

Wm. George Cobb

[No. 21.]

WONSTON TRACTS.

THE RACES.



ELEVENTH THOUSAND.

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THE RACES.

A CLERGYMAN was travelling from London on the outside of a stage-coach, with a number of other passengers. It was just at the time of some great races near London, at which a gentleman had been thrown from his horse, and killed by a carriage passing over him; and his death had been the subject of much conversation. One of the passengers was telling the story.—He said that he was driving by the spot at the moment, having taken his wife and daughters in a carriage for a day's amusement at the races—that he immediately stopped, took the body of the unfortunate gentleman into the carriage, and conveyed it to the place where the coroner's inquest afterwards sat. Upon his saying this, a conversation to the following effect took place between the clergyman and this passenger.

CLERGYMAN. Pray may I ask, Sir, did you proceed afterwards to take your family to the races?

PASSENGER. Yes, Sir; we were a good deal delayed, but we were in time to see the principal race.

C. The gentleman who was killed was not so fortunate in that respect; and it must have been a solemn thing to see his race run and finished while he was engaged in the pleasures of a race-course.

P. It was very melancholy to be sure; but it was an accident, and it might as well have happened if the gentleman had been going to church.

C. It certainly might; but there would have been

this great difference, that his friends would have had a consolation in his death, which as far as the only fact we know is concerned, they cannot now possess.

P. Do you think then, Sir, that a man who goes to a race-course cannot get to heaven?

C. I am quite sure, Sir, that the road to heaven does not lead a man to a race-course. I do not presume to judge of any man's personal salvation, and certainly I dare not communicate any private opinion I may be forced to form of one man to any other; there is however no harm but much good in taking notice of facts, and in observing conduct. I got upon this coach because it has the word *Southampton* painted on it, and I saw it going on the road that leads to that place. I have no doubt that the coach which has just passed us is going to London, because I saw it going towards that place. So when I see a stranger going into a church, if he were suddenly to fall down dead, all that I know about him is that he seemed to have an intention to worship God, and christian charity would make me hope in his death: if, on the contrary, I heard of a stranger being run over and killed on a race-course, all I know of him is that he was engaged in the pleasures of the world, where the thought of God has no proper place, and was at the time in the commission of an act, which is said in the Scripture to be enmity "against God," and faith in the Bible would make me tremble for the poor man.

P. Shew me, Sir, where in the Scriptures, it is said that going to see a race is "enmity against God."

The Clergyman turned to his Bible, and pointed out the passages; James iv. 4; and 1 John ii. 15—17. This produced a discussion about what was "the world," as his companion could not deny that something called "the world" was severely censured

in the Bible. This would be too long to repeat, but the conversation returned to the particular subject of races, by the passenger saying—"Well, Sir, I meant no harm in going to the races, and taking my family for a treat there. I am very much occupied in business, and a little relaxation does me good. I take my family to church every Sunday, and I do not see what harm there is in a little pleasure now and then."

C. I hope, Sir, that while you are engaged in your business, you intend to serve God in an acceptable manner, in the station in which he has placed you.

P. I trust so, Sir.

C. And I feel quite sure, from what you have already said, that when you give your family a treat of pleasure, you wish it to be one that will do no harm, either to them, or to anybody else.

P. Certainly.

C. Then, Sir, let us first consider the advantage of a little relaxation. It is quite necessary and very proper that a man should have relaxation; but his object in seeking it, if he be a reasonable man, should be to fit him to go back with more power and pleasure to his stated work. A man whose business required much walking would not seek a relaxation which would lame him. A watch-maker would not seek relaxation in anything that would injure his sight—nor a musician in anything that would hurt his hearing. So a man who wishes to serve God, and to prepare for an eternal life in God's presence would not seek pleasure in those things which unfit him to serve God now, or to love God's presence hereafter. The mixture of vanity, worldliness, avarice, deceit, swearing, and other things, too many and too bad to mention, which is found together on a race-course, ought to shock a

mind that knows how differently God wishes His people to live; and if we can enjoy the results of such a combination, it must have the effect of unfitting the mind for enjoying the things of God's Holy Spirit. God has given abundant means of relaxation which he is pleased to see us enjoy: to find no pleasure in these, and to find pleasure in those things which are certainly according to the spirit of the world, is a fearful sign that we may perhaps be classed amongst those who are called in Scripture "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"—and as that part of the Bible which speaks of such persons adds this exhortation to christians, "from such turn away" 2 Tim. iii. 4, 5), you never find that any person who has enjoyed the reputation of being seriously religious is a frequenter of race-courses: however their charity may enable them to hope, and so at other times to join the society of persons who go there, religious persons never venture upon the race-course themselves.

But upon the other point, Sir—You say that when you give your family a treat of pleasure, you wish it to be one that will do no harm, either to them, or to anybody else. Supposing you heard it given out, that at a certain place a very beautiful animal was to be shewn, about which the owners had taken great pains, and had spent much money—Suppose that you desired to see this animal, and felt no harm in going to the place for that purpose—there would be nothing so far to prevent you. But if upon enquiry you found, that it was a well-known fact, that this animal was to be exposed as a shew for the expressed purpose of collecting a crowd together, that in the crowd a certain number of pickpockets might commit their robberies easily—that, besides this, the occasion was taken to instruct young beginners how to steal with dexterity; and that in fact

it was a regular school for robbery—that for this purpose *a crowd* was absolutely necessary; and that this was the way the crowd was obtained—if, I say, you knew all this, would you willingly join the crowd, and so become the means of enabling the pickpockets to perform their wickedness? Would you take your family either to be instructed in the art of robbery themselves, or to see with pleasure the dexterity with which others can do it? Of course you revolt from such a thought. And yet, Sir, this is nothing but the nature of a race-course put into plain language. The beautiful horses are fed and tended, not to improve their breed, as is sometimes said, but to be the means of one man's trying how much money he can get from another man's pocket without giving him anything for it in return; and if you are inclined to say that the man who bets takes his chance of winning as well as losing, you only say, that instead of one man's picking another's pocket, unknown to him, there are two pickpockets who exercise their ingenuity against each other openly; and this even when you speak of what is improperly called "fair-play." But the fair-players are a small portion of the persons connected with races. There are people, commonly called "black-legs," of whom it is no scandal to say that they are acknowledged thieves and cheats: these abound at races, and are the persons who excite to most of the sport, and who lead young beginners most deeply into the vice of a race-course. And besides the superior sort of blacklegs, a race-course is beset with the lowest off-scouring of our prisons, who keep false E-O tables, and other unfair and illegal games, for instructing the poorest people in vice, and exciting in them the desire for gambling—a desire which, whether the figures with which it calculates be units or thousands—whether the coin

be pence or pounds, is the most tormenting and depraving curse with which any one can be cursed, and is the worst symptom of that "love of money" which is called in Scripture "the root of all evil." (1 Tim. vi. 10.) These agents of the devil could not do the work they are set about, unless they got a *crowd*: a crowd may be said to be to them what water is to fish—they could not swim without it. The running of beautiful horses, the seeing of fine people, the vanity of display, and more than all, a careless inattention to the subject, are the means by which Satan gets together the water for his fish to swim in—the crowds for his agents to work in; and every man who goes to a race-course takes a bucketful to his pond. Many do not see all the poisonous fish that they help to swim, but these things are, in the main, so notorious, that ignorance cannot be fairly pleaded as an excuse; and therefore every one who goes to a race-course must be considered as fearfully responsible for what is done there. The effect upon the young and ignorant who see such things, is injurious to a degree which none can imagine until they have traced it out afterwards.

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Much was said about the riotous revelling and debauchery which takes place at races, and many other points were discussed in connection with them; the result was that when the clergyman left the coach, the passenger confessed that he had never seen the subject in this light before—that before he went to a race-course again he would give the matter more serious consideration.

READER.—Have *you* ever given any serious consideration to this subject? Did you ever see it in this light before? Turn to the Bible—it is the word of God—find out the passages referred to above.

Can you deny the truth which they contain? Pause before you help on a work of Satan. Ask God, for Christ's sake, to give you the Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of Wisdom, to discover Satan's devices; and if you doubt upon the matter, remember that there are numbers of good and sensible men who concur in the view given in the conversation now related, and this fact of itself ought to be enough to make you feel that there is no certainty that races are lawful, and fit to be encouraged. If you go to a race in an uncertain state of mind and with a doubt upon the subject, you *certainly commit sin in going*, as is plainly proved in Scripture, (Rom. xiv. 5, 23); where St. Paul applies the argument to the keeping of days and the eating of meats. The argument is true though the case is different. "He therefore that doubts is condemned if he goes to a race."

Price $\frac{1}{2}$ d. or 3s. 6d. per 100.

J. SHAYLER, Printer, Wonston, Andover-Road.