

CAUTION
AGAINST
PROFANENESS,
BY THE HON. JUDGE RUSH,
of Philadelphia,
WITH AN APPENDIX.



A Persian, humble servant of the Sun,
Who, tho' devout, yet bigotry had none,
Hearing a lawyer, grave in his address,
With adjurations ev'ry word express,
Suppos'd the man a bishop, or at least,
God's name so much upon his lips, a priest;
Bow'd at the close, with all his graceful airs,
And begg'd an int'rest in his fervent prayers.

COWPER.

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XXXVIII.

A
CAUTION
AGAINST
PROFANENESS.

OF all the vices the wickedness and ingenuity of man have been able to invent, there is none that furnishes a more melancholy evidence of moral degradation and depravity of mind, than the practice of swearing in common conversation; because it is attended with no possible advantage or pleasure.—With respect to almost every other vice that can be named, it may be easily traced to some passion in the human breast; and in the momentary pleasure attending the gratification, we perceive the cause, though not an apology for the crime. The unchaste, the glutton, the drunkard, the adulterer may plead in their behalf the pleasure resulting from sensual indulgence, and the strength of temptation arising, perhaps from some constitutional bias. We may, however, venture to assert, whatever predisposition to certain vices may be connected with particular constitutions, no person was ever born with a propensity to swearing or blasphemy, or ever experienced a moment's pleasure from it. To the commission of this crime there is no inducement. The swearer is neither stimulated, on the one hand, by the hope of profit, which animates the thief and the gambler; nor, on the other, by the prospect of gratifying some bodily sense or appetite, which influences the glutton, the adulterer, or the drunkard. It well know that profane swearing is too generally considered as an offence of the most venial kind.

But I take the liberty of saying, this is the language of folly and inconsideration: for if the question be examined on the ground of reason or revelation, it will appear to be a sin of peculiar aggravation as it respects the Supreme Being, and of infinite mischief as it respects our fellow-creatures. Permit me here to observe, that in reading over the ten commandments, the difference of expression in which they are delivered, is discernible and striking. When murder is forbidden, it is said, Thou shalt not kill; when adultery is forbidden, it is said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; when perjury is forbidden, it is said, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour: but when profane swearing is forbid, it is in language vastly more pointed and emphatic; it is written, Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain:—and an alarming reason is added to this case, and in no other, as if to shew a greater degree of transgression and certainty of punishment,—“for the Lord will not hold him guiltless,” that is, according to a Hebrew mode of expression, he will most assuredly punish him “that taketh His name in vain.” In short, if the entire absence of all temptation to vice, and the utter exclusion of all pleasure in the commission of sin, necessarily enhance the guilt of an action, we can be at no loss to account for Heaven’s pointing its most dreadful thunders against swearing and blasphemy.

Should an earthly monarch permit the subjects in one part of his empire to trample on his authority, and to treat with contempt his name and character, the example would soon spread into other parts of his dominions, and be followed by the most fatal consequences to his government. A conduct of this kind would demonstrate his imbecility and unfitness to sway a sceptre; and, under his feeble administration, every thing would soon rush into disorder and ruin. Now, as God is the moral Governor and Ruler of the universe,—the Sovereign not only of this world, but

of unnumbered others, it is absolutely necessary that he should maintain good order in every part of his universal empire. But alas! such is the preposterous wickedness of man, that he who acknowledges the most profound veneration to be due to an earthly king, and dareth not repeat his name without honour, yet blusheth not to profane the name of his Creator, and to call on him to witness to a lie. He who feareth to breathe a whisper against his earthly sovereign, trembles not to invoke the name of his God on the most trivial occasion. He forgetteth his Majesty, he rejudgeth his judgement. Why art thou unpunished, O man,—but that this is not the day of thy retribution?

With respect to the more than brutal rudeness of common swearing, what shall I say of it? It has been remarked, and truly, that politeness and good manners are displayed in an easy deportment and conversation, that renders a man agreeable to all around him. Slighting and disrespectful expressions of an absent friend are acknowledged to be inconsistent with every idea of good-breeding and civility, because they excite uneasy and painful sensations. For the same reason to traduce to your face the character of one who is notoriously your patron and benefactor, has been always esteemed indecent and offensive. It is, no doubt, on this ground the military servants of a monarch are supposed to be treated in a very improper manner, when their sovereign is spoken of in their presense in terms of reproach or dishonour.—Bring the matter home at once to your own bosom. Thou hast a friend, or perhaps a wife dearer than any friend upon earth. What would you think in this case, of the person who should maliciously or wantonly sport with her fame and honour to your face, and in your hearing? The wretch who could thus speak daggers to your heart, would deserve universal execration, and to be driven from society as an unfeeling monster. Suppose then only for a moment (and we are confi-

dent the case will be often found to be more than supposition) that there are some persons in the world who venerate, love, and adore their Creator as the greatest and best of Beings, who are deeply sensible of their obligations to him, and whose hearts are filled with the most ardent gratitude to him for his mercy and goodness—Suppose, I say, a case of this sort, and you will then be able, by comparing it with the preceding, to form some idea of the agony and distress a good man may be supposed to feel, when he hears the name of his Sovereign, Father, Friend, and Benefactor, treated with the highest irreverence, profanity, and insult. Cease then, impious man, whoever thou art, to harrow up the very soul of thy brother—and let, at least, a sense of decency teach thee to respect the feelings of others, if thou canst not be restrained by higher and better motives.

APPENDIX.

INSTRUCTIVE ANECDOTES

On the Preceding Subject.

The following anecdotes from Mr. Buck (Vol. I. p. 265) shew how seasonably and to what good effect this vice may be reprov'd:—

“There is something so low, vulgar, and wicked in swearing, that it is surprising that men who wish to be considered as wise and polite, should be found so much in the habit of it. But, alas! we find it is not peculiar to the inferior circles of life, but prevails among the great and honourable, so called. Wise and suitable reproofs of this sin have, however, had a good effect, as the following instances shew:—

“1. Mr. John Howe being at dinner with some persons of fashion, a gentleman expatiated largely in

praise of Charles I. and made some disagreeable reflections upon others. Mr. Howe observing that he mixed many horrid oaths with his discourse, took the liberty to say, that, in his humble opinion, he had omitted one great excellence in the character of that prince; which when the gentleman had pressed him to mention, and waited with impatience to hear it, he told him it was this:—*that he was never heard to swear an oath in common conversation.* The gentleman took the reproof, and promised to break off the practice.

“ 2. Another time he passed two persons of quality who were talking with great eagerness, and d—d each other repeatedly. Upon which, taking off his hat, he said to them, *I pray God save you both;* for which they both gave him their thanks.

“ 3. At the time when the occasional Conformity Bill was debated in parliament, Mr. Howe passed a noble Lord in a chair in St. James’s Park, who sent his footman to call him, desiring to speak with him on this subject. In the conversation, speaking of the opponents of the dissenters, he said, ‘D—n these wretches, for they are mad.’ Mr. Howe, who was no stranger to the nobleman, expressed great satisfaction in the thought, that there is a God who governs the world, who will finally make retribution to all according to their present characters; and he, my Lord, has declared, ‘he will make a difference between him that sweareth, and him that feareth an oath.’ The nobleman was struck with the hint, and said, *I thank you, Sir, for your freedom; I take your meaning, and shall endeavour to make a good use of it.* Mr. Howe replied, ‘My Lord, I have more reason to thank your Lordship for saving me the most difficult part of a discourse, which is the *application.*’

“ 4. As Mr. Romaine was one day walking in the street with another gentleman, he heard a poor man call upon God to damn him. Mr. R. stopped, took out half-a-crown, and, presenting it, said, ‘My friend, I will give you this, if you will repeat that

oath.' The man started: "What! Sir," said he, "do you think I will damn my soul for half-a-crown?" Mr. R. answered, 'As you did it just now for nothing, I could not suppose you would refuse to do it for a reward!' The poor creature, struck with this reproof, as Mr. R. intended he should be, replied, 'God bless and reward you, Sir, whoever you are, I believe you have saved my soul: I hope I shall never swear again while I live.'

"5. The late Dr. Gifford, as he was once shewing the British Museum to strangers, was very much vexed by the profane conversation of a young gentleman who was present. The Doctor taking an ancient copy of the Septuagint, and shewing it to him, "O," said the gentleman, "I can read this." 'Well,' said the Doctor, 'read that passage,' pointing to the third command. Here the gentleman was so struck, that he immediately desisted from swearing."

To place the IMPIETY of this custom in the strongest light, a certain writer hath drawn out the *Swearer's Prayer*, as he calls it, at full length, as follows:—

O swearer! what dost thou call for, when the awful imprecations, *damn* and *damnation* roll so frequently over thy profane tongue? Tremble, swearer, while I tell thee! Thy prayer containeth two parts: thou prayest that thou mayest be deprived of eternal happiness, and plunged into everlasting misery!

When thou callest for damnation, dost thou not, in effect, say, "O God! thou hast power to punish me in Hell for ever; therefore let not one of my sins be forgiven! Let every oath I have sworn,—every lie that I have told,—every Sabbath that I have broken, and all the sins that I have committed, either in thought, word, or deed, rise up in judgment against me and eternally condemn me! Let me never partake of thy salvation! May my soul and body be deprived of all happiness, both in this world and that which is to come! Let me never see thy face with comfort—

never enjoy thy favour and friendship! let me never enter into the kingdom of heaven!"

This is the first part of thy prayer—Let us hear the second:—

“ O God, let me not only be shut out of Heaven, but also shut up in Hell! May all the members of my body be tortured with inconceivable agony, and all the powers of my soul tormented with horror and despair, inexpressible and eternal! Let my dwelling be in the blackness of darkness, and my companions accursed men and accursed devils! Pour down thy wrath and curse upon me; arm and send forth all thy terrors against me; and let thy fearful indignation rest upon me! Be mine eternal enemy; and plague, and punish, and torment me, in Hell, for ever and ever!”

Swearer, this is thy prayer! O dreadful imprecation! Dost thou like thy petition? Look at it. Art thou sincere in thy request, or art thou mocking thy Maker? Dost thou wish for damnation? Art thou desirous of eternal torment? If so, swear on—swear hard. The more oaths, the more misery; and, perhaps, the sooner thou mayest be in Hell.—But art thou shocked at this language? Does it harrow up thy soul? Does thy very blood run cold in thy veins? Art thou convinced of the evil of prophane swearing? How many times hast thou blasphemed the God of Heaven? How many times hast thou asked God to damn thee in the course of a year, a month, a day? Nay, how many times in a single hour hast thou called for damnation? Art thou not yet in Hell? Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, at the goodness and long-suffering of that God, whose great name profane persons so often and so awfully blaspheme! O be thankful that God has not answered thy tremendous prayer; that his mercy and patience have withholden the request of thy polluted lips! Never let him hear another oath from thy unhallowed tongue, lest it should be thy last expression upon

earth, and thy prayer should be answered in Hell! O let thine oaths be turned into supplications! Repent, and turn to Jesus, who died for swearers, as well as for his murderers. And then, O then thou shalt find, to thy eternal joy, that there is love enough in his heart, and merit sufficient in his blood, to pardon thy sins, and save thy soul for ever——Swearer! Canst thou ever again blaspheme such a God and Saviour as this? Does not thy conscience cry, God forbid! Even so, Amen.

But God, we have said, answers prayer, even the prayers of swearers, as may be seen in the following, among other awful instances:

In November, 1786, a person much given to swearing, being disappointed by one of his companions in not returning to the public-house as soon as he expected, swore he would never drink with him again; and that if he did, it should be his last. Accordingly, that day was his last. God took him at his word, and thus called him into eternity!

In Nov. 1787, one W—, a smith, spending the evening at a public-house in Leather-lane, quarrelled with one of his companions; and swearing the most horrid oaths, God struck him instantaneously dead, with an oath upon his lips, upon the bench where he was sitting. The jury who sat upon the body, after hearing all the circumstances of the case, brought in their verdict, that “W— was struck dead, as a judgment from God.”—This narration was given by the foreman of the jury.

[WILLS'S REGISTER.

In a family at Shelton lived Mr. G., a person much given to swearing. Mrs. F., being a good woman, had a girl about four years old, who was remarkably attentive to every thing of a religious nature. This child would often remark, with great horror of mind, to her mother, how Mr. G. swore, and would wish to reprove him; but for some time darst not. One time she said to her mother, “Does Mr. G. say Our Father?” a term by which she called her prayers).

Mrs. F. would not tell. She then said, "I will watch; and, if he does, I will tell him of swearing so." She did watch him, and heard him say his prayers privately in bed. Soon after this she heard him swear bitterly; upon which she said to him, "Did not you say Our Father this morning? How dare you swear! Do you think he will be your Father if you swear?" He answered not a word, but seemed amazed, as well ne might. He did not live long after this; but he was never heard to swear again. So true is that scripture, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained praise."

Two gentlemen having called at a coffee-house in the city, and drank a bottle together, when about to part, both insisted on paying. One put a seven-shilling piece on the table, and swore dreadfully that his friend should be at no expence: the other jocularly said, "That seven-shilling piece is a bad one;" on which he swore still faster. The master of the house, hearing what passed, came forward, and said, if they would allow him to examine the money, he would tell them whether or not it was good. Returning soon after, he, in the most polite manner, laid the piece before them on a *card* printed as follows:—

It chills my blood to hear the blest Supreme
Rudely appeal'd to on each trifling theme.
Maintain your rank, vulgarity despise;
To swear is neither brave, polite, nor wise.
You would not swear upon a bed of death:
Reflect; your Maker now could stop your breath*!

The gentleman read it, and he who had sworn, owned "He was justly and properly reprov'd; and would in future be more guarded in his expressions."

T. G. who lived in the parish of Sedgley, near Wolverhampton, having lost a considerable sum at cock-fighting, to which practice he was notoriously addicted, swore, in a most horrid manner, that he

* Sold by the Publishers of this Tract.

would never fight another cock,—frequently calling upon God to damn his soul to all eternity if he did; and, with dreadful imprecations, wishing the Devil might fetch him if ever he made another bet.

His resolutions thus impiously formed, were for a while observed; but about two years afterwards, Satan, whose willing servant he continued to be, inspired him with a violent desire to attend a cocking at Wolverhampton; and he complied with the temptation. He there stood up, and cried, “I hold four to three on such a cock.” “Four what?” said one of his companions in iniquity. “Four shillings,” replied he. Upon which the wager was confirmed; and he putting his hand into his pocket for the money, instantly fell a ghastly corpse to the ground.

— [Evan. Magazine.]

By the laws of England, every labourer, soldier, or sailor, is subject to a penalty of one shilling;—every tradesman, or other person, under the rank of a gentleman, two shillings;—every gentleman, &c. five shillings, for *every profane oath* sworn:—to be recovered before any city or country Magistrate.—The laws of God are far more severe.

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“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” Exod. xx. 7.

“Because of swearing the land mourneth.” Jer. xxiii. 10.

“Every one that sweareth shall be cut off.” Zech. v. 3.

Reader, art thou a swearer? O take this friendly warning: thy next oath may be thy last. If thy prayer be heard, thy soul is lost for ever!!!