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MRS HANNAH MORE.

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SACRED DRAMAS:

Chiefly intended

For Young Persons.

THE SUBJECTS TAKEN FROM THE BIBLE.

To which is added,

SENSIBILITY:

AN EPISTLE.

BY HANNAH MORE.

Twenty-third Edition, with Additions.



All the Books of the Bible are either most admirable and exalted Pieces of Poetry, or are the best materials in the World for it. *Courtesy.*

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

1825.

TO HER GRACE
THE DUCHESS OF BEAUFORT,
THESE SACRED DRAMAS
ARE, WITH THE MOST PERFECT RESPECT,
INSCRIBED:
AS, AMONG THE MANY AMIABLE
AND DISTINGUISHED QUALITIES
WHICH ADORN HER MIND,
AND ADD LUSTRE TO HER RANK,
HER
EXCELLENCE IN THE MATERNAL CHARACTER
GIVES A PECULIAR PROPRIETY
TO HER PROTECTION OF THIS LITTLE WORK;
WRITTEN WITH AN HUMBLE WISH
TO PROMOTE THE LOVE OF PIETY AND VIRTUE
IN YOUNG PERSONS,
BY HER GRACE'S
MOST OBEIENT,
MOST OBLIGED,
AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,
HANNAH MORE.



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I AM as ready as the most rigid critic to confess, that nothing can be more simple and inartificial than the plans of the following Dramas. In the construction of them I have seldom ventured to introduce any persons* of my own creation: still less did I imagine myself at liberty to invent circumstances. I reflected with awe, that *the place whereon I stood was holy ground.* All the latitude I permitted myself was, to make such persons as I selected act under such circumstances as I found, and express such sentiments as, in my humble judgment, appeared not unnatural to their

* Never, indeed, except in DANIEL, and that of necessity; as the Bible furnishes no more than two persons, Daniel and Darius; and these were not sufficient to carry on the business of the piece.

6

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characters and situations. — Some of the speeches are so long as to retard the action; for I rather aspired after moral instruction than the purity of dramatic composition. I am aware that it may be brought as an objection, that I have now and then made my Jewish characters speak too much like Christians; as it may be questioned whether I have not occasionally ascribed to them a degree of light and knowledge greater than they probably had the means of possessing: but I was more anxious in consulting the advantage of my youthful readers, by leading them on to higher religious views, than in securing to myself the reputation of critical exactness.

It will be thought that I have chosen, perhaps, the least important passage in the eventful life of David, for the foundation of the Drama which bears his name. Yet, even in this his first exploit, the sacred historian represents him as exhibiting no

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7

mean lesson of modesty, humility, courage, and piety. Many will think that the introduction of Saul's daughter would have added to the effect of the piece; and I have no doubt but that it would have made the intrigue more complicated and amusing, had this Drama been intended for the stage. There, all that is tender, and all that is terrible in the passions, find a proper place. But I write for the young, in whom it will be always time enough to have the passions awakened; I write for a class of readers, to whom it is not easy to accommodate one's subject;* so as to be at once useful and interesting.

* It would not be easy, nor perhaps proper, to introduce sacred tragedies on the English stage. The pious would think it profane, while the profane would think it dull. Yet the excellent RACINE, in a profligate country and a voluptuous court, ventured to adapt the story of *Athalie* to the French theatre; and it remains to us a glorious monument of its author's courageous piety, while it exhibits the perfection of the dramatic art.

The amiable poet* from whom I have taken my motto, after shewing the superiority of the sacred over the profane histories, some instances of which I have noticed in my introduction, concludes with the following remark, which I may apply to myself with far more propriety than it was used by the author:—"I am far from assuming to myself to have fulfilled the duty of this weighty undertaking; and I shall be ambitious of no other fruit from this weak and imperfect attempt of mine, but the opening of a way to the courage and industry of some other persons, who may be better able to perform it thoro'ghly and successfully."

* COWLEY.

CONTENTS.

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	11
MOSES.....	17
DAVID AND GOLIATH.....	49
BELSHAZZAR.....	97
DANIEL.....	139
REFLECTIONS OF KING HEZEKIAH, IN HIS SICKNESS.....	} 177
SENSIBILITY: AN EPISTLE TO THE HONOR- ABLE MRS. BOSCAWEN.....	} 185

INTRODUCTION.

Oh for the sacred energy which struck
The harp of Jesse's son! or for a spark
Of that celestial flame which touch'd the lips
Of bless'd Isaiah: * when the Seraphim
With living fire descended, and his soul
From sin's pollution purg'd!—or one faint ray,
If human things to heav'nly I may join,
Of that pure spirit which inflam'd the breast
Of Milton, God's own poet! when, retir'd
In fair enthusiastic vision rapt,
The nightly visitant deign'd bless his couch
With inspiration, such as never flow'd
From Acidale or Aganippe's fount!
Then, when the sacred fire within him burnt,
He spake as man or angel might have spoke,
When man was pure, and angels were his guests.

It will not be.—Nor prophet's burning zeal,
Nor muse of fire, nor yet to sweep the strings
With sacred energy, to me belongs;
Nor with Miltonic hand to touch the chords
That wake to ecstasy. From me, alas!
The secret source of harmony is hid;
The magic powers which catch the ravish'd soul
In melody's sweet maze, and the clear streams

* Isaiah, vi.

Which to pure fancy's yet untasted springs
Enchanted lead. Of these I little know!
Yet, all unknowing, dare thy aid invoke,
SPIRIT OF TRUTH! to bless these worthless lays:
Nor impious is the hope; for thou hast said,
That none who ask in faith should ask in vain.

You I invoke not now, ye fabled Nine!
I not invoke you, though you well were sought
In Greece and Latium, sought by deathless bards,
Whose syren song enchants; and shall enchant,
Through Time's wide-circling round, though false their
faith,

And less than human were the gods they sung.
Though false their faith, they taught the best they
knew;

And (blush, O Christians!) liv'd above their faith.
They would have bless'd the beam, and hail'd the
day

Which chas'd the moral darkness from their souls.
Oh! had their minds receiv'd the clearer ray
Of Revelation, they had learn'd to scorn
Their rites impure, their less than human gods,
Their wild mythology's fantastic maze.

Pure Plato! how had thy chaste spirit hail'd
A faith so fitted to thy moral sense!
What hadst thou felt, to see the fair romance
Of high imagination, the bright dream
Of thy pure fancy, more than realiz'd!
Sublime enthusiast! thou hadst bless'd a scheme
Fair, good, and perfect. How had thy wrapt soul
Caught fire, and burnt with a diviner flame!
For e'en thy fair idea ne'er conceiv'd
Such plenitude of bliss, such boundless love,

As Deity made visible to sense.
Unhappy Brutus! philosophic mind!
Great midst the errors of the Stoic school;
How had thy kindling spirit joy'd to find
That thy lov'd virtue was no empty name:
Nor hadst thou met the vision at Philippi;
Nor hadst thou sheath'd thy bloody dagger's point
Or in the breast of Caesar or thy own.

The Pagan page how far more wise than ours!
They with the gods they worshipp'd grac'd their
song;

Our song we grace with gods we disbelieve!
Retain the manners, but reject the creed.
Shall fiction only raise poetic flame,
And shall no altars blaze, O TRUTH, to thee?
Shall falsehood only please, and fable charm?
And shall eternal Truth neglected lie?
Because immortal, slighted or profan'd?
Truth has our reverence only, not our love;
Our praise, but not our heart: a deity,
Confess'd, but shunn'd; acknowledg'd, not ador'd;
Alarm'd, we dread her penetrating beams;
She comes too near us, and too brightly shines.

Why shun to make our duty our delight?
Let pleasure be the motive, disallow
All high incentives drawn from God's command:
Where shall we trace, through all the page profane,
A livelier pleasure and a purer source
Of innocent delight, than the fair book
Of holy Truth presents? for ardent youth,
The sprightly narrative! for years mature,
The moral document, in sober robe
Of grave philosophy array'd; which all

Had heard with admiration, had embrac'd
With rapture, had the shades of Academe,
Or the learn'd Porch produc'd it:—Tomes had then
Been multiplied on tomes, to draw the veil
Of graceful allegory, to unfold

Some hidden source of beauty now not felt!
Do not the powers of soul-enchancing song,
Strong imagery, bold figure, every charm

Of eastern flight sublime, apt metaphor,
And all the graces in thy lovely train,
Divine Simplicity! assemble all

In Zion's songs, and bold Isaiah's strain?

Why should the classic eye delight to trace
The tale corrupted from its prime pure source,
How Pyrrha and the fam'd Thessalian king
Restor'd the ruin'd race of lost mankind;
Yet turn, incurious, from the patriarch sav'd,
The rescu'd remnant of a delug'd world?

Why are we taught delighted to recount
Alcides' labours, yet neglect to note

Heroic Samson 'midst a life of toil
Herculean? Pain and peril marking both,
A life eventful and disastrous death.

Can all the tales which Grecian story yields;

Can all the names the Roman page records

Of wondrous friendship and surpassing love;

Can gallant Theseus and his brave compeer;

Orestes, and the partner of his toils:

Achates and his friend; Euryalus

And blooming Nisus, pleasant in their lives,

And undivided by the stroke of death;

Can each, can all, a lovelier picture yield

Of virtuous friendship: can they all present

A tenderness more touching than the love
Of Jonathan and David?—Speak, ye young!
Who, undebauch'd as yet with fashion's lore,
And unsophisticate, unbiass'd judge,
Say, is your quick attention more arous'd
By the red plagues which wasted smitten Thebes,
Than heaven's avenging hand on Pharaoh's host?
Or do the vagrant Trojans, driven by fate
On adverse shores successive, yield a theme
More grateful to the eager appetite
Of young impatience, than the wand'ring tribes,
The Hebrew leader through the desert led?
The beautiful Maid,* (tho' tender is the tale,)
Whose guiltless blood on Aulis' altar stream'd,
Smites not the bosom with a softer pang
Than her in fate how sadly similar,
The Gileadish virgin—victims both
Of vows unsanctify'd.—

Such are the lovely themes which court the Bard,
Scarce yet essay'd in verse—for verse how meet.
While heav'n-descended song, forgetting oft
Her sacred dignity and high descent,
Debases her fair origin; oft spreads
Corruption's deadly bane, pollutes the heart
Of innocence, and with unhallow'd hand
Presents the poison'd chalice, to the brim
Fill'd with delicious ruin, ministr'ring
Th' unwholesome rapture to the fever'd taste,
While its fell venom, with malignant pow'r,
Strikes at the root of virtue, withering all
Her vital energy. Oh! for some balm

* Iphigenia.

Of sov'reign power, to raise the drooping Muse
 To all the health of virtue! to infuse
 A generous warmth, to rouse an holy zeal,
 And give her high conceptions of herself;
 Her dignity, her worth, her aim, her end!

For me, Eternal Spirit, let thy word
 My path illumine! O thou compassionate God!
 Thou know'st our frame, thou know'st we are but
 dust;

From dust a Seraph's zeal thou wilt not seek,
 Nor wilt thou ask an Angel's purity.
 But hear, and hearing, pardon; as I strive,
 Though with a feeble voice and flagging wing,
 A glowing heart, but pow'rless hand, to point
 The faith of favour'd man to Heav'n; to sing
 The ways inscrutable of Heav'n to man;
 May I, by thy celestial guidance led,
 Fix deep in my own heart the truths I teach!
 In my own life transcribe whate'er of good
 To others I propose! and by thy rule
 Correct th' irregular,* reform the wrong,
 Exalt the low, and brighten the obscure!
 Still may I note, how all th' agreeing parts
 Of this consummate system join to frame
 One fair, one finish'd, one harmonious whole!
 Trace the close links which form the perfect chain
 In beautiful connexion; mark the scale
 Whose nice gradations, with progression true,
 For ever rising, end in DEITY!

* ————— What in me is dark,
 Illumine! what is low, raise and support!

Paradis: Lost.

MOSES

IN

THE BULRUSHES.

A Sacred Drama.

Let me assert eternal Providence,
 And justify the ways of God to Man.

Paradis: Lost.