

Ballad: The Reverend Micah Sows

In "The Bab Ballads," the ballad titled "The Reverend Micah Sows" presents a comedic and critical look at the hypocrisy often associated with moralizing figures of authority, specifically targeting the clergy. The poem begins with an energetic and almost aggressive description of the Reverend Micah Sows, a clergyman who passionately condemns the stage (theatre) as a domain of evil and immorality, urging his congregation to avoid it at all costs. His fervor is heightened by the presence of his bishop in the audience, suggesting that Micah's zeal is partly motivated by a desire for personal advancement within the church hierarchy.

As the poem unfolds, Sows's intense sermon is revealed to be secondhand, purchased from London, which undercuts the sincerity of his passion. After the service, the bishop engages with Sows, inquiring if he has ever personally visited a theatre to validate his harsh critiques. Sows admits he has never attended a play, basing his condemnation solely on what he has "often heard and read." The bishop confesses his own attendance at theatres, especially those that feature plays by Shakespeare, challenging Sows's preconceptions by implying that not all theatrical productions are morally corrupting.

The interaction concludes with the bishop recommending that Sows attend a theatre showing Shakespeare's works, playfully undermining Sows's earlier zeal with a practical suggestion that invites him to experience and judge the matter firsthand. The bishop's parting is marked by a sense of subtle triumph, anticipating the possibility of Sows's transformation or at the very least, hoping to expand his narrow views.

This ballad, through its humorous and satirical tone, critiques the tendency to denounce or demonize cultural institutions without firsthand experience or understanding, highlighting the danger of blind zealotry and the importance of personal engagement and critical thought. It uses the characterization of Reverend

Sowls and his interaction with the bishop to explore themes of hypocrisy, ignorance, and the complexities of moral judgment.