

Gentleman Soldier's Prayer Book

A record of the incident can be found in Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections (Add.MS.1474), which consists of the memoranda book of Thomas Wilkinson (d.1792), a former chief constable of Chester Ward, Co. Durham. It contains an "Account of Richard Middleton, a soldier, and why he had playing cards in church at Glasgow", apparently taken from a Newcastle



THE
Perpetual Almanack;
Or, Gentleman Soldier's Prayer Book:
 Showing how one RICHARD MIDDLETON was taken before the Mayor of the City he was in, for using Cards in Church during Divine Services: being a droll, merry, and humorous Account of an odd affair that happened to a Private Soldier, in the 60th Regiment of Foot.



THE sergeant commanded his party to the church, and when the parson had ended his prayer, he took his text; and all of them that had a Bible, pulled it out to read the text, but this soldier had neither Bible, Almanack, nor Common Prayer Book, but he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a pack of Cards, and spread them before him as he sat, and while the parson was preaching he first kept looking at one card and then at another. The Sergeant of the company saw him, and said, Richard, put up your cards; for this is no place for them.—Never mind that, said the soldier, for you have no business with me here.

When the parson had ended his sermon, and all was over, the soldiers repaired to their coach-yard and the common lodging house gave the word of command to fall in, which they did. The sergeant of the city came, and took the man prisoner.—Man, you are my prisoner, said he. Sir, said the soldier, what have I done that I am your prisoner?—You have play'd a game of cards in the church. No, said the soldier, I have not play'd a game, for I only look'd at a pack. No matter for that, you are my prisoner. Where must we go, said the soldier. You must go before the mayor, said the sergeant.

So he took him before the mayor's court when they came to the mayor's house, he was at dinner. When he had dined, he came to them, and said—Well sergeant, what do you want with me; I have brought a soldier before your honour for playing at cards in the church. What! that soldier! Yes, Well soldier, what have you to say for yourself! Mark, sir, I hope. Well and good, but if you have not, you shall be punished the worst that ever man was. Sir, said the soldier, I have been five weeks upon church-yard, and have but little to subsist on, unless without either Bible, Almanack, or Common Prayer Book, or any thing but a pack of cards. I hope to satisfy your honour of the purity of my intentions.

Then the soldier pulled out of his pocket the pack of cards, which he spread before the mayor, and then began with the ace.

When I see the ace, said he, it puts me in mind that there is one God only; when I see the deuce, it puts me in mind of the Father and the Son; when I see the trey, it puts me in mind of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; when I see the four, it puts me in mind of the four Evangelists that preached the gospel, viz. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; when I see the five, it puts me in mind of the five wise virgins that trimmed their lamps; there were ten, but five were foolish, who were shut out; when I see the six, it puts me in mind that in six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth; when I see the seven, it puts me in mind that the seventh day God rested from all the works which he had created and made, wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it; when I see the eight, it puts me in mind of the eight righteous persons that were saved when God drowned the world,



viz.—Noah, his wife, three sons, and their wives; when I see the nine, it puts me in mind of nine lepers that were cleansed by our Saviour; there were ten, but also never returned God thanks; when I see the ten, it puts me in mind of the ten commandments that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai, on the two tables of stone.

He took the knave and laid it aside.

When I see the queen, it puts me in mind of the queen of Sheba, who came from the farthest parts of the world to see the wisdom of King Solomon, and who was as wise a woman as he was a man; for she brought fifty boys and fifty girls, all clothed in boys' apparel, to show before King Solomon, for him to tell which were boys and which were girls; but he could not until he called for water for them to wash themselves; the girls went up to their windows and the boys only up to their waist, so King Solomon told by that. And what Queen Victoria, to pray for her. And when I see the King, it puts me in mind of the great King of Heaven and Earth, which is God Almighty.

Well, said the mayor you have given a very good description of all the cards, except one, which is lacking. Which is that? said the soldier. The knave, said the mayor. Oh, I can give your honour a good description of that. If your honour won't be angry. No, I will not, says the mayor, if you will not name me the knave.

Well, said the soldier, the greatest that I know of is the sergeant of the city that brought me here. I don't know, said the mayor, that he is the greatest knave, but I am sure he is the greatest fool.

I shall now show your honour how I use the cards as an Almanack. You certainly are a churlish fellow, said the mayor, but I think you'll have a hard matter to make that appear.

When I count how many spots there are in a pack of cards, I find there are three hundred and sixty-five, there are so many days in the year.

Stop, said the mayor, that's a mistake. I grant it, said the soldier, but as I have never yet seen an almanack that was thoroughly correct in all points, it would have been impossible for me to imitate an almanack exactly without a mistake. Your observations are very correct, said the mayor; go on. When I count how many cards there are in a pack, I find there are fifty-two, there are so many weeks in the year; when I count how many tricks there are in a pack, I find there are thirteen, there are twenty months in a year. You see, sir, that this Pack of cards is a Bible, Almanack, Common Prayer Book, and Pack of Cards to me.

Then the mayor called for a loaf of bread, a piece of cheese, and a pint of good beer, and gave to the soldier a piece of money, bidding him to go about his business, saying, he was the cheeriest man he had ever seen.

Lattack, Printer, 2, & 3, Moor-nich-Court, 7 Dials.