other Shews are
 “ nothing else but vanity.”

9. St. Chryostom, who lived about the same
 period, is very copious upon this subject. A few
 lines may be sufficient to shew his opinion.

“ Most people,” says this eloquent writer, “ fancy
 “ the unlawfulness of going to Plays is not clear.
 “ But by their favour, a world of disorders are the
 “ consequences of such a liberty. For frequenting
 “ the Play-House has brought whoring and ribaldry
 “ into vogue, and finished all the parts of de-
 “ bauchery.”—

“ You’ll say, I can give you many instances
 “ where the Play-House has done no harm.
 “ Don’t mistake. Throwing away of time, and
 “ setting an ill example, has a great deal of harm
 “ in it: and thus far you are guilty, at the best.

“ For

“ For granting your own virtue impenetrable and
 “ out of reach, granting the protection of your
 “ temper has brought you off unhurt, are all peo-
 “ ple thus fortified? By no means. Many a weak
 “ brother has ventured after you, and miscarried
 “ upon your precedent; and since you make others
 “ thus faulty, how can you be innocent yourself?
 “ All the people undone there will lay their ruin
 “ at your door. The company are all accessary to
 “ the mischief of the place. For were there no
 “ audience we should have no acting. And there-
 “ fore those who join in the crime will never be
 “ parted in the punishment. Granting your mo-
 “ desty has secured you, which, by the way, we
 “ believe nothing of; yet, since many have been
 “ debauched by the Play-House, you must expect a
 “ severe reckoning for giving them encouragement.
 “ Though after all, as virtuous as you are, I doubt
 “ not, you would have been much better, had you
 “ kept away.”

“ In fine, let us not dispute to no purpose: the
 “ practice will not bear a defence. Where the
 “ cause is naught, it is in vain to rack our reason,
 “ and strain for pretences. The best excuse for
 “ what is past, is to stand clear from the danger,
 “ and do so no more.” *Works, passim.*

10. St. Jerome, in the same age, cautions “ the
 “ ladies against having any thing to do with the
 “ Play-House, against lewd songs, and ill conver-
 “ sation; because they set ill humours at work,
 “ cares the fancy, and make pleasure a convey-
 “ ance for destruction.”—He tells us, in another

place, “ We must decline the Theatres, and all
 “ other dangerous diversions, which stain the inno-
 “ cence of the soul, and slip into the will through
 “ the senses.”

11. St. Augustine, of the fifth century, is large upon the same entertainments. A few words from him shall suffice :

“ The generality suppose the world goes won-
 “ derfully well when people make a figure : when
 “ a man is a prince in his fortune, but a beggar in
 “ his virtue : has a great many fine things about
 “ him, but not so much as one good quality to de-
 “ serve them : when the Play-Houses go up, and
 “ religion goes down : when prodigality is ad-
 “ mired, and charity laughed at : when the
 “ Players can revel with the rich man’s purse, and
 “ the poor have scarce enough to keep life and soul
 “ together.”—“ When God suffers these things to
 “ flourish we may be sure he is most angry. Pre-
 “ sent impunity is the deepest revenge. But
 “ when he cuts off the supplies of luxury, and dis-
 “ ables the powers of extravagance, then, as one
 “ may say, he is mercifully severe.”

Fifth Epistle to Marcellinus, passim.

12. St. Isidore, of the same century, tells us, that “ the chief study of Players is to corrupt the
 “ people and not to render them better ; for it
 “ is by the debauchery of their auditors they have
 “ their gain ; so that if the people were reformed,
 “ the Players’ trade would immediately be ruined.”
 —“ He who is extremely fond of the diversions of
 “ the Theatre will not have less inclination for
 “ vicious

“ vicious love: avoid then that first disorder, that
“ you may not fall into the other; for it is easier
“ to destroy vice before it has taken root, than to
“ pluck it up after it is deeply rooted, which is
“ very difficult, and some think it even impossible.”

Epistles, passim.

13. Photius, patriarch of Constantinople, in the eleventh century, has this injunction:

“ If a bishop or clergyman be present at the
“ diversions of the Theatre, let them be suspended
“ from the function of their ministry, and be shut
“ up in a monastery during three years: but if they
“ give marks of a sincere repentance, the prelates
“ may abridge that time.” *See his Nomocanon.*

III. COUNCILS.

When the bishops of the church met in council, during several of the first centuries, they took into consideration the evils of the Stage, and provided against them accordingly.

1. The council of Laodicea, at which were present most of the bishops of Asia, was held about the year 364. It forbids clergymen to be present at Plays and Theatrical shews.

2. By the third council of Carthage, A. D. 401. no laymen, or clergymen's sons are to be Actors or spectators of public Shews, because it is unworthy of Christians to be present.

3. The fourth council of Carthage, in which were present about 220 bishops, commands young converts to abstain from Stage-Plays, and excommunicates those that resort to them.

4. The

4. The first council of Arles, held about the year 400, ordains, that those Christians who acted upon the Theatre, should be excommunicated while they followed those employments.

5. By the African code it appears, that Stage-Players were ranked among apostates.

6. The Women Actors were counted so scandalous, that whoever married any of them, made himself incapable of being a clergyman by the apostolical canons.

7. The second Nicene council, where there were present between 3 and 400 bishops, A. D. 785. condemns Stage-Plays, and all Theatrical sports.

8. The Synodus Turconensis, about the year 813. determines that all Christians should avoid "Stage-Plays.

9. The council of Paris, A. D. 829. says, "It better becomes holy men to mourn than to laugh at the scurrilities, foolish speeches, and obscene jests of Stage-Players."

10. The Lateran council, A. D. 1215. consisting of 2 patriarchs, 70 archbishops, 400 bishops, 800 abbots and priors, condemns Tumblers, Jesters, and Stage-Players.

11. Synodus Lingonensis, A. D. 1404. forbids Plays under pain of excommunication and forfeiture of ten pounds.

12. I shall conclude this article with the national protestant synod at Rochel, A. D. 1571. which says, "It shall not be lawful for any Christians to act, or be present at any Comedies, Tragedies, Plays, Interludes, or any other such sports—

" con-

“ considering that they have always been opposed,
“ condemned, and suppressed in and by the church,
“ as bringing along with them the corruption of
“ good manners.”

From all these quotations, it fully appears, that the profession of Stage-Players has always been counted unlawful and scandalous, by the Christian church, in its best and purest days, and that no one could attend those fashionable diversions, but upon pain of excommunication. We have got the happy art, in these days of politeness and refinement, of serving God and Mammon: but it was not so then. We can come to church, and pray to God to bless us, and make us pure, and clean, and chaste, and holy; and then we can go to the Play-House, and spend our time, and pay our money to have our imaginations corrupted, our passions strengthened, our lusts excited, our understandings darkened, our minds polluted, and our whole souls thrown into disorder. And then we go to church again and pray:

“ Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open,
“ all desires known, and from whom no secrets are
“ hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the
“ inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly
“ love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy
“ name, through Christ our Lord.”—

“ O God, make clean our hearts within us: and
“ take not thy Holy Spirit from us.”

We go to the Sacrament, at least some of us, and profess to “ eat the flesh of Christ and to drink his
“ blood; to dwell in Christ and Christ in us, to
“ be

“ be one with Christ and Christ with us:” we profess “ earnestly to repent, and to be heartily sorry “ for our misdoings; that the remembrance of “ them is grievous unto us; that the burden of “ them is intolerable;” and then as soon as ever our consciences will permit us, we go to the Play-House again, and pay our money to hear the absurd conversation of frantic lovers, or the ridiculous nonsense of low-lived farce!

O rare Christians! this is fine sport for the devil! You dream you are mighty good sort of people, and in the high road to heaven; and pity and despise those poor melancholy creatures, who cannot conscientiously go the lengths that you do, in worldly pleasure and dissipation. But O remember, that the Play of life will soon be over; and a dying pillow will give you different views. Then you will find to your sorrow, that *no man can serve two masters*; and, that a whole life spent in the service of God, and in the practice of true religion, is not too much to inspire us with fortitude and magnanimity at that trying hour. How should any of us like to launch out into eternity from the Play-House? and to be summoned into the presence of an holy God with our heads and hearts full of the ravings of a Tragedy, or the gross vulgarities of a Farce? Yet this has been the case within these few years more than once in this very town. You all know it is not long since, that two gentlemen, respectable for their rank, went to the Play in the evening, well as usual, and both were found dead in their beds next morning. And I remember
reading

reading in the Newspaper, in the course of last year, of two persons dropping down dead as they were performing their respective parts in the public entertainments: one in the act of singing a most charming air; and the other while he was performing the character of Benvolio in Romeo and Juliet. Surely, my brethren, such exits are not desirable. It becomes not us, however, to pronounce upon their state (*the Judge of all the earth will do right*), but the common sensibilities of mankind receive a shock, upon such melancholy occasions, of a very unpleasant nature. And how do any of you, who are advocates for the diversions of the Play-House, know that your last end may not be like theirs? Sudden death at all times is very alarming. Sudden death, even in a church, or upon our knees in prayer, is very awful. But sudden death in a Play-House, or soon after leaving that school of pollution, is peculiarly abhorrent to our nature. Besides, I always think, there is something very dangerous in those temporary erections which are made use of upon these occasions in most country towns. We are every now and then hearing of dreadful disasters from fire, or from the falling down of the buildings, by which many lives have been lost, many bones broken, numbers maimed and disfigured. For my part, I honestly tell you, my brethren, I would not go into the present temporary Play-House in this town, when it is full of people, upon any consideration whatever. I will not say, It will fall; I should be very sorry if it did; but it is certain I should have very uncomfortable

fortable feelings, while I was there, both for my own safety, and for the safety of the audience. Only think for a moment! the building giving way! the people tumbling one upon another! the roof falling on your heads! the shrieks of the women! the cries of the wounded! the groans of the dying! the fears of the scrupulous! the horrors of the guilty at being found on the devil's ground, in the devil's chapel, and in the devil's service! But I turn away from the scene: it is too painful for human nature to dwell upon, even in prospect: what must it be then in actual experience? I pray God none of the people of Macclesfield may ever find themselves in so deplorable a situation!

But let us next consider, that the diversions of the Play-House have been discountenanced by the wisest states and kingdoms, and even by those, who upon their first appearance, were great encouragers of them, such as the Greeks and Romans.

IV. STATES AND KINGDOMS.

Some nations have suppressed the Stage entirely, and banished the Actors out of their countries, as the primitive Christians threw them out of the church. We'll begin,

1. With the Athenians, who were none of the worst enemies to the Play-House. They made a law, that no judge of the Areopagus should write a Comedy, looking upon that kind of composition as disreputable at least, and an indignity to his office.

Themistocles,

Themistocles, the famous Athenian general, made another law, that no magistrate should resort to the Stage. Before this law, it was an ancient custom in Athens, that none should be admitted upon the Stage, but those who should sing and utter honest things, lest the beholding immodest actions might draw them on to vice.

It is readily acknowledged that the Stage had been encouraged by them, but they paid dear for their sports, which in the end proved the ruin of their government: for Justin tells us, “ that the
“ expence of the Stage, their effeminacy, their
“ fauntering at the Play-House, and minding the
“ performances of poets more than the feats of
“ war, made them an easy prey to their enemies.
“ But after they had long been bewitched with
“ Plays, finding at last how fatal the encourage-
“ ment given the Stage had been to them, they
“ did not only abandon them as pernicious evils,
“ but condemned them by a law, that made the
“ Actors infamous.”

2. The Lacedæmonians would not allow of the Stage in Sparta, upon any condition whatever. And when a Rhodian Ambassador demanded of one of them, what was the cause of their strict laws against Stage-Players? he answered, “ Because
“ they are hurtful to the commonwealth.”

3. The Massilians, who were remarkable for good discipline, would not allow or tolerate any Stage-Plays in their country.

4. The Romans, who at first encouraged the Stage, lived to repent of it. Indeed it was sub-
ject

ject to great vicissitudes among them, according to the inclinations of the persons in power. Before Julius Cæsar's time, they stopt the building of a Theatre, apprehending that the entertainments of the Play-House would bring in foreign vice, and that the old Roman virtue would be lost, and the spirit of the people emasculated and softened; therefore that wise nation made the function of Players scandalous, seized their freedoms, and threw them out of their privileges, as degenerating from the nobility and virtue of their ancestors.

Tiberius, none of the best emperors, though he much delighted in Plays, yet at last, by reason of those great mischiefs occasioned by them, did, upon the request of the senate and people, condemn all Players to the whipping-post, and then banished them out of Italy as unsufferable evils.

See Tacitus.

Augustus, who at first very much delighted in Stage-Plays, having observed the fatal effects of them, ordered the Players to be whipped, and afterwards exiled, as intolerable plagues to a state.

See Suet.

Nero, who doted so much upon Plays as to turn Actor himself, saw just reason before he died to turn them and all Theatrical interludes out of Rome and Italy.

See Suet.

Julian, the Apostate, had so much regard to the public-welfare as to prohibit Stage-Plays.

See Sozom. Eccl. Hist.

Trajan also put down the Stage and banished the Actors.

See Pliny.

M. Au-

M. Aurelius Antoninus likewise banished all Stage-Players, as corrupters of the empire.

Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Valentinian, Gratian, and Valens, all emperors of Rome, made public laws against Stage-Plays as the fountains and nurseries of all wickedness and corruption among the people.

See Rom. Hist. passim.

5. Salvian tells us, that Plays were not acted in many cities of Gaul and Spain, nor in all the cities of the Romans.

6. The Goths, and other Barbarians censured and condemned Stage-Plays as effeminate and ridiculous superfluities.

7. The old Germans, who are noted for their strict regard to chastity, were not corrupted with the allurements of Plays and Shews. *See Tacitus.*

8. In the opinion of Josephus and the Maccabees, Stage-Plays were directly opposite to the laws, government, rites, and customs of the Jews; therefore they did not only oppose Herod, but conspired his death, when he introduced among them Plays and Shews in honour of Augustus.

See his Antiq. and the Books of Maccab.

Philo-Judæus, a very learned Jew, who flourished about our Saviour's time, condemns Stage-Plays as vain and hurtful pastimes, in which thousands miserably spend their time and waste their lives.

See his Works.

9. In the year 1697, the French king, at the instance of some religious persons about the court, ordered the Italian Players to retire out of France, because

because they did not observe his Majesty's orders; but represented immodest pieces, and did not correct their obscenities and indecent gestures.

See Collier.

In the year 1703 the French Stage lay under a sentence of excommunication.

10. About the same period the Theatres were shut up in several parts of Italy by the Pope.

11. The king of Prussia also about the beginning of this century shut up the Play-Houses in his dominions.

12. There are several countries in Europe which would never endure the Stage in any form, or under any regulations whatever.

13. Plays are condemned by the laws, though encouraged by the people, of England.

In queen Elizabeth's reign the Play Houses in London were pulled down, and Stage-Players driven out of the city. The words of the act are very strong: "All Bearwards, Common Players
" of Interludes, &c. shall be taken, adjudged and
" deemed rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars,
" and shall sustain all pain and punishment, as by
" this Act is in that behalf appointed."

About the year 1580 there was a petition made to queen Elizabeth for suppressing of Play-Houses. It is somewhat remarkable, and therefore I shall transcribe some part of the relation: "Many godly
" citizens, and other well-disposed gentlemen of
" London, considering that Play-Houses and Dicing-
" Houses, were traps for young gentlemen and
" others, and perceiving the many inconveniencies
" and

“ and great damage that would ensue upon the
“ long suffering of the same, not only to parti-
“ cular persons but to the whole city; and that it
“ would also be a great disparagement to the go-
“ vernors, and a dishonour to the government
“ of this honourable city, if they should any
“ longer continue; acquainted some pious magif-
“ trates therewith, desiring them to take some
“ course for the suppression of common Play-
“ Houses, &c. within the city of London and li-
“ berties thereof; who thereupon made humble
“ suit to queen Elizabeth and her privy council,
“ and obtained leave of her Majesty to thrust the
“ Players out of the city, and to pull down all
“ Play-Houses, and Dicing-Houses, within their
“ liberties, which accordingly was effected.”

See Collier.

By a statute in king James's reign there is a pe-
nalty of ten pounds laid upon those, who in any
Stage-Plays, &c. did jestingly or profanely use the
holy name of God, or of Christ, or of the Holy
Ghost.

Ann. 3. Jac. 1.

These Acts of Parliament were revived and en-
forced in the reign of queen Anne, by which
Players are to be punished as rogues. The con-
stable and other inhabitants may bring them before
a justice; and officers neglecting their duty forfeit
twenty shillings.

V. CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

I would beg the attention of the congregation
a little longer, till we consider what are the senti-

D

ments

ments of our own church concerning Stage-Entertainments. And I desire, my brethren, that you will not be displeas'd with me, nor throw yourselves into undue heats about it. I have a right, you know, to shew mine opinion : and if you think that I and all these venerable authorities are wrong, take your own way, judge for yourselves, and attend the Play-House as much as you please. Only remember as we go along (and it is impossible you should form a true judgment without it), that we are dying creatures ; that we are deprav'd and degenerate creatures ; that we are now placed in a state of trial and probation ; and that, if ever we go to heaven, our souls must be made pure, holy, and meet for the kingdom : and I think you must all allow, that the Play-House is not calculated for these purposes:

Stage-Plays are no where authorized by the Church of England as such, but are every where condemn'd by the purity of her doctrine, and by many of her most eminent lights.

None of her Articles, Canons, or Homilies, give the least encouragement to those diversions : but, on the contrary, in conformity to the Statutes of the land, and Practice of the Primitive Church, they condemn all kinds of unlawful sports.

1. By the 75 Canon, “ No clergyman shall
 “ spend his time idly by day or night, playing at
 “ Dice, Cards, or Tables, or any other unlawful
 “ game.”

2. The Church-Catechism, in renouncing the *Pomps* and *Vanities* of the world, seems to refer to these Theatrical shews ; because in this sense the
 ancient

ancient church understood these words, which we have borrowed from them.—“ Do but take a view,” says the pious and learned Dr. Horneck, “ of the
“ writings of the primitive Fathers, and you will
“ find them unanimously of opinion; that in our
“ baptism, when we renounce the devil and all
“ his works, the pomps and glory of the world, we
“ do particularly renounce Stage-Plays, and such
“ ludicrous representations.”

“ The first thing Christians do in their baptism,” says Salvian, “ is to renounce the devil, his
“ pomps, shews, and works.”

“ How darest thou, O Christian,” adds he,
“ run from church, and holy places, to the Stage,
“ the synagogue of Satan? How darest thou go to
“ a Play-House after baptism, when thou hast
“ confessed those very Plays to be works of the
“ devil? Thou hast renounced the devil and all
“ his pompous Shews; so that by attending these
“ you return to the devil’s service again.”

3. We may know the thoughts of the church by her sons, who generally look upon the diversions of the Stage as very pernicious entertainments. We will begin with,

1. Archbishop Parker, who condemns Plays in his *Antiquities of the British Church*.

2. Dr. Alley, bishop of Exeter, in his book, called, *The Poor Man’s Library*, declares with great warmth against Stage-Plays, as the fuel of lust, occasion of adultery, and other intolerable evils.

3. Dr. Beard, in his *Theatre of God’s Judgments*, speaking of Plays and Comedies, says,

“ They have no other use but to deprave and corrupt good manners, and open a door to all uncleannesses.”

4. Lord Chief Justice Hale, who was so great an ornament to the bench, advises his son not to go to Stage-Plays. *Epistle to one of his sons.*

5. Archbishop Usher, the glory of his church and age, speaking of Interludes and Stage-Plays, says, “ They offend against the seventh commandment in several instances.” *Body of Divinity.*

6. Dr. Bray says, “ It may be very well looked upon as a breach of our baptismal vow for any Christian to be present at Stage-Plays.”

On the baptismal Covenant.

7. Dr. Horneck says, “ Actor and Spectator go away from the Theatre worse than they came; and though both came away laughing, yet both prepare for bitter mourning and lamentation.”

Letter against Plays.

8. Dr. John Edwards, in his Preacher says, “ That the entertainments of the Stage, as they are managed and used, have a natural and unavoidable tendency to that which is sinful and unlawful; for they foment idleness and profuse wasting of precious time: they dissolve the spirits into lightness and wantonness; they foster immodesty and obscenity; they nourish licentiousness and debauchery; they encourage profaneness; the youth especially of both sexes are corrupted and ruined by these public Shews, and almost every day affords us some proof of it.”

9. Dr.

9. Dr. Kennet, bishop of Peterborough, speaking of the year 1641, says, “ It seems very evident, that the liberty and delight then taken in Plays and Operas, did sadly corrupt the minds and manners of our people, and so let in that looseness and irreligion, which served to suggest the wickedness and villanies soon after acted in the civil war.”

10. Dr. Fog, late dean of Chester, saith, that “ if the Stage be not purged from that filthiness both of speech and gesture, which is usually represented there, we must join with the ancient Fathers and civilized Heathens in condemning it.” *See his two Treatises.*

11. Mr. William Law, in his Treatise on Christian Perfection, asks the question, Whether it is lawful for a Christian, and upon Christian principles, to go to the Play-House? “ I answer,” returns he, “ that it is absolutely unlawful. As unlawful, as for a Christian to be a drunkard or a glutton, or to curse and swear.”

See some fine reasoning upon the subject of the Play-House in the same Treatise.

12. Archbishop Tillotson, that star of the first magnitude in the firmament of the church, speaking of some parents, says, “ They are such monsters, I had almost said devils, as not to know how to give good things to their children.—Instead of bringing them to God’s church, they bring them to the devil’s chapels, to Play-Houses, and places of debauchery, those schools and nurseries of lewdness and vice.”

“ To speak against Plays in general, may be
 “ thought too severe, and that which the present
 “ age cannot so well brook, and would not per-
 “ haps be so just and reasonable; because it is very
 “ possible, they might be so framed and governed
 “ by such rules, as not only to be innocently di-
 “ verting, but instructing and useful, to put some
 “ vices and follies out of countenance, which can-
 “ not perhaps be so decently reprov'd, nor so
 “ effectually expos'd and corrected any other way.
 “ But as the Stage now is, they are intolerable,
 “ and not fit to be permitted in a civilized, much
 “ less in a Christian nation. They do most noto-
 “ riously minister both to infidelity and vice. By
 “ the profaneness of them, they are apt to in-
 “ stil bad principles into the minds of men, and
 “ to lessen the awe and reverence which all men
 “ ought to have for God and religion: and by
 “ their lewdness they teach vice, and are apt to
 “ infect the minds of men, and dispose them to
 “ lewd and dissolute practices.”

“ And therefore I do not see how any person
 “ pretending to sobriety and virtue, and especially
 “ to the pure and holy religion of our blessed Sa-
 “ viour, can without great guilt, and open con-
 “ tradiction to his holy profession, be present at
 “ such lewd and immodest Plays, much less fre-
 “ quent them, as too many do, who yet would
 “ take it very ill to be shut out of the communion
 “ of Christians, as they would most certainly have
 “ been in the first and purest ages of Christianity.”

Works, passim.

13. Mr.

13. Mr. Collier, that scourge of the English stage, closes his Short View in the following manner: “ Nothing can be more disserviceable to
“ probity and religion, than the management of
“ the Stage. It cherishes those passions, and re-
“ wards those vices, which it is the business of
“ reason to discountenance. It strikes at the root
“ of principle, draws off the inclinations from vir-
“ tue, and spoils good education. It is the most
“ effectual means to baffle the force of discipline,
“ to emasculate people’s spirits, and debauch their
“ manners. How many of the unwary have these
“ Syrens devoured? And how often has the best
“ blood been tainted with this infection? What
“ disappointment of parents, what confusion in
“ families, and what beggary in estates have been
“ hence occasioned? And which is still worse, the
“ mischief spreads daily, and the malignity grows
“ more envenomed. The fever works up towards
“ madness, and will scarcely endure to be touched.
“ And what hope is there of health when the pa-
“ tient strikes in with the disease, and flies in the
“ face of the remedy? Can religion retrieve us?
“ Yes, when we don’t despise it. But while our
“ notions are naught, our lives will hardly be
“ otherwise. What can the assistance of the church
“ signify to those who are more ready to rally the
“ preacher, than practice the sermon? to those who
“ are overgrown with pleasure, and hardened in
“ ill custom? who have neither patience to hear,
“ nor conscience to take hold of? You may almost
“ as well feed a man without a mouth, as give
“ advice

“ advice where there is no disposition to receive
 “ it. It is true; as long as there is life, there
 “ is hope. Sometimes the force of argument,
 “ and the grace of God, and the anguish of afflic-
 “ tion, may strike through the prejudice, and
 “ make their way into the soul. But these cir-
 “ cumstances do not always meet, and then the
 “ case is extremely dangerous. For this miser-
 “ able temper we may thank the Stage in a great
 “ measure: and therefore if I mistake not, they
 “ have the least pretence to favour, and the most
 “ need of repentance, of all men living.”

14. The late great and good archbishop Secker,
 who was as much a friend to the innocent pleasures
 of mankind as ought to be desired, was yet no
 friend to Stage Entertainments. His words are
 these: “ Another considerable ingredient in the
 “ favourite amusements of the world, are public
 “ Spectacles. And provided regard be had to
 “ time and cost, they might be allowably and be-
 “ neficially frequented, if they were preserved
 “ from tendencies dangerous to virtue. But
 “ failings in that article totally alter the nature
 “ of them; and gross failings reflect not only
 “ on our morals, but our taste. Indeed it is
 “ lamentable, that, fond as we are of adopting
 “ the fashions and qualities of our neighbours,
 “ often much for the worse, we should not im-
 “ port what is praise-worthy in them, but suffer
 “ the most dissolute of them to excel us in the
 “ chastity of their Dramatical representations:
 “ yet after all, were they ever so innocent, in
 “ proportion

“ proportion as they are trifling and insignificant,
“ they are contemptible and unworthy of regard.”

Sermons on Several Subjects.

15. I will close these authorities from the Establishment against the Stage with the sentiments of the Rev. Mr. Venn, who in his excellent book entitled, *The Complete Duty of Man*, takes occasion to speak of Plays and other amusements in the following manner: “ In the number of licensed and honourable ways of cherishing de-
“ filement, are all wanton glances of the eye, that
“ mirror of the mind. Of this pernicious kind,
“ is singing soft and amorous songs; the suffering
“ double entendres to pass without unfeigned
“ marks of real disgust: of this kind are mixed
“ dancings, reading novels; and, above any
“ thing, the frequenting the Play-House; for in
“ this innocent amusement, as the world will have
“ it called, in defiance of our holy faith, our
“ reason and experience; in this innocent amuse-
“ ment, whatever can corrupt the mind is set off
“ to the greatest advantage. Is there a lewd
“ allusion, or stroke of wit? The air, the voice of
“ the Actor labours to give it the highest em-
“ phasis: whilst the greater part of the audience
“ loudly applaud the entertainment. And if, by
“ very great chance, some piece should gain ad-
“ mittance on the Stage, free from a filthy tinc-
“ ture, the house must still have their prurient
“ humour gratified by an epilogue, or a farce, full
“ of witty innuendos, tending to persuade both
“ married and single, that the very happiness of
“ the

“ the human race must stand or fall with those
 “ things they know naturally, and as brute
 “ beasts.”

To these testimonies from some of the Worthies of our own church, we may add the opinions of a few pious, learned, and celebrated persons of other communions. And,

1. The Rev. Dr. Wither Spoon, late a member of the American Congress, some years before he left Scotland, wrote an unanswerable Treatise against Stage-Entertainments, entitled, “ A serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage.” And in this Enquiry he clearly shews, that contributing to the support of a Public Theatre, is inconsistent with the character of a Christian. To this Treatise I would earnestly recommend every sensible and conscientious reader, who wishes to see the point fairly and coolly argued. Two or three quotations must suffice for the present occasion.

“ I am convinced on the most mature deliberation, that the reason why there never was a well regulated Stage, in fact, is, because it cannot be, the nature of the thing not admitting of it.”—

“ Some writers do mention a few particular Plays of which they give their approbation. But these have never yet, in any age or place, amounted to such a number, as to keep one society of Players in constant employment, without a mixture of many more that are confessedly pernicious.”—

“ The

“ The Stage, after the greatest improvement
“ of which it is capable, is still inconsistent with
“ the purity of the Christian profession.”

2. Mariana, the Jesuit, has written one entire
treatise against Stage Plays, calling the Stage,
“ The shop of uncleanness, and a plague fatal to
“ kingdoms.”

3. Cardinal Bellarmine censures Plays as un-
christian pastimes,

4. Julius Cæsar Bulingerus has written an ex-
cellent treatise against all kinds of Stage-Plays,
proving them to be utterly unlawful.

5. Henricus Spondanus proves, that Stage-
Plays were always condemned by the primitive
Christians as the pomps of the devil.

6. Nicolaus de Clemangis reckons Stage-Plays
among the disorders in his time.

7. Cardinal Baronius speaks against them in his
Ecclesiastical Annals.

8. Armand de Bourbon, prince of Conti, has
written two treatises against Plays and Shews, in
the latter of which he says: “ It is so true, that
“ Plays are almost always a representation of
“ vicious passions, that the greatest part of Chris-
“ tian virtues are incapable of appearing on the
“ Stage. Silence, patience, moderation, divine
“ wisdom, poverty of spirit, and penitence, are
“ not virtues the representation of which can
“ divert spectators, and especially one never hears
“ any mention there of humility or bearing of
“ injuries. What a poor hero of a Play would
“ an humble and patient religious person make?”

9. Guy,

9. Guy, bishop of Arras in Flanders, in a sort of pastoral letter addresses the inhabitants of that town upon the subject of Stage Entertainments in the following manner: “ A man must be very
“ ignorant of his religion, not to know the great
“ disgust it has always declared, for public fights,
“ and for Plays in particular. The holy Fathers
“ condemn them in their writings: they look
“ upon them as relics of Heathenism, and schools
“ of debauchery. They have been always abo-
“ minated by the church: and notwithstanding
“ those who are concerned in this scandalous pro-
“ fession, are not absolutely expelled by a formal
“ excommunication; yet she publicly refuses them
“ the sacraments, and omits nothing upon all oc-
“ casions to shew her aversion for this employ-
“ ment, and to transfuse the same sentiments
“ into her children. The rituals of the best
“ governed dioceses have ranged the Players
“ among those whom the parish priests are
“ obliged to treat as excommunicated persons.
“ The ritual of Paris joins them with forcerers,
“ and magicians, and looks upon them as noto-
“ riously infamous. The most eminent bishops
“ for piety have publicly denied them the sacra-
“ ments. For this reason we ourselves have
“ known one of the most considerable bishops in
“ France turn back a Player that came to be mar-
“ ried: and another of the same order refuse to
“ bury them in consecrated ground: and by the
“ orders of a bishop, who is much more illustrious
“ for his worth, for his piety, and the strictness of
“ his

“ his life, than for the purple in his habit, they
“ are ranked among fornicators, usurers, blas-
“ phemers, lewd women, and declared excommu-
“ nicates, amongst the infamous, and simoniacal,
“ and other scandalous persons who are in the
“ list of those who ought publicly to be debarred
“ communion.”

“ Unless therefore we have a mind to condemn
“ the church, the holy Fathers, and the most
“ holy bishops, it is impossible to justify Plays :
“ neither is the defence of those less impracti-
“ cable, who, by their countenance of these di-
“ versions, not only have their share of the mis-
“ chief there done, but contribute at the same
“ time to fix these unhappy ministers of Satan in
“ a profession, which, by depriving them of the
“ sacraments of the church, leaves them under
“ a constant necessity of sinning, and out of all
“ hopes of being saved, unless they give it over.”

10. St. Francis de Sales, in his Introduction to a devout life, has these words : “ Little children
“ run eagerly and fondly after butterflies, and no
“ body thinks it ill in them, because they are chil-
“ dren : but is it not a ridiculous, or rather a
“ lamentable thing, to see men of understanding
“ with eagerness and fondness pursuing trifles so
“ unworthy of them as games, balls, feasts, Plays,
“ and pompous drefs ; which, besides their being
“ altogether useless, put us in danger of being
“ disordered and corrupted in following them.”

11. Didacus de Tapia, an eminent Spaniard,
speaks very freely upon the same subject. Some
people

people it seems pretended there was some good to be learned at the Play-House. To these he makes this reply: "Granting your supposition," says he, "your inference is naught. Do people use
 "to send their daughters to the Shews for discipline? And yet it may be, they might meet
 "some there lamenting their own debauchery. No man will breed his son upon the high-way to
 "harden his courage; neither will any one go on board a leaky vessel, to learn the art of shifting
 "in a wreck the better. My conclusion is, let no body go to the infamous Play-House: a place
 "of such staring contradiction to the strictness and sobriety of religion? a place hated by God,
 "and haunted by the devil. Let no man, I say, learn to relish any thing that is said there: for
 "it is all but poison handsomely prepared."

In D. Thom.

12. Monsieur de Fenelon, in his Education of a Daughter, declares also against the Stage: "There are not wanting some mothers," says he, "who carry their children to Plays and other diversions; which can't fail of disgusting them for a serious and busied life, in which these very parents would however engage them. Thus they mix poison with wholesome food. They speak not but of wisdom, but they accustom the volatile imagination of children to the violent commotions of passionate representations, and of music; after which they cannot easily again be fixed."—"Whatever excites love, the more
 "artful

“ artful and concealed it lies, appears to me more
“ dangerous.”

13. Monsieur Rollin is of the same opinion:
“ Comedies and Tragedies,” says he, “ even of
“ those which seem to be wholly free from such
“ sentiments as are repugnant to modesty and sound
“ morals, may be of very dangerous consequence
“ to young persons; not to mention, that the
“ perusal of them, is almost sure to possess the rea-
“ ders with a strong desire to see them represented
“ by Actors, who inspire them with life; the live-
“ ly imagination of children, catches greedily at
“ whatever fooths the senses, and favours the vo-
“ luptuous passions; and there are few things in
“ dramatic poems, but awaken them.”

14. M. de Rochefoucault is of the same way of
thinking: “ All great diversions,” says he, “ are
“ dangerous to a Christian; but of all that have
“ been invented, there is none we have so much
“ reason to fear as Plays. The passions are there
“ so naturally and artfully delineated, that they
“ raise and imprint them in our heart, especially
“ that of love: and principally, when it is repre-
“ sented as chaste and honest: for the more inno-
“ cent it appears to innocent souls, the more capa-
“ ble they are of being affected with it.”

15. Our own countryman, the pious, amiable,
learned, and universally respected Dr. Watts, shall
close these testimonies against the Play-House:
“ It is granted,” says this good man, “ that a Dra-
“ matic representation of the affairs of human life
“ is by no means sinful in itself: I am inclined to
“ think,

“ think, that valuable compositions might be made
 “ of this kind, such as might entertain a virtuous
 “ audience with innocent delight, and even with
 “ some real profit. Such have been written in
 “ French, and have, in times past, been acted with
 “ applause. But it is too well known, that the
 “ Comedies which appear on our Stage, and most
 “ of the Tragedies too, have no design to set reli-
 “ gion or virtue in its best light, nor to render
 “ vice odious to the spectators. In many of them,
 “ piety makes a ridiculous figure, and virtue is
 “ drest in the habit of folly; the sacred name of
 “ God is frequently taken in vain, if not blas-
 “ phemed; and the man of flagrant vice is the fine
 “ gentleman, and the poet’s favourite, who must
 “ be rewarded at the end of the Play.”

“ Besides, there is nothing will pass on our The-
 “ atres, that has not the mixture of some amorous
 “ intrigue: lewdness itself reigns, and riots in
 “ some of their scenes: sobriety is put quite out
 “ of countenance, and modesty is in certain danger
 “ there: the youth of serious religion, that ven-
 “ tures sometimes into this infected air, finds his
 “ antidotes too weak to resist the contagion. The
 “ pleasures of the closet and devout retirement
 “ are suspended first, and then utterly vanquish-
 “ ed by the over-powering influence of the last
 “ Comedy: the fancy is all over defiled, the vain
 “ images rise uppermost in the soul, and pollute
 “ the feeble attempts of devotion, till by degrees
 “ secret religion is lost and forgotten: and in a
 “ little time the Play-House has got so much the
 “ mastery

“ mastery of conscience, that the young Christian
“ goes to bed after the evening Drama, with as
“ much satisfaction and ease, as he used to do after
“ evening prayer.”

“ If there have been found two or three Plays
“ which have been tolerably free from lewd and
“ profane mixtures, there are some scores or hun-
“ dreds that have many hateful passages in them,
“ for which no excuse can be made. And when
“ all the charming powers of poesy and music are
“ joined with the gayest scenes and entertainments,
“ to assault the senses and the soul at once, and to
“ drive out virtue from the possession of the heart,
“ it is to be feared, that it will not long keep its
“ place and power there. What a prophet of their
“ own says of the court, may with much more truth
“ and justice be said of the Theatre :

“ It is a golden, but a fatal circle,
“ Upon whose magic skirts a thousand devils
“ In crystal forms sit, tempting innocence,
“ And beckon early virtue from its centre.

“ Another of the poets of the town, who made
“ no great pretences to virtue, and who well knew
“ the qualities of the Theatre, and its mischievous
“ influence, writes thus of it :

“ It would be endless to trace all the vice
“ That from the Play-House takes immediate rise.
“ It is the unexhausted magazine
“ That stocks the land with vanity and sin,
——— “ By flourishing so long,
“ Numbers have been undone, both old and young.
“ And many hundred souls are now unblest,
“ Which else had dy'd in peace, and found eternal rest.”

Improvement of the Mind.

All these testimonies against the Play-House are exceedingly strong, and ought most certainly to deter serious and religious persons from encouraging it, either by their money or their example. For every time you go to that place of rendezvous for the idle and the dissipated, you not only lose your precious moments, and pay your money, and get your soul ruffled and put out of frame, but you give a sanction to the Play-House, and do all that in you lies to make it every where prevail. It is not unlikely but you will reply, that others go, and even some of the Clergy attend the Theatre, and it is very hard you should be restrained. Why should you be deprived of those amusements, which so many thousands in this country continually enjoy?

It is very true: many are the instances of persons of sense who attend the diversions of the Stage; and several even among the clergy are not unfrequently to be seen there. But, you know, the world is a dangerous precedent, and we are commanded *not to follow a multitude to do evil*. If we live with the world, we shall fare with it: and the lip of eternal truth hath said, *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* — And as for the attendance of the clergy upon the Play-House, this is nothing so wonderful; nor is it a part of our conduct which will do you honour to imitate. Sure I am their attendance upon the
Theatre,

Theatre, in the present state of it, cannot be justified, either upon the principles of sound reason or religion. Besides, if you will take the trouble to look through the Old and New Testament you will find, that, in abundance of cases, the clergy have been the bitterest enemies that true religion ever had. They have been at once the support and the disgrace of Christianity.

Let this however be as it may; ought not all these venerable authorities that have been adduced to out-weigh ten thousands of those poor creatures, that keep fair with the enemies of God, and lackey after the rich and great, for the sake of the loaves and fishes? Yea, in my estimation, the name and authority of archbishop Tillotson alone should over-balance a whole tribe of time-serving characters. He was no rash, giddy, party-spirited man: but a cool, serious, sensible, pious enquirer after truth. And if the Play-House had been any way calculated to promote the interests of piety, virtue, and morality, he certainly would have given it all the encouragement that was in his power.

But why should we appeal to the judgment and testimony of others? Let us all attend to what passes within our own bosoms upon these occasions. I confess, when I have frequented the Play-House, (which I was unwise enough to do some years ago,) I always found my mind more dissipated, my passions stronger, my affections more unmortified, and my imagination more unruly and unmanageable. I always found less love

to the bible and religious books, less regard to public and private prayer, less attraction to God and goodness. After coming from the Play-House I always found myself incapable of private prayer; my mind being over-run with wanderings, foolish thoughts, and the things which I had seen and heard in that school of vanity.

And don't you always find it the same with you, my brethren? Don't you feel your souls deranged, and unfitted to hold converse with the Father of your spirits? And do you think those amusements can be right and pleasing to God, which thus disorder the mind, and disqualify it for religious duties?

Further: As the native tendency of the gospel is to purify and sublimate the human mind, to strengthen and enlarge its powers, and render it capable of more noble exertions: so that of the Play-House is to slacken the reins of virtue, to carnalize the soul, to strengthen the passions, and disorder the affections; consequently, to darken the understanding, and render the superior powers of our nature subject to the inferior. Hence (though I deny not that there are some few decent moral characters among the patrons of that nursery of dissipation), I believe it generally holds good, that the more a man is addicted to Stage Amusements, the more he is inclined to the gratification of those passions, which it is one of the great ends of religion to restrain; and whose gratification oftentimes proves fatal both to reputation and circumstances. And here I may safely appeal

appeal

appeal to your own observation, whether you don't always find, that those young persons who attend the Play-House most constantly, grow the most lewd, loose, rakish, idle and worthless. And is not this an infallible proof, that the tendency of the Stage, as now conducted, is bad, immoral, wicked? We find St. Augustine, after his conversion, heavily complaining of the bad effect Stage-Plays had upon him, when he delighted in those amusements. Deeply entangled with the love of women, an attendance upon the Theatre inflamed his passions beyond all possibility of restraint. "I was strongly carried away," says he, "with Stage-Plays and Interludes, which were filled with the images of my own miseries, and the fuel of my fires." — Propertius, we have already seen, attributes his ruin to the Play-House. "O nimis exitio nata Theatra meo!" — As another example of this we might produce poor Otway, the author of the Orphan, and several other dramatic compositions. "He continued writing Plays and poems till his death; which happened in a manner," says Dr. Johnson, "which I am unwilling to mention. Having been compelled by his necessities to contract debts, and hunted, as is supposed, by the terriers of the law, he retired to a public house on Tower-Hill, where he died of want, or, as it is related by one of his biographers, by swallowing, after a long fast, a piece of bread which charity had supplied. He went out, as is reported, almost naked, in the rage of hunger,

“ and finding a gentleman in a neighbouring coffee-house, asked him for a shilling. The gentleman gave him a guinea; and Otway going away bought a roll, and was choaked with the first mouthful.”

There is a remarkable anecdote also preserved of Mr. Budgell, one of the writers in the *Spectator*, concerning the celebrated Tragedy of Mr. Addison, called, *Cato*. Mr. Budgell, through folly and misfortunes, having ruined his circumstances, came to a resolution of destroying himself. Accordingly he filled his pockets with stones, and threw himself into the Thames, where he sunk instantly. After his death there was found upon his desk, a slip of paper, on which were written, as a justification of his conduct, these words:

“ What Cato did, and Addison approv'd,
“ Cannot be wrong.”

Mr. Addison never supposed, that his friend would make so ill a use of the Tragedy, which had cost him so much pains, and had been received with so much applause. Cato certainly did destroy himself; and, upon his own mistaken principles, he acted nobly: but Mr. Addison, as a Christian, never meant to give a sanction to self-murder. It may be much questioned, however, whether this fine Tragedy hath ever done so much good in the world, as to overbalance this unhappy effect.

Another melancholy instance of the mischiefs done by the Stage is contained in the following
true

true story, on which the Tragedy of George Barnwell is probably founded.

“ *The* UNGUARDED YOUTH IN LONDON;

“ A LESSON FOR YOUNG MEN.

“ *To the Editor of* ———.

“ SIR,

“ I mean not to enter into the merits, or
“ demerits of the Beggar’s Opera, when I refer
“ you and your readers to an anecdote recorded
“ in most of the papers of last September, and
“ occasioned by the then prevailing controversy
“ about the propriety of exhibiting that celebrated
“ drama upon the London Theatres.—In the anec-
“ dote in question, we are told, and on the best
“ authority too, that some years ago, a gentleman
“ of fortune took his nephew, a raw youth just
“ arrived from the country, to the Play-House.
“ The piece represented happened to be the above
“ Opera; and so highly pleased was the old gen-
“ tleman with it, that in the course of the per-
“ formance he could not help repeatedly exclaim-
“ ing, in the hearing of his nephew, “ Were I a
“ young fellow, and reduced to my shifts, the cha-
“ racter of Macheath should be mine.” If the
“ uncle was pleased, the nephew was transported
“ with what he saw and heard; and eagerly im-
“ bibing the baneful sentiment so unguardedly
“ dropped by the former, he treasured it up in his
“ heart. What was the result of it?—Alas! the
“ following letter gives but too dreadful an
“ explanation. It is a genuine copy (names
“ excepted)

“ excepted) of the original, now in my possession,
 “ as sent to me by the above unhappy lad, while
 “ he laboured under every anguish that a heart of
 “ sensibility—a heart which (though still inclined
 “ to virtue) has yet been hurried into the last ex-
 “ tremity, vice and its attendant, guilt, can pos-
 “ sibly experience.”

“ That it may convey a striking lesson to the
 “ young and inexperienced, who have but lately
 “ fixed, or who intend soon to fix their abode in
 “ London, is the ardent wish of,

“ Sir,

“ Your very humble Servant,

“ HONORIO.”

“ *From ALTAMONT to HONORIO.*

“ Avignon,—

“ Ah! my ever dear and venerable friend! —
 “ Friend! alas! I have rendered myself unworthy
 “ of that appellation; and even the recollection of
 “ the virtues of Honorio enhances the misery of
 “ the hapless Altamont.”

“ Would to God, my friend, I had never left
 “ the blissful plains of B——, or at least had never
 “ visited that mass of foul villany and pollution,
 “ the Town.—Hardly had I set foot in London,
 “ when Acasto, my worthy and ever-to-be-lamented
 “ uncle, conducted me to the Play-House; and
 “ it is from that period that I ought to date my
 “ ruin.”

“ The Beggar's Opera was the piece performed,
 “ and to such a pitch was the deluded Acasto cap-
 “ tivated

“tivated with the piece, that he scrupled not openly
“to defend the most vicious sentiments, and aban-
“doned characters in that baneful drama. He even
“dared, in the gaiety of his heart, to justify the
“most atrocious deeds which a desperate high-
“wayman could commit, when impelled to it by
“necessity.—Alas! could we have thought that he
“was himself to atone with his life for this doc-
“trine? fraught with destruction, and unguardedly
“insinuated in the hearing of a youth unacquaint-
“ed with the world, yet naturally fond of plea-
“sure, and eager for the means of gratifying it?—
“Ah! no, he could not think that Altamont, the
“child of his heart, was destined to be his mur-
“derer!”

“Enamoured as I was of dissipation, it was not
“long before I became a slave to the passions of
“the abandoned Florella; and though I knew her
“soul to be equally prostituted as her body, yet
“I thought her smiles cheaply purchased with the
“last shilling of my little fortune.—What was now
“to be done?—One demand was only a preface
“to another—the horrors of a gaol haunted me
“whithersoever I went—Florella was insolently
“clamorous for a renewal of my former profusion
“—she upbraided me for my want of spirit—call-
“ed me niggardly poltroon,—and, in short,
“plainly insinuated, that if I could not support
“her by fair means, I must either do it by foul, or
“never see her more.

“Not see Florella more! The thought was
“death. Nor did I close my eyes, till providing
“myself

“ myself with a mask, and the other implements
 “ for the road, I sallied forth in quest of a booty.
 “ —In crossing the wood in the neighbourhood of
 “ M——, whom should I meet but,—gracious
 “ God! support me while I repeat it!—my ho-
 “ noured uncle, Acasto!—Trembling with confu-
 “ sion, and surrounded with darkness, I knew not
 “ who it was, till I had thrown him by his vene-
 “ rable grey hairs to the ground. It was now, I
 “ thought, too late to retreat. With mad precipi-
 “ tation I accordingly plunged my dagger into his
 “ breast. Unable before to withdraw from con-
 “ scious guilt and shame, remorse and tenderness
 “ now rivetted me to the spot; nor did I stir from
 “ the fatal scene of blood, till having thrown aside
 “ my mask, with his dying breath, he declared
 “ that he knew me, that he forgave me, and that
 “ he implored salvation for my guilty soul.

“ Since this fatal adventure I have sojourned
 “ in this place, a wretch unworthy to live, yet a
 “ villain unfit to die; nor have I heard more of
 “ the detestable Florella since, but that she still
 “ triumphs in the capital of England, the infam-
 “ mous favourite of the votaries of lewdness, diffi-
 “ pation, and of every infernal vice.

“ Cease not, oh! Honorio—thou friend of my
 “ youth (while that youth was innocent) to pray
 “ for

“ The undone and miserable

“ ALTAMONT.”

Such is the tendency, and such the triumphs of
 the Stage! And I appeal still farther to your ob-
 servation,

servation, my brethren, whether you ever knew of any individual, or at least any number of individuals who have become more moral and religious by attending the Play-House? Or did you ever hear of any person, who, upon his death-bed, or in his more serious moments, gave thanks to God, that he had been favoured with the happy privilege of frequenting the Theatre. On the contrary, several instances might be produced of persons, who, as soon as ever they came to have any serious concern for the salvation of their souls, renounced their connexion with the Stage, and lamented their former folly as long as they lived. I will mention only two. Racine, one of the most illustrious dramatic writers in France, when he once came to be convinced of the impropriety of Stage Entertainments, resolved not only to write no more Plays, but to do a rigorous penance for those he had written, although they were of the most excellent kind, and he not more than 38 years of age.— And Armand de Bourbon, prince of Conti, “ conceived so great a passion and fondness for Plays
“ that he entertained a long time in his service a
“ company of Players, that he might with more
“ ease and conveniency enjoy the pleasure of that
“ diversion. But after some years spent in this
“ manner, the Prince took a firm resolution of applying himself entirely to the service of God.
“ He prohibited Balls, Plays, and Gaming to all his
“ domestics, and employed himself continually in
“ meditation, in prayer, and in reading the scriptures or the lives of saints, and in pious and charitable works.”

To

To these two celebrated Frenchmen might be added a third, not less so, though in a different way: this was the arch-infidel Voltaire. “When he was fourscore years of age he removed from Ferney to Paris, where he was crowned in full theatre, and distinguished by the public with the strongest enthusiasm.” But this poor creature soon fell a victim to his vanity. “The fatigue of visits, and attendance at the theatrical representations, the change of regimen and mode of living, inflamed his blood, already too much disordered. And we are told, that Dr. Tronchin, having been sent for, found him in the greatest agonies, exclaiming with the utmost horror, I am abandoned by God and man! The Rector of the parish had just quitted the room (omni re infectâ) on a sudden, before he could be prevented, he seized what was in the chamber pot, and ate it. This Dr. Tronchin related afterwards to all his acquaintance; and added, that he wished all who had imbibed the irreligious tenets of this unhappy man, could have been present at his last scene, as it must have been productive of the best effects. Several of the loryphæi of the sect endeavoured to prevail with the Doctor to suppress or soften what he saw and heard: but in vain. As long as he lived, he uniformly persisted in giving the same account.”

A gentleman, then in France, adds, “When Dr. Tronchin first came to Monsieur Voltaire, he said, “Doctor, I will give you half of what I am worth if you can give me six months life.”

“The

“ The Doctor answered, “ Sir, you cannot live six weeks.” He replied, “ Then I shall go to hell, and you will go with me!”*

This is the hero of modern infidels! And these are thy triumphs, O religion! “ Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die!”

Now after all that has been said, dare any of you, who call yourselves Christians, give your money, your time, and your example to encourage an entertainment, which is directly in opposition to the kingdom of Christ? Don't we pray every day, *that God's kingdom may come?* And does not his kingdom consist in purity, meekness, righteousness, holiness, goodness, and truth? What though the Stage is not prohibited by name in the word of God? Neither is atheism, deism, piracy, swindling, suicide, and many other offences both against the laws of God and man. But then it expressly, and upon pain of eternal damnation, forbids all that is intended by these crimes. So here, an attendance upon the Stage is not a transgression of any particular precept of the holy scriptures: but it is more: it is an offence against the whole soul, spirit, nature, genius, and tendency of the gospel. It saps the foundation: it subverts the whole design of it: it erects the standard of the devil under the colours of the Redeemer: and thus that grand adversary of God and man artfully prevails upon poor, simple, well-meaning Christians, under the pretence of an innocent and rational amusement, to promote his
diabolical

* See the Gentleman's Magazine for 1782, page 529.

diabolical designs in the ruin of the human race. But let the person, who pays the smallest regard to the authority of the word of God, read the following scriptures, and say if they are not, upon the most moderate interpretation of them, in direct opposition to every tendency of the Play-House?—*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. — Thou shalt not commit adultery. Exodus 20. 7. 14.—Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Mat. 5. 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8.—Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Woe unto you that are full: for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep. Luke 6. 21 and 25.—Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. Mat. 12. 33—36.—They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded*

is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace: because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. Rom. 8. 5—9.—Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. 1 Cor. 3. 16, 17.—Fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. Rom. 12. 11, 12.—Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. Rom. 13. 11—14.—Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Col. 3. 16, 17.—I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the
renewing

renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Rom. 12. 1, 2. — Now, can any person, of the smallest discernment, conceive, that the entertainments of the Play-House are consistent with the spirit and tendency of these passages of the holy scriptures? Shall we go to the Theatre to improve our minds in all these happy-making fruits of righteousness?

Besides; do you think, if our Saviour was upon earth, that he would attend the Play-House? Put the question home, and answer it faithfully according to your own mean ideas of his sanctity, and say, whether he would go and spend two or three hours of an evening, in listening to the love scenes of a Tragedy, the wild rant of a Comedy, or the ridiculous nonsense of a farce? No. I would charitably hope there are none of us who have so unworthy an opinion of the Redeemer as even to suspect it. And ought you and I then, my brethren, to do what we verily believe Jesus Christ would not have done? Did not he come into the world to *set us an example that we should follow his steps?* O ye frozen-hearted formalists! ye that halt between God and the world! no longer deceive your own souls! no longer trifle with your salvation! Repent ye truly of your past sins; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind; so shall your past sins be done away, and your pardon be sealed in heaven by your injured and offended Father. But if you are determined to pursue your old courses, to tread the way of transgressors, and to live in the spirit and fashion of the world,

world, I have only this to say, *Your blood shall be upon your own heads*: the day of repentance is near at hand, and you will find it an *hard thing to kick against the goads!*

Yet consider, I entreat you, consider well your situation before you finally reject the advice and admonitions that are here given. I am no enemy to the innocent pleasures of mankind. Any amusements that have a tendency to make men wiser and better, holier and happier, I would certainly wish to give all due encouragement unto. But, I think, it has been proved the entertainments of the Stage are not of that kind. And whatever is otherwise, cannot be justified, either upon the principles of sound reason or religion; and consequently ought not to be countenanced by any person who wishes well to his fellow-creatures. I grant, setting aside reason, religion, and the good of society, the Play-House, even in its most degenerate state, may be justified; and so may every entertainment that administers fuel to the passions, and corrupts the human heart. But then every man who thinks justly, and wishes to do the thing that is right, will consider the end of these things, before he indulges in dangerous or unlawful pleasures. If indeed there are any of you, my brethren, who are determined to follow your own ways: if you shut your eyes against evidence, and will not hearken: if you have made up your minds upon these subjects, and are resolved to abide the consequence: if you have weighed the matter thoroughly, and hesitate not to cherish the brutal part of your natures, at the ex-

F pence

pence of reason, religion, the favour of God, the joys of heaven, and the applause of your own bosoms; it is in vain to remonstrate any farther with you. The language of wisdom will then have its completion, before many more years of your lives are expired: *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your cdlamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord.*

We should however, do well to reflect still further, that transgression has been the bane of society ever since the world began. And a conscientious regard to the commandments of God has in all ages been the preservation of his servants. Listen to the following instances of God's dealings with mankind, and say, if sin, of every species, is not the thing which his soul abhors. And if, from before the world was, to this time, he hath always expressed his utmost displeasure against sin and sinners; what are we of this age, that we should expect to be treated better than others who have rebelled against him?

1. Before the creation of the world, the angels sinned: *they kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, and God hath reserved them in everlasting chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day.* Jude 6.

2. After

2. After the world was created, Adam and Eve sinned against their Creator, in a manner that to us may seem very trifling. But we all know the transgression was followed with the most melancholy consequences.

3. Cain imbrued his hands in the blood of his brother: and he became a fugitive and a vagabond upon the face of the earth.

4. About 1500 years after the creation of the world mankind were become very wicked: God appeared to Noah and told him his intention of destroying the world by a flood of waters within 120 years, if they did not turn and repent. They did not turn and repent: and God, according to his threatening, sent a flood of waters and destroyed them all, except Noah and his family.

Hence we may learn what it is to be singular in the cause of God. Noah alone and his family are righteous: Noah alone and his family are preserved. Dare then, O dare to be singularly good, my brethren, in the midst of a crooked and sinful generation.

5. About 420 years after the flood, the sons of Noah are again become very wicked: they forget the Lord that hath done so great things for them. Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, are set forth for an example suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Lot and his family are preserved. Fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, come down from heaven and destroy all the rest.

Here we see again, my brethren, what it is to serve God, and what it is to forsake him. Whole

cities are wicked, Lot and his family excepted: they are destroyed, he is preserved: preserved, the one by angels; the other destroyed by fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven!—When vice is in fashion, singularity is a virtue!

6. About 850 years after the deluge, the Egyptians were become very wicked before the Lord; and many and various were the judgments of God upon them.

7. The Babylonians were a large, rich, and flourishing people. Luxury, debauchery, excess, and wickedness of every kind grew predominant; and the divine vengeance quickly followed: they have long been no more a people.

8. Assyria, from small beginnings, became a large and flourishing empire. Wickedness in every degree succeeded success in war; and the vengeance of God like a mighty stream flowed in upon them: they are now no more a people.

9. The Amalekites, the Ammonites and the Moabites, because of sin, are now no more.

10. The large and flourishing cities of Tyre and Sidon, because of luxury and excess, are sunk in eternal oblivion.

11. The Grecians, the Macedonians, the Romans, have all in their turns fallen victims to the divine indignation, because of their rebellion against God.

12. The thirty nations of Canaan, by the positive command of the Almighty, were all cut off in the very blossoms of their sins. Their iniquity was full: they were ripe for destruction.

13. What

13. What shall we say concerning the children of Israel, God's elect and peculiar people? So often as they sinned, so often did the Lord punish their iniquity. Soon after they came out of the land of Egypt, while Moses was yet upon the mount; the people made a molten calf and worshipped it: what was the consequence? Three thousand of them were put to death by the immediate command of God. In short, of the 600000 which came out of the land of Egypt, only two entered the land of Canaan: all the rest died in the wilderness because of their wickedness and because of their sin.

After they were settled in the land of Canaan, we read in the book of Judges, that they oftentimes grew wicked and forsook the Lord: and so sure as they forsook him, so sure did he punish them. The same it has been in every age since, and they are now a by-word and reproach among all the nations of the earth. Nay, in the time of the prophet Isaiah, even the fine ladies of the land of Israel are particularly threatened by the Almighty himself. How far the description agrees with the character and manners of our British ladies I leave them to determine: *Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks, and wanton eyes, walking, and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, the chains, and the brace-*

lets, and the mufflers, the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the head-bands, and the tablets, and the ear-rings, the rings, and nose-jewels, the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping-pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of a sweet smell, there shall be a stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a stomacher, a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she, being desolate, shall sit upon the ground. If. 3. 16—26.

If we advert to individuals, we shall always find it has been the same. Cain sinned against God: he was punished. Ham sinned: he was punished. Lot's wife sinned: she was punished. Balaam sinned: he was punished. Eli sinned: he was punished. Saul sinned: he was punished. David sinned: he was punished. Solomon sinned: he was punished. And of about forty kings who reigned over Israel and Judah, only some seven or eight were good men. All the rest were wicked, and all the rest were punished and abhorred of God.

What shall we say to this cloud of witnesses? Is it not clear, that sin is the prime cause of all the calamities which have been in our world? And have not sin and sinners, in all ages, and in all nations, ever met with the divine vengeance; and shall sinners of this age alone escape? Hath God punished angels, nations, kings, people, high and low one with another; and shall a drunken Christian—a swearing Christian—a lewd Christian—a wanton Christian

Christian — an unholy Christian — a prayerless, giddy, foolish, lukewarm, pleasure-loving, dissipated Christian: shall these, and such as these escape with impunity? It cannot be. Our privileges are the greater; and if we make not a suitable improvement of them, our condemnation will be the greater also. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.*

Mat. 11. 20—24.

And now, to bring these reasonings to a close, and to sum up the whole in one view: If the entertainments of the Stage are of Pagan original, and invented in honour of impure demons: If the wisest and best men even among the Heathens considered the Play-House as a public nuisance; and the diversions of it as fatal to religion: If the holy Fathers in the first and best days of the Christian church always spake of it as inimical to the gospel: If general councils, both popish and protestant, wherein have been assembled several hundreds of bishops and clergy at one time, have frequently confirmed the opinion of the Fathers: If the wisest states and kingdoms have found it political,

cal,

cal, after trial made, to prohibit Stage Entertainments: If the doctrine and discipline of our own church give not the smallest encouragement to diversions of this kind: If several of the most pious and learned men, of various denominations, among the moderns, have openly appeared against the Stage, and unanswerably exposed its unchristian tendency: If every candid person, who makes a practice of attending the Theatre, must and will acknowledge, that the amusements of it disorder the affections, and disqualify the mind for devout retirement: If young people of both sexes, who frequent the Stage, always grow dissolute in proportion to their attendance: If several men of name and character have ascribed their ruin to the Theatre in their most serious moments: If whenever any of the devotees of the Play-House have been brought to a sober concern for the salvation of their souls, they have always lamented their past folly, and religiously abstained from its amusements: If its entertainments are inconsistent with christian piety, and never were, nor ever could be attended by Jesus Christ, or his apostles, or any of his holy followers: If the trade of this town is such, at present, as to leave abundance of the poor destitute of bread, and to render the encouragement of the Play-House highly impolitical: If the temporary building, that has been erected for the purpose of assembling in, is, and must be, from the very nature of it, attended with some danger: And if God always hath, and always will take vengeance on those who oppose his gospel, and the laws of virtue
and

and religion: If all these considerations together will not deter every sober, discreet, well-meaning person from giving his time, his money, and his presence to countenance the Stage, it must be said he has either a very weak head, a very hard heart, or a mind proof against conviction, and utterly regardless of the favour of the Almighty.

As for those who say unto God and religion, *Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: Who is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?* Or that insolently exclaim with a brother of theirs of old, *Who is the Lord that we should obey him? We know not the Lord, neither will we regard his voice:* as for these, I say, we must leave them. Reason, argument, persuasion, religion, are not for them. They must be dealt with in a different manner. *The Lord will, ere long, make bare his holy arm, and then shall we discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*—The following example will illustrate the situation of such unhappy characters. It is contained in a letter written by a clergyman to the late Richard Nash, Esq. at Bath.

“ SIR,

“ I Was not long since called to visit a poor gentleman, ere while of the most robust body, and of the gayest temper, I ever knew. But when I visited him; Oh! how was the glory departed from him! I found him no more that sprightly and vivacious son of joy, which he used to be; “ but

“ but languishing, pining away, and withering
 “ under the chastizing hand of God. His limbs
 “ feeble, and trembling: his countenance forlorn
 “ and ghastly: and the little breath he had left,
 “ sobbed out in sorrowful sighs! his body hasten-
 “ ing apace to the dust, to lodge in the silent
 “ grave, the land of darkness and desolation. His
 “ soul just going to God who gave it; preparing
 “ itself to wing away unto its long home; to enter
 “ upon an unchangeable and eternal state. When
 “ I was come up into his chamber, and had seated
 “ myself on his bed, he first cast a most wishful
 “ look upon me, and then began as well as he was
 “ able to speak: — Oh! that I had been wise, that
 “ I had known this, that I had considered my lat-
 “ ter end. Ah! Mr. —, death is knocking at
 “ my doors: in a few hours more I shall draw my
 “ last gasp; and then judgment, the tremendous
 “ judgment! How shall I appear, unprepared as
 “ I am, before the all-knowing and omnipotent
 “ God? How shall I endure the day of his com-
 “ ing! — When I mentioned among many other
 “ things, that strict holiness, which he had former-
 “ ly so slightly esteemed, he replied with an hasty
 “ eagerness: Oh! that holiness is the only thing I
 “ now long for. I have not words to tell you how
 “ highly I value it. I would gladly part with all
 “ my estate, large as it is, or a world to obtain it.
 “ Now my benighted eyes are enlightened, I clearly
 “ discern the things that are excellent. What is
 “ there in the place whither I am going but God?
 “ Or what is there to be desired on earth but reli-
 “ gion?

“ gion? — But if this God should restore you to
“ health; said I, think you, that you should alter
“ your former course?—I call heaven and earth to
“ witness, said he, I would labour for holiness, as
“ I shall soon labour for life. As for riches, and
“ pleasures, and the applauses of men, I account
“ them as dross and dung, no more to my happi-
“ ness, than the feathers that lie on the floor. Oh!
“ if the righteous Judge would try me once more;
“ if he would but reprieve, and spare me a little
“ longer; in what a spirit would I spend the re-
“ mainder of my days? I would know no other
“ business, aim at no other end, than perfecting
“ myself in holiness. Whatever contributed to
“ that; every means of grace; every opportunity
“ of spiritual improvement, should be dearer to
“ me, than thousands of gold and silver. But alas!
“ why do I amuse myself with fond imaginations?
“ The best resolutions are now insignificant, be-
“ cause they are too late. The day in which I
“ should have worked is over and gone, and I see a
“ sad, horrible night approaching, bringing with it
“ the blackness of darkness for ever. Heretofore,
“ woe is me! when God called, I refused; when
“ he invited, I was one of them that made excuse.
“ Now therefore I receive the reward of my deeds;
“ fearfulness and trembling are come upon me:
“ I smart and am in sore anguish already; and yet
“ this is but the beginning of sorrows! It doth
“ not yet appear what I shall be; but sure I shall
“ be ruined, undone, and destroyed with an ever-
“ lasting destruction!

“ This

“ This sad scene I saw with mine eyes ; these
 “ words, and many more, equally affecting, I heard
 “ with mine ears, and soon after attended the un-
 “ happy gentleman to his tomb.” — Here we may
 “ learn what a *fearful thing it is to fall into the hands*
of the living God!

For my own part, brethren, notwithstanding all that I have here said, I have not the smallest dislike to the persons of the Players. On the contrary, I would do any thing in my power to serve the meanest of them. I am sorry, that such sensible and agreeable people, as some of them appear to be, should devote themselves to that pernicious and dishonourable way of life. I don't know what they can say for themselves at the great day of final account. I wish they may not be treated as the corrupters and debauchers of mankind. Would to God they would consider it before it is too late? Methinks 'tis a pity, yea, I am grieved to think, their fine children should be brought up in the same way. *O that they were wise!* O that they would consider these things before the day of grace is fled!

I would fain hope that the religious part of the congregation have no need of being cautioned and warned against the infatuating pleasures of the Play-House. *You have not so learned Christ.* You know and feel the danger of sinful compliances, and how destructive they are to the peace and composure of your own minds. *Abstain therefore from every appearance of evil; and be ye followers of God as dear children. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying,*
that

that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints: neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. The time past of our life may suffice us to have lived according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air; the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. It is true they will think it strange, that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, and will speak evil of you. But, Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some uncommon thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, and because you cannot join with many of your neighbours in their dissipated courses, happy are ye: for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator.

One word for myself, and I descend. In speaking against the present depraved state of the Play-House,

House, I have done what I really thought my duty, after much serious consideration concerning it. It is surely incumbent upon every clergyman to oppose, with all his power, whatever he conceives is repugnant to the religion of Jesus. And I defy any man to say and to prove, that the Play-House, as it is generally conducted, is consistent with the purity and holiness of the gospel. Nay, I will go further, and be bold to assert, that there is not a cool, sensible, thinking person in the whole congregation, no not even among the Players themselves, that looks upon the present mode of conducting the Stage as agreeable to the true nature and genius of Christianity.

I am well aware of the resentment, that will be excited against me, for speaking so plainly against a fashionable amusement. But this is a consideration of little consequence, when we are called upon to do our duty, and to speak in the name of the great God. If the Tragedies, Comedies, and Farces, that are represented, be agreeable to true religion, and to the holy gospel, and consistent with the real interests of a trading town, most of whose inhabitants are by no means in affluent circumstances; nay, a vast majority of whom can with great difficulty pay their way, let them be defended with reason, and scripture, and argument: if they are not agreeable to true religion and the holy gospel, neither consistent with the real interests of a trading town, so circumstanced as ours is, then every minister of that gospel, every friend to true religion, and every well-wisher to the town and neighbourhood,

ourhood, ought as much as in him lies, to discourage them, notwithstanding the contumely and resentment of the multitude. Even a sensible Heathen could say :

- “ Justum, ac tenacem propositi virum,
 “ Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
 “ Non vultus instantis tyranni,
 “ Mente quatit solidâ, neque Auster
 “ Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ,
 “ Nec fulminantis magna manus Jovis :
 “ Si fractus illabatur orbis,
 “ Impavidum ferient ruinæ.”
- “ The man in conscious virtue bold,
 “ Who dares his steady purpose hold,
 “ Unshaken hears the crowd's tumultuous cries,
 “ And the impetuous tyrant's angry brow defies.
 “ Let the loud winds, that rule the seas,
 “ Tempestuous their wild horrors raise ;
 “ Let Jove's dread arm with thunders rend the spheres,
 “ Beneath the crush of worlds undaunted he appears.”

If an unenlightened Heathen could use such language, shall we, who profess to believe and preach the pure and holy religion of Jesus Christ, be afraid of speaking the truth, for fear of offending the opposers of that religion? No, my brethren : We know him who hath said, *Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

- “ Aw'd by a mortal's frown, shall I
 “ Conceal the word of God most high?
 “ How then before thee shall I dare
 “ To stand, or how thine anger bear?
 “ Shall I, to sooth th' unholy throng,
 “ Soften thy truths, and smooth my tongue ?

“ To

“ To gain earth’s gilded toys, or flee
“ The cross endur’d, my Lord, by thee?
“ What then is he whose scorn I dread?
“ Whose wrath or hate makes me afraid?
“ A man! an heir of death! a slave
“ To sin! a bubble on the wave!”

THE END.