



## To Mr Gladstone

Dear Mr Gladstone,

I am writing to you once again to express my concern about the treatment of the poor deformed people of London. It is all but impossible to wander the streets without being accosted by these peddlers of human misery. I am seriously considering my place in this once-great city if we continue to encourage the spectacle of gawking at those less fortunate than ourselves.

As my good friend Henry Mayhew has repeatedly said, these penny gaffs offer nothing but an unwanted distraction for the people of London. With the death of P.T. Barnum last year, could we not call this the end of this monstrous practice?

There are plenty of theatre shows, and music hall acts that could step into the void and fill the public's mind with wonder. They do not need a bearded lady, a Tom Thumb or an Elephant Man to make them chuckle for a penny.

Not only is the act of staring at these souls barbaric, but their treatment at the hands of their masters is even worse. They look happy enough on stage, forced to smile for their pennies, but if you stick around after a show, you are likely to see them beaten, whipped or scolded by their managers for not earning enough to keep them fed. When Joseph Merrick returned from Belgium, lost and alone and robbed of every last penny, we cried out in anger and reached into our own pockets to find him a room. And yet, here we are, still paying our coins to stare at his peers.

As Prime Minister of England, you are in a unique position to carry out the growing will of the people. By making such acts illegal, you will give these people a new chance at life. Their dignity can be returned, and they may once again take their place as useful members of society.

I look forward to your reply, and to hearing of your actions.

Kindest regards,

Alfred Montegue.



## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What is “concern” in this context?
2. Which word in the first paragraph tells you that the people the author is talking about aren’t the same as everyone else?
3. Find a word or phrase that tells you the author doesn’t think London is as good as it once was.
4. Which word in the text means “shouted at”?
5. Write a definition for “dignity”.

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**I**

Find two pieces of evidence that the author doesn’t agree with “freak shows”.

**R**

How much does a show cost?

**R**

Who is the Prime Minister of England at the time of the letter?

**S**

What happened after Joseph Merrick returned from Belgium?

**E**

How has the author tried to persuade Mr Gladstone?