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L I T E R A R Y, M O R A L

AND

PHILOSOPHICAL.

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AN ADDRESS TO THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL OF
EVERY DENOMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES,
UPON SUBJECTS INTERESTING TO MORALS.

FROM the nature of your pursuits, and from your influence in society, I am encouraged to address you upon subjects of the utmost importance to the present and future happiness of your fellow-citizens, as well as to the prosperity of the United States.

Under the great diversity of opinions, you entertain in religion, you are all united in inculcating the necessity of morals. In this business you are neither catholics nor protestants—churchmen nor dissenters. One spirit actuates you all. From the success, or failure, of your exertions in the cause of virtue, we anticipate the freedom or slavery of our country. Even the new government of the united states, from which so many advantages are expected, will neither restore order, nor establish justice among us, unless it be accompanied and supported by morality, among all classes of people. Impressed with a sense of the truth of these observations, I shall briefly point out a few of those practices, which prevail in America, which ex-

ert a pernicious influence upon morals, and thereby prepare our country for misery and slavery.

I shall begin by pointing out, in the first place, the mischevicious effects of spirituous liquors upon the morals of our citizens.

I. They render the temper peevish and passionate. They beget quarrels, and lead to profane and indecent language. They are the parents of idleness and extravagance, and the certain forerunners of poverty, and frequently of jails, wheelbarrows, and the gallows. They are likewise injurious to health and life, and kill more than the pestilence, or the sword. Our legislatures, by premitting the use of them, for the sake of the paltry duty collected from them, act as absurdly as a prince would do, who should permit the cultivation of a poisonous nut, which every year carried off ten thousand of his subjects, because it yielded a revenue of thirty thousand pounds a year. These ten thousand men would produce annually by their labour, or by paying a trifling impost upon any one of the necessaries of life, twenty times that sum. In order to put an end to the desolating effects of spirituous liquors, it will be proper for our ministers to preach against, not the abuse of them only, but their use altogether. They are never necessary but in sickness: and then they are better applied to the outside, than to the inside of the body.

II Militia laws have an unfriendly influence upon morals, more especially where they authorise the election of the officers by the privates. The meetings of citizens for militia exercises are generally attended with intemperance in drinking, quarrelling, profane swearing, and acts of violence to the property of the persons who live near the places where those meetings are held. It is a mistake to suppose that the defence of liberty requires a well organized militia in the time of peace.

The United States proved in the beginning of the late war, and France has proved since, that armies of disciplined irresistible troops may be formed in a short time out of the peasants of a country. War has lately become a simple art. All that is practical in it, may be acquired in a few weeks. The most gallant exploits were performed during the late war, by men who had been but a few days in the practice of handling fire arms.

III. Fairs are a Pandora's box opened twice a year, in many of the states. They are wholly unnecessary, since shops are so common in all the civilized parts of the country. They tempt to extravagance—gaming—drunkenness—and uncleanness. They are proper only in despotic states, where the more a people are corrupted, the more readily they submit to arbitrary government.

IV. Law-suits should be discouraged as much as possible. They are highly disreputable between persons

who profess christianity. The attendance upon courts, exposes to idleness—drinking—and gaming; and the usual delays of justice seldom fail of entailing hereditary discord among neighbours. It is with inexpressible pleasure that I have lately seen an account of a recommendation from the presbyterian synod of New-York and Philadelphia, to all the churches under their care, to settle their disputes after the manner of the primitive christians and friends, by arbitration. Blessed event in the history of mankind! may their practice spread among all sects of christians, and may it prove a prelude of that happy time foretold in the scriptures, when war and murder shall be no more.

V. The licentiousness of the press is a fruitful source of the corruption of morals. Men are deterred from injuring each other, chiefly by the fear of detection or punishment. Now both of these are removed by the usual secrecy of a licentious press. Hence revenge, scandal, and falsehood are cherished and propagated in a community. By means of this engine of malice, we sometimes see not only reputation but even life, itself, taken away. The patriotic Mr. Cummins, and the amiable Dr. Hawkesworth, it is said, both died of a broken heart, in consequence of being attacked by persons, who concealed themselves behind a licentious press in London. Personal disputes and attacks in a newspaper, may be compared to duels, or to the Indian mode of fighting, according as they are carried on with,

or without the names of their authors. They shew in both cases, a degree of the same spirit, which leads to open murder or private assassination. But further: the cause of liberty is greatly injured by personal publications, which are not true, or which have no connection with the public; for who will believe a truth that is told of a bad man, who has been accustomed to read falsehoods published every day, of a good man? Printers who vend scurrility, would do well in considering, that the publisher of scandal, is as bad as the author of it, in the same manner that the receiver of stolen goods, is as bad as the thief.

VI. Horse-racing and cock-fighting are unfriendly amusements to morals, and of course to the liberties of our country. They occasion idleness, fraud, gaming, and profane swearing, and harden the heart against the feelings of humanity. These vulgar sports should be forbidden by law in all christian and republican countries.

VII. Clubs of all kinds, where the only business of the company, is feeding (for that is true name of a gratification that is simply animal) are hurtful to morals. The society in taverns where clubs are usually held, is seldom subject to much order. It exposes men to idleness, prodigality, and debt. It is in private families, only that society is innocent, or improving. Here manners are usually kept within the bounds of decency by the company of females, who generally compose

a part of all private families ; and manners, it is well known, have an influence upon morals.

VIII. Amusements of every kind, on Sundays, beget habits of idleness and a love of pleasure, which extend their influence to every day of the week. In those manufacturing towns in England, where the Sundays are spent in idleness or frolicking, little or no work is ever done on the ensuing day; hence it is called St. Monday. If there were no hereafter—individuals and societies would be great gainers, by attending public worship every Sunday. Rest from labour in the house of God, winds up the machine of both soul and body, better than any thing else, and thereby invigorates it for the labours and duties of the ensuing week. Should I ever travel into a christian country, and wish to know whether the laws of that country were wise and just, and whether they were duly obeyed, the only question I would ask, should be “do the people spend Sunday at church, or in pleasurable entertainments at home and abroad?” the Sunday schools in England have been found extremely useful in reforming the children of poor people. Who can witness the practices of swimming, sliding and skating, which prevail so universally on Sundays, in most of the cities of the United States, and not wish for similar institutions to rescue our poor children from destruction? I shall conclude my remarks upon this subject, by declaring, that I do not wish to see any new laws made to enforce the keeping

of the Sabbath. I call upon ministers of the gospel only, to increase and extend, by their influence, the pure and useful spirit of their religion. In riding through our country, we may always tell, by the appearance of the people we meet with on the road, or see at taverns, whether they enjoy the benefit of public worship, and of a vigilant and faithful ministry. Where a settlement enjoys these inestimable blessings, we generally find taverns deserted on a Sunday, and a stillness pervading the whole neighbourhood, as if nature herself had ceased from her labours, to share with man in paying her weekly homage to God for his creating goodness.

Thus I have briefly pointed out the principal sources of vice in our country. They are all of a public nature, and affect, in a direct manner, the general interests of society. I shall now suggest a few sources of vice, which are of a domestic nature, and which indirectly affect the happiness of our country.

I. The frequent or long absence of the master and mistress from home, by dissolving the bounds of domestic government, proves a fruitful source of vice among children and servants. To prevent in some degree, the inconveniencies which arise from the necessary absence of the heads of a family, from home, it would be a good practice to invest the eldest son or daughter, when of a suitable age, with the government of the family and to make them responsible for their conduct, upon

the return of their parents. Government in a family is like an electric rod to a house. Where it is wanting a family is exposed to the attacks of every folly and vice, that come within the sphere of its attraction.

II. Frequent and large entertainments weaken domestic government, by removing children and servants too long from the eye of authority. They moreover, expose children and servants to the temptation of eating and drinking to excess.

III. Boys and girls should never be admitted as servants—into a genteel family. They are seldom instructed properly, by their masters or mistresses. Their leisure hours are moreover spent in bad company: and all the vices which they pick up, are spread among the children of the family, who are generally more prone to associate with them, than with any other. Where poverty or death makes it necessary to bind out children, they should be bound to those persons only, who will work with them. By these means, they will be trained to industry, and kept from idleness and vice.

IV. Servants, both male and female should always be hired by the year, otherwise no proper government can be established over them. The impertinence and irregular conduct of servants, arise from their holding their places by too short a tenure. It would be a good law to fine every person, who hired a servant, without a written good character, signed by his last master,

and countersigned by a magistrate. This practice would soon drive bad servants out of the civilized parts of our country and thereby prevent much evil both in families and society. How many young men and women have carried through life the sorrowful marks in their consciences or characters, of their being early initiated into the mysteries of vice, by unprincipled servants of both sexes! Servants that are married, should be preferred to such as are single. Matrimony in all ranks of people lessens the temptation to vice, and furnishes fresh motives to just conduct.

V. Apprentices should always board and lodge, if possible, with their masters and mistresses, when they are separated from their parents. Young people seldom fall into bad company in the day time. It is in the evening, when they cease to be subject to government, that they are in the most danger of corruption: and this danger can be obviated only by subjecting all their hours to the direction of their masters or mistresses.

I shall conclude this address, by suggesting to ministers of the gospel, a plan of a new species of federal government for the advancement of morals in the United States. Let each sect appoint a representative in a general convention of christians, whose business shall be, to unite in promoting the general objects of christianity. Let no matters of faith or opinion ever be introduced into this convention, but let them be consider-

ed as badges of the sovereignty of each particular sect. To prevent all disputes, let the objects of the deliberations of this general convention be ascertained with the same accuracy, that the powers of the national government are defined in the new constitution of the United States. By this previous compact, no encroachments will ever be made by the general government, upon the principles—discipline—or habits of any one sect—for in the present state of human nature, the division of christians into sects, is as necessary to the existence and preservation of christianity, as the division of mankind into nations, and of nations into separate families are necessary to promote general and private happiness. By means of such an institution, christian charity will be promoted, and the discipline of each church will be strengthened—for I would propose, that a dismissal for immorality, from any one church, should exclude a man from every church in the ecclesiastical union. But the advantages of this christian convention will not end here. It will possess an influence over the laws of the United States. This influence will differ from that of most of the ecclesiastical associations that have existed in the world. It will be the influence of reason over the passions of men. Its objects will be morals, not principles, and the design of it will be, not to make men zealous members of any one church, but to make them—good neighbours—good husbands—good fathers—good masters—good servants—and of course good.

rulers and good citizens. The plan is certainly a practicable one. America has taught the nations of Europe by her example to be free, and it is to be hoped she will soon teach them to govern themselves. Let her advance one step further—and teach mankind, that it is possible for christians of different denominations to love each other, and to unite in the advancement of their common interests. By the gradual operation of such natural means, the kingdoms of this world are probably to become the kingdoms of the prince of righteousness and peace.

Philadelphia, June 21, 1788.

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE CONSISTENCY OF OATHS WITH
REASON AND CHRISTIANITY.

IN discussing this question, I shall first mention the objections to oaths, which are founded in reason; and, secondly, the objections to them which are derived from the precepts and spirit of the christian religion.

I. Oaths produce an idea in the minds of men, that there are *two* kinds or degrees of truth; the one intended for common, and the other for solemn occasions. Now, this idea is directly calculated to beget a want of reverence for the *inferior* kind of truth; hence men are led to trifle with it in the common affairs of human life. I grant that some men will tell the truth, when urged to it by the solemn formalities of an oath, who would not otherwise do it: But this proves the great mischief of oaths in society; for as men are called upon to speak the truth *999 times* in common life, to *once* they are called upon to *swear* to it, we have exactly *999* falsehoods to *one* truth told by them. How extensive, then, must be the mischief of this great disproportion between truth and falsehood, in all the affairs of human life! It is wrong to do

any thing that shall create an idea of two kinds of truth. There is a scale of falsehoods ; but truth has no degrees or subdivisions. Like its divine author, it is an eternal unchangeable UNIT.

II. The practice of swearing according to human laws, appears to be the cause of all profane swearing, which is so universal among all ranks of people in common conversation ; for if there are two modes of speaking the truth, it is natural for men to prefer that mode which the laws of our country have entitled to the first degree of credibility : hence men swear, when they wish to be believed, in common conversation.

III. Oaths have been multiplied upon so many trifling occasions, that they have ceased, in a great degree, to operate with any force upon the most solemn occasions : hence the universal prevalence of *perjury* in courts, armies and custom-houses, all over the world. This fact is so notorious in Jamaica, that a law has lately been passed in that island, which requires a bond of £.200, instead of an oath, from every captain that enters his vessel in the custom-house, as a security for his veracity in the manifest of his cargo, and for the amount of his duties to the government.

Reason and scripture (when perfectly understood) are never *contrary* to each other ; and revelation from God can never give a sanction to that which is so

evidently absurd, and unfriendly to the interests of human society. Let us proceed then to examine the bible, and here we shall find, that oaths are as contrary to the precepts and spirit of christianity as they are to sound reason.

Before I mention either the precepts or the spirit of the gospel, which militate against oaths, I shall mention a few of the cases of swearing which I find upon record in the New Testament. I shall first mention the precedents in favour of this practice, and then the precepts and precedents against it.

The *first* precedent I shall produce, is taken from the example of the devil, who addresses our Saviour in an oath, in Mark v. 7. "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the most high God? I adjure thee *by God* that thou torment me not."

A *second* precedent is taken from the example of the high priest, who addresses our Saviour in an oath in Matthew, xxvi. 63. "I adjure thee," says he, just before he consents to his death, "by the *living God*, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the son of God." It has been said that there was no impropriety in this mode of expression, otherwise our Saviour would have rebuked it: but let it be remembered, that he stood before the tribunal of a high-priest, as a *prisoner*, and not as a *teacher*; and hence we find he submits in *silence* to all the prophane insults that were offered him. In this silent submissi-

on to insult, he moreover fulfilled an ancient prophecy: "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" Isaiah LIII. 7.

Peter furnishes a *third* instance of swearing. "And again he *denied*" (says Matthew, chap. xxvi. 72.) "with an *oath*, I know not the man." It would seem from this account, that a bare *affirmation* was so characteristic of a disciple of Jesus Christ, that Peter could not use a more direct method to convince the maid, who charged him with being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, that he was *not* a *christian*, than by having recourse to the Jewish and pagan practice of taking an oath.

Herod furnishes a *fourth* instance of swearing, in Matthew xiv. 7, when he promised to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she should ask of him: she asked for John the baptist's head in a charger: the king repented of his hasty promise; "nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." Here it is evident he would have violated a common promise. But if common promises are not held sacred, and binding, ~~there is~~ there is an end of a great portion of truth in society, and of all the order and happiness which arise from it. To secure constant and universal truth, men should swear *always* or *not at all*.

A *fifth* precedent for swearing we find in the xix of Acts and 13th verse. "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, *we adjure thee*, by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them; so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded."

The *last* precedent for swearing that I shall mention, is the one related in Acts xxiii. 21st. It contains an account of forty men who had bound themselves, by *an oath*, not to eat or drink, until they had killed St. Paul. It would seem that this banditti knew each other perfectly, and that they would not act together under the form of a common obligation. The occasion indeed, seems to require an oath. It was an association to commit murder. I am disposed to suspect that oaths were introduced originally to compel men to do things that were contrary to justice, or to their consciences.

In mentioning the precepts and precedents that are to be found in the new testament against swearing, the following striking passage, taken from Matthew v. verses 34, 35, 36, 37, should alone determine the question. "Swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the

great king. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil."

The words of the apostle James, are equally pointed against swearing, chap. v. 12. "But above all things my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."

I know, these passages are said to be levelled only against profane swearing in common conversation, but this will appear improbable when we reflect, that our Saviour's words were addressed exclusively to his disciples, and that the epistle of St. James, from whence the prohibition of swearing is taken, is directed to a number of pious converts to christianity, none of whom, any more than the disciples of our Lord, could be suspected of profane swearing in common conversation. Both passages equally condemn oaths of every kind, and demonstrate their contrariety to the gospel dispensation.

There is a peculiar meaning in the reason which is given for the prohibition of swearing in the precept, of our Saviour, viz. that any thing more than a bare affirmation, *cometh of evil*. Yes, it came originally from the universal prevalance of falsehood in society; but the christian religion, by opening new sources of

moral and religious obligation, and by discovering more fully the beauty and rewards of truth and deformity, and future punishment of falsehood, has rendered the obligation of oaths wholly unnecessary. They compared with the feeble discoveries of the Jewish, and the numerous corruptions of the pagan religions; but they are unnecessary under that full and clear manifestation of the divine will which is contained in the gospel. Cæsar's wife should not be suspected.—With how much more propriety should this be said of the veracity of a christian, than of the chastity of the wife of a heathen emperor, Every time a christian swears, he exposes the purity and truth of his religion to suspicion. “As for you, Petrarch, your word is sufficient,” said the cardinal Colonna, in an enquiry into the cause of a riot that had happened in his family, while that celebrated poet was a member of it; and in which he exacted an oath from every other member of his family, not excepting his own brother, the bishop of Luna. The same address should be made to every christian, when he is called upon to declare the truth. “You believe in a future state of rewards and punishment—you profess to be the follower of that Being who has inculcated a regard for truth, under the awful consideration of his omniscience, and who has emphatically styled himself the TRUTH.” *Your word, therefore, is sufficient.*

A nobleman is permitted, by the laws of England, to declare the truth upon his *honour*. The profession

of christianity is declared in scripture to be an high calling, and christians are said to be *priests* and *kings*. Strange! that persons of such high rank, should be treated with less respect than English noblemen; and still more strange! that persons possessing these august titles, should betray their illustrious birth and dignity, by conforming to a practice which tends so much to invalidate the truth and excellency of their religion.

It is very remarkable, that in all the accounts we have of the intercourse of our Saviour with his disciples, and of their subsequent intercourse with each other, there is no mention made of a single oath being taken by either of them.

Perhaps there never was an event in which the highest degrees of evidence were more necessary, than they were to establish the truth of the resurrection of our Saviour, as on the truth of this miracle depended the credibility of the christian religion. But in the establishment of the truth of this great event, no oath is taken, or required. The witnesses of it simply relate what they saw, and are believed by all the disciples except one, who still remembered too well the prohibition of his master, "swear not at all," to ask for an oath to remove his unbelief.

It is worthy of notice likewise, that no preposterous oath of office is required of the disciples when they assume the apostolic character, and are sent forth to

preach the gospel to all nations. How unlike the spirit of the gospel are those human constitutions and laws, which require oaths of fidelity, every year! and which appear to be founded in the absurd idea that men are at all times the guardians of their own virtue.

There can be no doubt of christians having uniformly refused to take an oath in the first ages of the church: nor did they conform to this pagan custom, till after christianity was corrupted by a mixture with many other parts of the pagan and Jewish religions.

There are two arguments in favour of oaths which are derived from the new testament, and which remain to be refuted.—1st St. Paul uses several expressions in his epistles which amount to oaths, and even declares “an oath to be the end of strife.” It was the character of St. Paul, that he became all things to all men. He circumcised as well as baptized Jews, and he proves the truth of revelation by a quotation from a heathen poet. Oaths were a part of the Jewish and pagan institutions—and, like several other ceremonies, for some time, continued to retain a strong hold of the prejudices of the new converts to christianity. But the above words of the Apostle, which have been urged in favor of swearing, are by no means intended to apply to common life. They have a retrospect to the promise made to Abraham of the coming of the Messiah, and were designed to shew the

certainty of that event in a language which was accommodated to the idea of the Jewish nation.

2d. It has been said, that the great Jehovah frequently swears, both in the old and new testament, and that the angel who is to sound the last trumpet will "swear that time shall be no more." Every expression of this kind should be considered as an accommodation to Jewish and pagan customs, in order to render the truths of revelation more intelligible and acceptable. The Supreme Being, for the same reasons, often assumes to himself the violent passions, and even the features and senses of men; and yet who can suppose it proper to ascribe either of them to a Being, one of whose perfections consists in his existing as a pure unchangeable spirit.

If oaths are contrary to reason, and have a pernicious influence upon morals and the order of society; and above all, if they are contrary to the precepts and spirit of the gospel; it becomes legislators and ministers of the gospel to consider how far they are responsible for all the falsehood, profane swearing and perjury that exist in society. It is in the power of legislators to abolish oaths, by expunging them from our laws; and it is in the power of ministers of the gospel, by their influence and example, to render truth so simple and obligatory, that human governments shall be ashamed to ask any other mode of declaring it, from *Christians*, than by a bare affirmation.

The friends of virtue and freedom have beheld, with great pleasure, a new constitution established in the United States, whose objects are *peace, union and justice*. It will be in the power of the first congress that shall act under this constitution, to set the world an example of enlightened policy, by framing laws that shall command obedience without the absurd and improper obligation of oaths. By this means they will add the restoration and establishment of TRUTH, to the great and valuable objects of the constitution that have been mentioned.

Jan. 20 1789.

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC PUNISHMENTS UPON CRIMINALS, AND UPON SOCIETY. READ IN THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING POLITICAL ENQUIRIES, CONVENED AT THE HOUSE OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, ESQ. IN PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 9th, 1787.

“ Accustomed to look up to those nations from whom we have derived
“ our origin, for our laws, our opinions, and our manners; we have re-
“ tained, with undistinguishing reverence, their errors, with their im-
“ provements; have blend. d, with our public institutions, the policy of
“ dissimilar countries; and have grafted, on an infant commonwealth,
“ the manners of ancient and corrupted monarchies.” PREFACE TO
THE LAWS OF THE SOCIETY FOR POLITICAL ENQUIRIES.

THE design of punishment is said to be, 1st, to reform the person who suffers it; 2dly, to prevent the perpetration of crimes, by exciting terror in the minds of spectators; and, 3dly, to remove those persons from society, who have manifested, by their tempers and crimes, that they are unfit to live in it.

From the first institution of governments, in every age and country (with but a few exceptions) legislators have thought that punishments should be *public*, in order to answer the two first of these intentions. It will require some fortitude to combat opinions that have been sanctified by such long and general preju-