

**TWO SERMONS: THE FALSE ACCUSERS
OF THE BRETHREN REPROVED, AND THE
ACCUSED INSTRUCTED HOW TO
REPLY, PP. 7-48; MAN'S RIGHT AND
PRIVILEGE TO JUDGE FOR HIMSELF, AND
TO BE JUDGED BY GOD ONLY**

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JOSEPH HUTTON

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and cunning, endeavour to cheat men into the hope of attaining or securing these first objects of their desire by measures calculated, as they themselves well know, to extend the ravages of disease, and to perpetuate the reign of ignorance and vice. The interested opponents of improvement have long since discovered that a strong prejudice may be readily excited, in the minds of the multitude, against any new opinion, in reference more especially to morals and religion, by representing the authors and maintainers of it as immoral characters, whose object it is to deceive or corrupt those who listen to them. This idea accordingly they hesitate not to infuse, whenever they have an opportunity of doing so. They assail by calumny those whom they dare not meet in the fair and equal combat of argument. To malign the teacher is less difficult than to disprove his doctrine, and there is this additional advantage, that multitudes will understand and credit a calumny, by whom an argument would not have been listened to, or could not have been comprehended. "He is a bad man, he wishes to corrupt you; shut your ears and hearts against every thing he has to say;" this is indeed a short and easy method with heretics and unbelievers, which the enemies of truth and virtue often employ to prevent the progress of opinions that they dislike or dread, and by which the well-meaning, but timid and ignorant, are too often persuaded to rest in their ignorance, unenlightened and unimproved.

Nor is this device of frightening fearful virtue into a voluntary deafness to the voice of Truth, of recent discovery ; it has been practised with success in every age, and in some cases in which it required a degree of effrontery almost inconceivable to resort to it. Think of Socrates, my friends, that true philosopher and brightest luminary of the heathen world, condemned to death as a corrupter of the young : think of the first followers of Jesus, models of virtue in a vicious age, every where spoken against, not as evil thinkers merely, but as evil doers also ; most wonderful of all, think of Jesus himself, of him who was " holy, harmless, and undefiled, in whom there was no sin, neither was guile found in his lips," stigmatized, while living, as a " glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," and finally consigned to the torments of the cross, as a blasphemer of his God. Which of us, indeed, in our own day, has not had frequent occasion to wonder at the effect produced by giving evil names to good men and things ?—by stigmatizing emancipators, for instance, as anarchists, friends of the poor as foes of the rich, advocates of religious liberty as patrons of infidelity and indifference, disseminators of the gospel as enemies of social order and disturbers of the peace. Without question, it is a grievous thing that so many should thus suffer themselves to be deceived by mere words, by empty sounds, to their own hurt : there is something, however, to console, and even to cheer us with hope,

in the reflection, that the very success of the deceiver in every such instance is a testimony to the esteem in which virtue is generally held ; since it would appear, that to misrepresent truth as the promoter of vice, is found, by the artful and designing, one of the surest methods of preventing its reception and impeding its progress in the world.

It is not, however, I regret to say, by the unprincipled alone that the moral characters of men are stigmatized, on the sole ground of opinions deemed obnoxious, though seriously and conscientiously held, irreproachably acted upon, and charitably professed. Amongst the truly good there are not a few who regard and represent agreement with themselves, on certain topics of doubtful speculation, as essential both to good fame in this world, and salvation in the next,—with whom to dissent from their peculiar creed is to be a person of irreligious and immoral character, an enemy of God, and if entitled to the love of man at all, entitled to it only in the no very enviable form of pity. “He thinks not as I do, therefore he is a bad man,” is an argument which even Christians, and Christians, too, in many respects not unworthy of the name, have not been ashamed to use : nor let them object to this representation, on the ground that it is not dissent from their private opinion, but from the revealed will of God, that they regard as the test of criminality, since by the “revealed will of God” they must obviously mean that will as interpreted

by themselves. "He does not agree with me in my view of the truths of revelation,—therefore he is a bad man," may be a somewhat fuller, but does not appear to me to be a much more favourable, statement of their argument.

Were I to attempt to account for the disposition which even the truly pious and virtuous have so frequently manifested to exclude from their good opinion here, and from the hope of happiness hereafter, those whose form of religious faith differs from their own, I might perhaps conjecture, that having attributed, and justly so, all the solid excellence of their own characters, all that within them on which they build their everlasting hopes, to the religious creed that they profess, a creed inclusive of many articles, variously true and variously influential, but inseparably combined in their view by association, they have never ventured to conceive that *any portion* of a faith held so sacred, and found so beneficial, could safely be dispensed with, or regarded as of less intrinsic value or practical importance than the rest. They feel like the individual who, having derived essential benefit from a medicine, compounded of many different ingredients, the separate value and operation of which he has never learned to estimate, naturally dreads the thought of any one of them being omitted, and alarms himself with the idea that, if it were, the sanative influence of the compound would altogether cease. "This medicine has saved my life—this faith

has purified my heart, sanctified my conduct, and saved my soul." No other medicine, no other faith, it is rashly and ignorantly concluded, could have produced the same effect.

The beneficial influence of their own creed, taken as a whole, upon their minds, has appeared, I doubt not, to many good men an experimental and conclusive evidence of its perfect accordance with that revealed will of God, from which they believe every part of it to have been derived. They forget that the really influential articles may, after all, be those which it has in common with other creeds, by which, therefore, the same happy effects may be produced. In estimating the practical influence of their creed upon themselves, they necessarily regard it as a whole; but in examining the creeds of other men, they naturally consider apart the articles of which they consist, and from these, separately taken, infer practical consequences which those who have always been accustomed to view them in combination, and to attend only to their united influence, cannot perceive and will not allow to exist. "The ingredients of this medicine must be excellent," is the natural, though rash, conclusion of one who has materially profited by the mixture: "This compound must be dangerous, if not destructive, since some of the component parts of it are to my certain knowledge poisonous or unwholesome," is the no less hasty decision of one who has had no experience of it as a compound.

"This creed is sound and orthodox throughout," says the dogmatical good man who has lived a holy and happy life under its influence: "It is damnably erroneous," says another, as good, possibly, and as dogmatical, who has confined his view to certain detached articles of it, which he has examined separately, and concluded, perhaps justly, to be of evil tendency, but which, if he had carried his examination farther, he might have found to be neutralized by other articles connected with it.

Happily, there is no Christian creed in which the well-constituted mind will not find the needful food of piety and virtue; and these, once established in the heart, will render all the minor errors and extravagancies of theory comparatively harmless. The goodness of the man, like the tree which Moses cast into the bitter waters of Marah, or the meal which Elisha mingled with the poisonous pottage, will often sweeten the bitterness and neutralize the venom of the creed, and that, too, with so insensible as well as efficient an operation, as to leave the worthy professor altogether unsuspecting of its containing any thing disagreeable or noxious. As the good man frequently imagines that goodness in others which he feels within himself, so would he appear sometimes to invest his creed, by his mode of viewing it, with unreal excellence, his own virtue, like certain optical glasses, supplying the illusive medium through which what to the naked eye of the impartial spectator appears

hideous and deformed, is seen in apparent symmetry and beauty.

The fact, however, is certain—ascrbe it to what cause we may, whether to the misinterpretation of particular passages of scripture, a superstitious view of the importance of sectarian peculiarities, or a base and unprincipled policy—that it has been much too common a practice among the followers of Christ, for the professors of different opinions, in their treatment of each other, to invade the province of the Searcher of hearts, and to set at nought the precept of their common Master, “ Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Where, alas ! is the sect whose members have not at one time or other degraded their own character, by vilifying the conduct of their opponents, and groundlessly imputing criminality, where the very most that they could attempt to prove was error ?

I presume not to say, my brethren, that the conduct of Unitarians has always been blameless in this respect, or that we could safely venture to throw the first stone against those who have thus offended. There may have been occasions on which members of our body, in the warmth of their opposition to sentiments which they deem erroneous, have failed to manifest the due degree of candour and charity towards the holders of them,—when they have unjustly visited upon the creed the personal conduct of its professors, or upon the professors the disavowed practical consequences of the creed,—when they