

The love of fame has been [stiled] the universal passion & its influence has been the source of the greatest good as well as the greatest evil to the human race whilst it has animated the virtuous in the pursuit of what is excellent, it has inspired lovely ambition with an unholy zeal and driven it on to deeds of carnage and devastation what was impelled the conquerors of the world in their bloody career but the desire of obtaining an earthly immortality. Nations have been depopulated & countries have been deluged with blood merely to gratify this ambition of an individual & purchase for him a deathless renown. This thirst for glory so inflamed the soul of Caesar, that when reading the history of Alexander he burst into tears upon being asked the reason he exclaimed “do you think I have not sufficient cause for concern when Alexander at my age signed over so many conquered countries I have not a single proud achievement to boast.” This passion at first amounted to phrenzy [sic] in Alexander himself & has made his appellation of “Macedonia’s madman” perfectly appropriate. After he had subdued all the nations between the Hellespont & the Ganges he buried armour of an enormous size for the purpose of deceiving future generations & inducing them to believe he had commanded an army endowed with more than mortal persons. So anxious was he that in other might ever snatch the palm of glory from his brow, that he besought the gods that no man might ever pray beyond the bounds of his expedition.

The works of Homer are supposed to have done great injury to mankind by inspiring the love of military glory. Alexander was said to sleep with them always on his pillow. How like a pestilence does this hero of Iliad rage in the following lines

His fiery coursers, as the chariot rolls,  
Thread down whole ranks & crush out hero’s souls  
Dashed from the hoofs, as over the dead they fly  
Black bloody drops, the smoking chariot dye;  
The spiky wheels through heaps of carnage tore  
And thick the groaning axles dropped with gore,  
High over the scene of death Achilles stood,  
All grim with dust & horrible with blood:  
Yet still insatiate, still with rage on flame-  
Such is the lust of never dying fame.

The love of fame when kept within its proper bounds like the luminary of day, diffuses life & light and happiness among men; but when it rages in the hearts of the governors of the world and is not guided by virtue, it then becomes as terrific as the mad career of the fabled chariot of the run driver by the ardent and ambitious Phaeton. Ambition or the love of fame in such men becomes the courage of mankind. Half of what is called the history of nations is occupied in recording the scenes of carnage & deeds of destruction which have been wrought by men of this description.

Men who their glory’s dire foundation laid  
On countries ruined & on friends betrayed  
Then who for fame, amidst alarms & strife  
Have sailed in tempests down the stream of life



For fame whole nations filled with flames & blood  
And swam to empire through the purple flood

That passion which is dignified by the name of the love of fame when it relates to the great ones of the earth-becomes the love popularity when applied to individuals in the more common circles of society. It would be a waste of time to mark all the minute shades of differences between the two. The latter has been more particularly assigned to us as the subject of our nation & to it we shall chiefly confine ourselves upon the present occasion.

Popularity honestly obtained is one of the greatest temporal blessings which man can enjoy. When it is the reward of virtue-when it springs from the grateful recollections of thousands for benefits conferred, then it is a consolation only second to that of an approving conscience. What must have been the feelings of the patriot chief, the immortal Washington, when he was hailed the father of his country by millions of freeman: when a spontaneous & universal effusion of their gratitude elevated him to the first station in the country.

Descending to the shades of private life, how grateful must it be to that man who is hailed as the benefactor of the little circle by which he is surrounded & in whose prosperity all within its sphere fell a deep interest. Such a sympathy gives zest to prosperity & in a considerable degree deprives adversity of its power.

No one can know the full extent of this blessing unless at some period of his life misfortune has been his lot. It is then that he can feel the consolation of beholding all the kind & endearing sympathies of his fellow-men enlisted in his favor: it is then he can witness their willingness to devote themselves to his services & interpose to shelter him from the storm. In such a situation, sorrow if it be the child of misfortune & not of guilt loses half its sting.

It is the duty of every man in society to endeavor to obtain the good will of his fellow men. The love of popularity has been implanted in us for the worst and best purposes. We were formed by the author of our existence social animals, hence a desire to obtain the approbation of those by whom we are surrounded, constituent part of our nature. This principal when kept in proper subordination is one of the most powerful auxiliaries to virtue. Popularity is, generally speaking, the reward of a benevolent heart & a conduct guided by that sublime precept of Christian morality. "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you." It is only then truly a blessing when its possessor is conscience of enjoying the smiles of our approving conscience as well as those of our approving would.

But popularity is only a blessing when it has been obtained by using virtuous means in the pursuit of noble ends. There are hypocritical demagogues who prefer the applause of the multitude to the approbation of Heaven & whose opinions & actions are but the echoes of the public voice. Such men float along with the eminent & possess neither



sufficient honesty nor independence to prevent themselves from going with the multitude to do evil instead of resisting, they flatter public prejudice & by thus deluding the people, they calculate upon rising into honor & power. They are wolves in sheep's clothing & have existed from the beginning. They are willing to obtain the applause of men by forfeiting the favour of God. This is a most dreadful exchange. The justice of Heaven is often vindicated in this world upon the wretch who worships the creature more than the creator. The thin veil which covers his heart is at length most commonly send asunder & it is exhibited to the public gaze in all its naked deformity. A cold contracted selfishness then appears to have been the source from which all his actions flowed. This has been the final fate of such numbers of intriguing demagogues, that the maxim which has long been adopted in morals might be almost as university applied in politicks, that "honesty is the best policy". It is so difficult always to act in a borrowed character without detection that the man who attempts it may be justly said

"To go out to sea upon a shattered bark  
And trust himself to miracles for safely"

And when once he is shipwrecked he has lost his all. He lived upon the breath of the multitude & when that is withdrawn he can neither look to God nor man for consolations.

How different from that of such a man is his situation who has forfeited popular favour by opposing popular prejudice & conscientiously discharging his duty to his fellow-men. Though storms & tempests may rage without, all is sunshine & tranquility within. Neither does his popularity always sink never to rise again. As the world generally tears from the hypocrite his disguise, so after the angry passions of the day have subsided, it often does justice to the motives & the conduct of the persecuted patriot. This it must be confessed is not always the case; because some of the greatest benefactors of the human race have experienced the lasting ingratitude of mankind. Such men, however, possess within their own bosoms an approving conscience, a consolation which the world can neither give nor take away.

Men placed in the humbler walks of life are more likely to enjoy without interruption that popularity which is the reward of merit, than those in exalted stations. In the social intercourse of life, when virtue uniformly directs the conduct, it is so amiable in quality, that it at length extorts esteem even from the most reluctant. When it at length becomes intimately known to the society by which he is surrounded, his popularity, in all human probability, will continue as long as the cause which first gave it existence. This is however not the case with respect to the distinguished actors on the grand theatre of human life. For the purpose of preventing them from fixing their affections upon the honours of this world, Providence seems to have determined, that in their nature they should be unstable. They are thus taught to allay the suggestions states they are much more exposed to the shafts of envy than humbler citizens. Whispers are spread abroad among the multitude for the purpose of blasting their reputations. Their character though in itself it may be bright & pure as the sun in the firmament of heaven becomes gradually



clouded by deeper & deeper shades of suspicion. At length that bare passion which “sickens at another’s fame & hates that excellence it cannot reach triumphs over the reputation of the great & good.” This is truly a catastrophe over which angels might weep.

The weapon by which character is most universally assailed is malicious defamation. Of all the criminals who infect society there is none more to be depreciated than the slanderer. Like the author of all wickedness, he has generally no temptation for his crime but the love of evil. Without any provocation the baleful influence of his dreadful breath withers the reputation of his fellow men into hideous and disgusting deformity. He not only destroys the individual against whom his malice is directed but by stealing away his character deprives him of the power of benefiting mankind. Thus has society often lost the services of those who would have been its brightest ornaments. The slanderer is therefore the enemy of the human race.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the evils which owe their origin to slander. The monster is however most hideous when it attacks female reputation. In your intercourse with society have you never known it assail the innocent & lovely daughter of affectionate parents? Have you never witnessed that benevolence & feeling of happiness which warmed her heart & was reflected in every glance from her countenance concerted into despondency & despair?

There is no flower so frail as that of female reputation. It withers at the touch & dreadful is the desolation which follows its destruction. The love of reputation is so blended with the very fountains of a woman’s existence that the wretch who ruins her character but too often deprives her of life & thus becomes her murderer.

Slander although murder often follows & although in its consequences it is more destructive than almost any other crime, is yet not punished by the laws of society. The naked & hungry wretch who to supply the pressing wants of nature steals from you a few shillings is doomed to expiate his crime by suffering a severe punishment whilst he who treacherously deprives you of that without which existence is no longer a blessing, triumphs unpunished over your destruction. The comparative guilt of the two is thus elegantly illustrated by the great dramatist of

“Who steals by purse steals trash  
T’was mine, tis his & has been slave to thousands  
But he who rifles from me my good name  
Takes that which naught enriches him  
And makes me poor indeed

Whence is it then that the slanderer is not detested by society? Why is it that he is not avoided as a pestilence? Why is he not punished by the laws? The answer to these questions reflects no honour on our nation. The love of curiosity united with the little tincture of envy which has been instilled into almost every heart enables the larger portion



of society to hear the character of others traduced with the utmost patience & forbearance. They either do not foresee the consequences; or if they do, they console themselves with the reflection, what not being the authors of the slanders they are not answerable for its results.

How fortunate would it be for society if this were not the case: if public opinion would brand the character of the slanderer with deserved infamy. Then indeed would popularity be better worth possessing; for then it would not only be the reward of merit but it would be lasting as the virtues which first gave it existence.

The thirst after honest fame, the desire of laudable distinction, in short the love of popularity in the true sense of the word, is to be encouraged among men especially in youth. It cherishes virtuous practices till they become habitual; it calls forth latent virtues & powers into activity & usefulness; it multiples & expands the benevolent feelings of the heart-and by promoting actions for the benefit of our country & the world human nature surely [?] is dignified, exalted & enabled.

Let then the young candidate for future distinction and aspirants after fame encourage a hope of that "second life in others breath", but encourages it by means & for objects consistent with humanity's virtue & religion & let each unite in the prayer.

"Unblemished let me live or die unknown  
Oh grant me honest fame or grant me none"

W.S. [William Speer]. Buchanan



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mss1995\_348\_ND\_Love of Fame



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