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FROM THE COLUMBIAN CENTINEL.

## THE MONITOR.

### On the moral influence of PREACHING.

IT is frequently said that the conduct of men is little influenced by what they hear from the pulpit. It is urged that many of the discourses are not practical nor adapted to enlighten the mind. Admitting this, it is nevertheless answered, that none of them recommend an ill course of life, and many preachers paint moral beauty in the most attractive colours, or exhibit the turpitude and meanness of vice with so much truth and force, as to make it appear loathsome to its very followers. Those who deny the usefulness of preaching, say, that its influence is momentary. There is a rapping, say they, at the door of conscience, and perhaps it opens, but it is soon shut again and bolted. The course of bad thoughts is not stop'd at all, and that of bad actions for an instant only. The thoughtless follower of vice plunges into the world, and, considering serious reflection as bad company, he contrives to get rid of it as soon as he can. These objections only shew that good precepts will not preserve us from falling, if they be not supported by good habits. Yet many false conclusions have been drawn from these considerations. Why do we pay for preaching, if we see men persist in vice as much as ever? Do we hope better success at this day, than the world, though it has grown old in the attempt, has hitherto found?

Plausible as these ideas seem, they are not the less fallacious. Good opinions alone will not secure a man against temptation. Yet if he be instructed in his duty, he will surely condemn himself for violating it; and still more will he condemn another in a like case. The minister, by teaching men what they ought or ought not to do, may not guard them against the allurements of guilty pleasure, but he will do something towards preventing error: They will not mistake what duty is. Right thinking may not produce right action—it is however an essential part of our moral education. To make duty plain is to strip vice of those disguises, which it is obliged to assume in order to obtain its first victory over virtue. The mind shrinks from that sense of remorse which it well knows is sure to follow criminal indulgence. This restraint alone is usually sufficient to keep us from falling into great transgressions. This view of the subject regards the influence of preaching only on the operations of a man's own mind, without advert- ing to the shame of being seen as a criminal by the world.

And if we consider that sermons are addressed to our children as well as to those of mature age, we shall see the inestimable advantage of having the young mind pre-occupied by good impressions, and as it were, disciplined to virtue.—The preacher, however, does more in favor of morality. Shame has terrors not less formidable than those of the law. Public opinion is the judge, and the minister of a vengeance which cannot always prevent crimes, but is sure to overtake the offenders. Accordingly we find that the morals of a people are nearly as accurate as the general state of knowledge among them. The clergy, by descending on our duties, enable us to distinguish right from wrong, and by the frequency of their addresses, these distinctions become familiar. It is no small advantage to good morals to bring

men together—but to do it on the terms of their observing decorum, and sitting in silence as hearers, is a still greater point gained.—Add to this, while the nature and consequences of vice and virtue are represented, each man turns his eye on himself, and feels conscious that every man's eye is upon him. The law of opinion is not only interrupted but actually enforced at the moment. He feels awed by that public which he sees assembled, and engaged in the work of discountenancing vice. Thus, by enlightening us in regard to our duties, and as it were forcing upon an assembled multitude the reflection upon them, the clergy, though they may not prevent the breaches of the moral law, contribute a great deal towards securing the sanctions of it. Public opinion inflicts the punishment, and probably with more effect both towards the prevention of offences and the reformation of the transgressors, than if it were suffered at the whipping post or the pillory.

It has been before hinted that the authority of public opinion is greatly increased by assembling men together. To men of cold hearts and sceptical philosophy the effects of that mysterious sympathy by which we suffer or enjoy the emotions of the beholders will seem incredible.—Yet it is known that the moral and political condition of Greece was influenced by the discipline of the Gymnasium, and the active emulation of their Olympic and Isthmian games. The excess of grief or joy sometimes proved mortal to the competitors.

Every congregation is with us a moral school in which virtue is not only rendered amiable, but publicly confided to the vigilant protection of an assembly deeply interested and carefully instructed to be faithful to the trust. It is the fault of the minister if in those places vice is not made to hang its head. Is it saying too much, that with us the church is the Gymnasium, in which youthful virtue grows strong by exercise? While facts shew that public opinion did so much in Greece; is it a rash hypothesis to suppose it able to accomplish so little in our times?

The limits of this paper would not allow us to pursue these considerations as far as we might do it with advantage. The theory of our ecclesiastical institutions is certainly excellent. Great credit is due to our forefathers who laid the foundations of them so deeply that our habits concur with our interests as a people. It would be useful to call the attention of the wise and worthy to the means by which the clergy might be rendered even more respectable and influential than they are at present. Splitting of parishes is certainly an evil. Forming funds for the support of ministers would be well repaid by securing the peace of parishes.

The result of these reflections is, that our moral opinions are formed in early youth and influenced afterwards by the clergy. Who does not know the sway that opinion bears? The world and its politics are governed by it. It is the business of the clergy to form and direct it in favor of virtue. This work they never quit. They begin almost at the cradle, and bear their disciple company to the grave. This order of men is of the greatest use to society. The laws govern by force; but they address themselves to men's hearts, so as that they shall govern themselves.

*Extract from a Charge delivered by Thomas Smith, Esquire, President of the Courts of Common Pleas, &c. in the fourth circuit, to the Grand Juries for each of the counties of Cumberland, Mifflin, Huntingdon, Bedford and Franklin, at the opening of the several courts of Quarter Sessions, holden in October and November, 1792.*

I had written thus far when I received a letter from his Excellency the Governor, which, as it is directed to me in my public station, and relates to the business on which I am now addressing you, and as the sentiments contained in it, perfectly coincide with those which I have uniformly expressed from this place; it being also founded on a proclamation of the President of the United States, expressive of the same sentiments; I beg leave to read an extract from that letter (referring you to the proclamation, which you have all read or heard read) viz. "Sir, the President has communicated to me a copy of a proclamation, which he issued, in consequence of certain irregular proceedings that have taken place, in particular parts of some of the States, contravening the laws for raising a revenue from spirits distilled within the United States: and I am desirous in every proper way, to manifest my disposition to further the object of the particular measure, which he has at this time adopted, as well as to promote on every occasion, a due obedience to the constitutional laws of the union. Permit me, therefore, Sir, to request, that you will take every official opportunity to inculcate the indispensable duty of obedience to the acts of Congress: and, particularly, that you will be pleased as far as the jurisdiction of your circuit extends, to charge the grand juries of the several counties within your district, to enquire into, and present, all offences of the nature to which the proclamation refers. I am persuaded, Sir, that you are convinced, with me, that the prosperity of the States individually, depends upon the prosperity of the union, which can only be effected by a strict and faithful attention to our federal obligations. I repose a perfect confidence in your exertions upon the particular subject that I have now suggested. I am with great esteem, Sir, your most obedient servant, "THO. MIFFLIN."

These sentiments of your Governor, corresponding with those of the President of the United States, will, I trust, make a proper impression upon the people at large; as they have the same tendency with those, which a sense of duty, an ardent wish to promote the peace, prosperity, the liberties and social felicity of the people, have induced me to endeavor to impress upon their minds, with particular earnestness, in this infant State of our national existence. I flatter myself that this similarity will give weight to the addresses which I have made to the several grand juries since my appointment; and to the observations which I am now going to make on the subject-matter of the Governor's letter.

Most sincerely do I felicitate you, my fellow citizens, in that I have no occasion to point out a single offender against the law under consideration. I have heard but of one feeble attempt within this district, to oppose the execution of it—that attempt did not appear to be the effect of premeditation; it seemed rather an unguarded sally, an e-

bullition of liberty; inasmuch that the gentlemen who conduct the public prosecutions in the county where it happened, did not think it necessary to send a bill to the grand jury against the actors.

By the 6th article of the constitution of the United States, that constitution, and the laws of the United States made in pursuance thereof, are the supreme law of the land: the Judges in every State are bound thereby, and obedience is due to them by every citizen; if therefore you, or any of you, know that any offence has been committed, of the nature to which the Proclamation refers, it is your duty to present the offender. What although some of the people of the United States, and I among the number, may have disapproved of, or not sufficiently comprehended, the system which made the law in question necessary, are a few to set up their private opinion against the wisdom of the society at large, of which they are members? Is resistance to any law constitutionally made by those whom the society have delegated for that purpose, justifiable in a few who may have, or effect to have, objections to it? No government could subsist, were this allowed; anarchy, individual ruin and national destruction, must be the consequence. It is equally certain that a firm adherence to the principles of the Union, and a due obedience to its laws, and to those of the State, will have an equal tendency to ensure to us, individual peace and prosperity, and national safety and greatness.

When we review the conduct of the people of the United States during, and since, the formation of the Federal Constitution, and the constitutions of the several States, with very few exceptions indeed; have we not very strong and pleasing evidence, that our fellow-citizens have displayed more real patriotism, and that they possess more political virtue and wisdom, than any other nation now in existence, has done in similar circumstances? Had there existed among us, a number of men of perverted talents and desperate fortunes, or many men of wild ambition and void of principle, or hunters after popularity without merit to deserve it, or crafty knaves greedy of power, and determined to acquire it by any means, however base, they would have had, during this eventful period, ample scope to have played upon the passions of the people; and on no occasion more, than on the promulgation of the law in question. From the early prejudices imbibed against the Excise Laws of Britain and Ireland, by the citizens of these States who were natives of those countries, I will venture to say, that by ringing vociferously and on every occasion, the changes on about a dozen of words against all laws for raising a revenue from spirits distilled within the United States, however necessary and however modified, (and a Parrot might learn to repeat the words in a few hours) the dullest and most stupid character, might, for a while, have passed for an enlightened patriot, and the most insignificant character, although destitute of every moral virtue, might have been elevated into political consequence. May we not be as much surprised as we are happy that so few of such characters have appeared among us? And that the few who have appeared, have been soon discovered and sunk again into their original insignificance, with very few exceptions? Popularity so gained, is seldom of duration among any enlightened people. History will convince eve-