

*THE PRACTICABILITY OF SUPPRESSING VICE,
BY MEANS OF SOCIETIES INSTITUTED
FOR THAT PURPOSE.*



A

S E R M O N,

Delivered before the Moral Society,
IN EAST-HAMPTON, (LONG-ISLAND.)

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BY LYMAN BEECHER,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN THAT PLACE.



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ECCLESIASTES, IV. 9 and 12.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.

And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.

THIS passage expresses the efficacy of union, for the attainment of an important object. The principle is in general, too obviously true to need confirmation. Society itself, is the result of individual weakness and combined strength. It will, therefore, be the object of this discourse to illustrate the benefits of union in relation to a particular object; the suppression of vice and promotion of virtue.

There are three circumstances, which it is desirable should be connected with every object for which men associate. That it be important, that it be warranted, or at least not forbidden by the word of God, and that it be *practicable*.

With respect to the object now to be considered, there can in relation to the first particulars, be no doubt. That the suppression of vice; is an object of vast importance, the experience of all ages testifies. There is nothing with which we are more experimentally acquainted than with sin; and no cause has been so uniform and efficacious, in every age and circumstance, to produce misery. No expedient has yet been discovered, to avert entirely its deadly influence. It has existed in every shape, and in every

relation of life ; and though in some cases slow, is always sure in its operation.

The history of individuals, of families, societies and nations, is a melancholy confirmation of this remark. Egypt, Tyre, Babylon, Rome and Carthage, though dead, still speak, in impressive language the power of sin. They fell before it : and so uniform and irresistible hitherto, has been its influence, that it has become a maxim, that nations through the influence of moral causes, have their infancy, middle age, old age and death ; that no nation will ever be exempted, but every one in melancholy succession, sink to the house appointed for all the living.

But because nations have never yet resisted the influence of sin, is it certainly to be inferred that they never will ? If they do, however, it must be effected by the more extensive prevalence of religion and morals : and we are taught to expect, that at no distant period the blessings of God upon the exertions of men, shall introduce and perpetuate a more healthful happy state ; that the influence of sin, shall be limited ; and that nations, who must otherwise have died prematurely, shall experience even to a good old age, the health and vigour of youth. To prevent an exhibition of the past miseries of sin, and to be instrumental to introduce the pure healthful state we are encouraged to expect, is certainly of all objects the most important.

That this is an object of union warranted by the word of God, no one it is presumed is disposed to doubt. Sin is an enemy to the universe. God has proclaimed war against it, and not only permits, but ~~recommen~~ ^{recommen}ds us to combat it in every shape.

The only question important to be at this time discussed, will be—Is the suppression of vice and promotion of virtue, by means of societies instituted for

that particular purpose, a *practicable thing*? This will therefore be the subject, to which your attention will be solicited in the ensuing discourse. And here it is natural to enquire—

I. Why the influence of union should be less efficacious in reference to the suppression of vice, than in reference to any other object?

Is the superior strength and efficacy of united efforts, experienced, and acknowledged in all other cases, and shall the principle fail in its application to the most important of all objects? There arises a presumption in favour of the practicability of suppressing vice and promoting virtue, by means of societies instituted for that particular purpose, because a method resorted to, and found to be efficacious in relation to other important objects. This presumption is strengthened,

2dly. By an argument drawn from the analogy of Providence.

In the natural world, God has provided remedies for most of the diseases, and various evils incident to life; in the moral world also, remedies are provided; and it seems to be a maxim of the divine government, that the evils of sin shall not be indispensable, but the effects of our own negligence and folly.

You will please then to remark, that in spite of the usual means that have yet been employed, sin has in every nation gained the ascendancy. Are there no other means, or no methods to render the means, already in operation, more extensively effectual? Are we reduced to the dire necessity of sinking unavoidably under the accumulated evils of sin? Has God, in so flagrant a manner, departed from the stated course of his providence? Can no barriers be erected, no weapons formed, to keep out the invading foe? If from the analogy of Providence, we are in-

duced to believe there can be, what mound so firm, what weapon so potent, as that of societies, instituted for that particular purpose? Which leads to observe, 3dly. That the adaptedness of such societies, to the end proposed to be obtained by them, is an additional confirmation of their practicability.

Why is it that sin is always enabled to gain the ascendancy? Are the majority in the beginning dissolute? Are they unable to limit its progress? Or do they believe it to be harmless? None of these. The majority, are in the beginning moral. They have the power, and if awake, the inclination, to limit the prevalence of vice. But they are stupid. They do not consider. Sin is deceitful. In its commencement, while feeble, it hides its deformed visage, its growing strength, and deadly influence, beneath the covert of a name. It calls its indulgences innocent, puts bitter for sweet, and darkness for light. Hence the beginnings of sin pass often unnoticed, and vice is, even by the virtuous, practised under the name of virtue.

But even where the foe appears in his own proper character, how slow are people to take the alarm. They lament the evil, but do nothing to prevent it. The danger is not conceived to be great, and, however great, as too distant to excite apprehension. If the pestilence, or the sword threatened, they would oppose, or fly before them; but when sin is every day making advances, though pestilence and sword and every evil is in its train, it is next to impossible to awaken attention and excite alarm.

Doubtless one reason is, that the progress of a community in vice, is seldom justly estimated. If the virtuous held their station, they would perceive the true progress of society in the ways of evil: as men standing on the banks of a river would perceive the

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increasing distance between them and passing objects. But the virtuous are themselves carried downward by the deceitful current : and as the relative distance between them and the vicious does not perceptibly increase, they are insensible of the constant motion of the whole body towards the vortex of ruin.

These considerations manifest the importance of vigilance to detect, and of power to tear the mask from our secret enemy, to assail him in the feebleness of infancy, to drive him from the covert into the open field, to point out the fugitive, to lift on high the warning voice, that every one may see and know, and unite to expel the malignant intruder. In this manner may vice be checked in the beginning, be strangled in the cradle. But leave society to its natural inconsiderateness, the monster grows unseen, diffuses contagion, and enervates the body, until himself becomes a giant, and society a feeble infant, a hapless victim at his feet. What then better calculated to answer this salutary needed purpose of keeping awake the attention of the community, than societies of the description we are considering, where every member is a soldier, every soldier a sentinel : and when it becomes the particular duty of a select number, to mark existing vices, to strip them of their disguise, to point out their origin, their consequences, and to prescribe the remedy.*

To inconsideration as a circumstance facilitating the progress of sin, may be added indolence and fear. The effort necessary in an individual to reprove a neighbour, or prevent an evil practice, is too great

* In the existing society in this town, it is made the duty of a standing committee, to report at each meeting an answer to some one, or all of the following questions.

1. What evils of a moral nature, are existing in this community ?
2. What are the probable causes of these evils ?
3. In what manner can they, with the most probable success, be remedied ?

to be undertaken. If the evil be not a personal injury, if it be only of a general nature, gradual and remote, it may rise to a great height, before an individual will volunteer to prevent it. Enough will lament its existence, wish that somebody would make the attempt to suppress it, and wonder that somebody does not. But each for himself, prays to be excused; and devolves the task upon some one in his own view better qualified. No one is willing to incur the displeasure of the offender, or to risque the difficulty and censure, that may be connected with the attempt.

How easy too, in view of these difficulties, to persuade ourselves that our attempts will be fruitless. Indeed in many cases the persuasion would be just. Our interference would but inflame and increase the evil. How obvious in this case, the necessity and utility of union. Two are better than one, for they have a good reward for their labour; and if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. What the individual could not do in that he was weak, many individuals combined can do with ease, because they are strong. The exertion for each is not so great, and the censure, divided among many, is not feared. The reluctance of the individual to reprove is diminished; he speaks more readily, and with greater efficacy, because he speaks the sentiments of many, and is conscious that numbers are prepared to uphold him, and back his reproof.

4thly. A society of the description we are considering, is calculated to do good, from the influence it may have in the formation of public opinion.

Public opinion, has in society a singular influence; if vice can in any instance enlist that opinion on its side, it triumphs. But let the weight of that opinion

be laid upon any vicious practice, and it will most inevitably sink under it. Hence it becomes a matter of great importance; that public opinion should in all cases be correct; and be arranged with its whole influence on the side of virtue. Let this once be attained, and a benefit incalculable is secured.

But how shall this be effected? The opinion of many individuals in their individual capacity, will avail but little; but let that opinion be united and formally expressed; and its influence will be great. An association of the sober, virtuous part of community, if that union become extensive, will have irresistible influence to stigmatize crimes, and to form correctly that opinion which is known to possess such influence over the minds of men. The good which is done in this way is exceedingly great; is effected silently; provokes no opposition, requires no expense, and but little exertion.

5thly. Societies instituted for the particular purpose of suppressing vice, are calculated to give efficacy to every motive by which the conduct of men is influenced.

Are members in society conscientious, and led into wrong habits insensibly? Such societies open the eyes of this respectable class of community; unmask the latent enemy, and thus recall them from following the multitude to do evil. Are any influenced less by the fear of God and the principle of duty, than by a regard to character and the public opinion? These societies contribute to correct that opinion, to array it on the side of virtue, and to make the doing good, indispensable to the enjoyment of a good character. Are there still any who neither fear God or regard man, they may yet fear the law, and this restraint may, by such societies, be greatly increased by

rendering the detection and punishment of crimes more inevitable.

It would appear from this view of the subject, that it is in the power of any community, by uniting, to check and suppress almost any vice that shall threaten their peace. Still further to confirm the practicability of doing this, it may be proper to observe,

6thly. That moral societies may do much good, by turning their attention to the rising generation, to schools and private families, and by circulating moral and religious tracts, and by appointing in each school, small premiums, the rewards of good behaviour and laudable progress.

Let the rising generation be all of them instructed; let them be reared up in the fear of God; let books calculated to effect this be put into their hands, and immorality will hardly need to be banished; for it will scarcely be found to exist. A religious education forms children to habits of early industry, fixes the moral principle, fortifies against temptation, and prepares them, as they rise to years of discretion, to fill usefully the spheres in which they are called to move. I shall observe once more,

7thly. That we are confirmed in our belief of the practicability of suppressing vice, by means of societies instituted for that purpose, from the consideration that the experiment has been made, and has succeeded.

The first society, of the description we are considering, concerning which we have any knowledge, was instituted in the city of London about the year 1697. The moral state of the city, and nation at this time; the origin, and success of the first society, are thus related by the historian.

“ It is well known (says he) to our shame, that profane swearing and cursing, drunkenness, and open

lewdness, and profanation of the Lord's day, have been committed with great impunity, and without controul, without either shame or the fear of laws ; so that they were seen and heard at noon day, and in the open streets. Debauchery had diffused itself through the whole body of the nation, till at last our morals were so corrupted, that virtue and vice had with too many changed their names. It was reckoned breeding to swear, gallantry to be lewd, good humour to be drunk, and wit to despise serious things. In this state of things, reformation was indeed talked of, as an excellent thing, but vice was looked upon as too formidable an enemy to be provoked ; and public reformation was thought to be so difficult a thing, that those who gave it very good words, thought it not safe to set about it. When things were in this dismal and almost desperate state, it came into the hearts of five or six private gentlemen, to engage in this hazardous enterprize. This was such an undertaking as might well be expected soon to alarm the enemy, and which the patrons of vice would attempt to defeat, before any progress could be made. And so it proved. The champions of debauchery put themselves in array, to defend their infamous liberties ; to ridicule, to defame, and to oppose this design : And others, whom in charity we would not look upon as enemies, were forward to censure these attempts, as the fruit of an imprudent zeal. But, notwithstanding a furious opposition from adversaries, and the unkind neutrality of friends, these gentlemen not only held their ground, but made advances into the territory of the enemy. The society commencing with five or six, soon embraced numbers, and persons of eminence, in every station. In imitation of this society, and for the same purpose, other societies were formed in every part of the city,

and among the sober of almost every profession and occupation. Besides these, there were about nine and thirty religious societies in and about London, who, among other objects, made that of reformation a prominent one.

The effects of these combinations were favourable, beyond the most sanguine expectation. From their vigilance and promptitude, the growing vices of the day were checked, insomuch that it was soon found difficult to detect a single criminal in the streets and markets, where a little before, horrid oaths, curses and imprecations, might be heard day and night. Multitudes of drunkards, profaners of the Lord's day, besides hundreds of disorderly houses, were brought to justice, and such open vices suppressed. Nor were the good effects of these associations limited to the city. They soon extended to most of the principal towns, and cities of the nation, to Scotland and Ireland; so that, says the historian, a great part of the kingdom have been awakened, in some measure, to a sense of their duty; and thereby a very hopeful progress is made towards a general reformation."

Before we proceed farther, it may be proper to remark, that if in any place and at any time, a society for the reformation of morals would be impracticable, it would be, we should suppose, at the time, and in the place, where this society commenced. In the city of London; at a time of prevailing dissoluteness, countenanced by men in high stations; vice intrenched, bold, open and daring; religion despised, ridiculed, and, to appearance, almost extinguished; yet even this polluted city was, by the blessing of God upon the exertions of a few individuals, in a great measure cleansed. The strong holds of vice were assailed, carried, and demolished, and the complexion of the whole city, and even the whole nation, greatly chang-

ed. But in our nation, especially in country towns, what vices have we to combat, compared with the formidable opposition made here. We have indeed to lament the existence of vicious habits; but how far from being as numerous, or as inveterate, as those this little band were at first called to attack. There were bold champions, and in multitudes; men determined to preserve their licentious liberties; men of wealth and influence, who formed counter combinations to defeat the efforts of virtue, and uphold the dominion of vice. In our communities the body of the people are sober, honest and moral; and even among the immoral, where is the hardened, open champion of vice, who will head the phalanx of opposition, to contend for licentiousness, to oppose, ridicule, and defeat the efforts of virtue. We have greater strength to begin with, and less opposition to encounter, and nothing but our own sloth and indifference, can render the attempt impracticable.

Recently a society of a similar nature has been revived in England. This society, among other measures, have written, printed, purchased and distributed, innumerable moral, and religious tracts, among the poorer class of people; and the effect has been answerable to the labour bestowed. In a letter from the London Missionary Society, published in the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, is the following animating account. "The diffusion of knowledge by means of the religious tract society, proceeds on a very enlarged scale. Hundreds of thousands, are dispersed throughout all parts of the nation, and sent to America and the colonies; and many instances of the happy effects produced by them, amply reward our efforts. Blessed be God, we could fill volumes with the living and dying experience of little children, departed in peace to the Lamb's bosom."

In this country, in the state of Maryland, about the year 1760, a society was formed for the particular purpose of suppressing vice. In the preamble to their constitution they say—"It is notorious that the laws of God and man, are basely trampled on by drunkenness, lewdness, profane swearing, sabbath breaking, and many other irregularities;" and yet this society, it is said, succeeded so well as to induce numbers in different states to imitate their example. From that time to the present, similar societies as circumstances required, have in various places been instituted. Their effects we cannot in every instance state. In no instance have they yet been discovered to be injurious, and uniformly where information has been obtained, it has been in favour of their utility.

In the year 1790, a society for the reformation of morals was formed in Franklin, Massachusetts. The sermon delivered on that occasion, by the Rev. Doctor Emmons, is particularly recommended to the attention of every person who entertains doubts concerning the practicability, expediency, and importance of such societies.

In the year 1798, a letter was received by the general assembly of the Presbyterian church, then sitting in Philadelphia, from a society established in that city, to aid the civil magistrate in the suppression of vice and immorality. The consideration of the letter was referred to a committee, who brought in the following report.

"The committee appointed to take into consideration a letter, and certain communications, from a society established in Philadelphia, to aid the civil magistrate in the suppression of vice and immorality, report :

That the designs of the society aforesaid, appear to be in the highest degree laudable, and to deserve the

approbation and imitation of the friends of religion and good morals, in every part of the country ; especially at the present period of abounding immorality and profaneness : and the committee do accordingly recommend, that the assembly express it as their desire, that the members of our communion countenance, and aid the institution of similar societies, in every place where such establishments may be attempted." To this report the assembly agreed, and recommended it to the several presbyteries, to attempt the formation of such societies, in the several congregations within their respective limits.

Will it be suggested that such institutions may create dissensions in society ?

But where have they ever had this effect ? And have they not been sufficiently tried, to manifest such consequences, if they had any tendency to produce them ?

But admitting they would in some instances create dissension, would the objection against them be valid ? Did not the gospel, heaven's greatest blessing, in its progress create dissension, and in the language of its enemies turn the world upside down ? The question is, admitting such societies would produce some difficulty, will not the unrestrained progress of vice produce more. If the suppression of intemperance would create difficulty, would not its prevalence create greater difficulty ? And will not profane swearing, and profanation of the sabbath, and other immoralities, by effacing the fear of God, and hardening the heart, make, in the end, a thousand-fold more disturbance in society, than the effort necessary to suppress these vices. In one case, the evil may be expected to be short-lived ; for vice is a coward, and, when met with firmness, will quit the field. In the

other, the evils will be permanent, and every day more insupportable.

But what does the objection imply? It implies that vice is already too strongly entrenched to be disturbed: that its dominion is established, and cannot be resisted: that we must give up the contest, yield all hopes, and experience in succession, all the evils which follow in its train; until we sink to the grave, which vice is preparing to entomb our happiness, and our glory. Are we prepared to do this? Go, look at the descendants of the once renowned Greeks and Romans. Behold them enervated, ignorant, enslaved, toiling to support the pride of haughty masters, drawn out like sheep for the slaughter, to die in the contest of ambition. Their ancestors were a brave, hardy, independent race. Vice cut the sinews of industry, prepared and riveted their chains. Can we calmly anticipate their fate? The destruction of our constitution, the extinction of science, the slavery of our posterity? But what shall prevent this fate. The same causes, if not limited, will produce the same effects; and if vice be already too strong to be opposed, those effects are not distant.

But the idea is fallacious. The suppression of vice by means of societies instituted for the purpose, is the most peaceful, and probably the most effectual method that can be devised; and, the only question is, shall vice have its own course, or shall we unite to limit its influence, to diffuse the blessings of piety and virtue, and to preserve to a good old age, the health and happiness of our nation. Will it be said that such institutions will do no good? How can this be said in the face of facts? Why should the efficacy of union fail here, which is confirmed in relation to every other object? Are not such societies as we are considering, calculated in every shape to do good?

To promote vigilance, to hold up the connection between vice and misery, to give correctness and efficacy to public opinion, and to strengthen the sinews of law? Has not the society in this place, although in its infancy, been connected with happy effects? It has not indeed made its members perfect, or annihilated vice in the community. Did any expect it would? We are not angels, but men; and if we can gradually improve ourselves, and improve the society in which we live, though in a small degree, it is an object not to be despised.

Before we proceed, it may be proper to notice a popular distinction, craftily made between immorality and irreligion. The one is acknowledged to affect the security both of life and property, while the other is supposed to injure no one but the subject. That irreligion is not, in its influence, so direct and immediate, may be readily granted. But is it therefore harmless? Is it not rather a certain and most fruitful cause of immorality?

In what manner does God govern his creatures, but by the principles of love, hope and fear? But irreligion annihilates at once all these restraints, and lets loose the creature, fearless of God and futurity, to perpetrate iniquity. Let the Almighty be supposed to have turned aside his omniscient eye from the world, and what an horrid state of things might be expected to exist. If under the government of God, and in the prospect of an approaching judgment, such enormities have been practised; to what height would they have arisen, had the fear of God, and the expectation of future punishment, been obliterated.

No man had, perhaps, a better opportunity to understand human nature, and the influence of moral causes, than Washington. His sentiments on this

subject are explicit, and worthy to be engraven in letters of gold.

“ Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morals, (says he) are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for life; if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education, on minds of a peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that a national morality can prevail, in exclusion of religious principles.”

Nor can the practicability and propriety of suppressing irreligion, be questioned; for, although it is not the province of man to make christians, and dictate creeds, it is his province, and the laws have made it his duty, to preserve those institutions of heaven, by which a sense of moral obligation, and the expectation of reward and punishment is kept alive.

From the considerations suggested, it appears, that the suppression of vice by means of societies instituted for that particular purpose, is a practicable thing. It may be proper, as the improvement of this discourse, to consider the motives which should induce to the formation of such societies: and,

1. It is a probable, and perhaps the only method, to preserve the liberties of our nation.

The vices which have destroyed other nations, are ~~the same~~ prevalent in our own.

From a variety of causes, irreligion hath become in all parts of our land, alarmingly prevalent. The name of God is blasphemed; the bible is denounced; the sabbath is profaned; the public worship of God is neglected; intemperance hath destroyed its thousands, and is preparing the destruction of thousands more; while luxury, with its diversified evils, with a rapidity unparalleled, is spreading in every direction, and through every class. These are the causes which have destroyed other nations: their malignant nature is still the same, and, unless their operation be suspended, they will destroy us.

When it is intimated that associations for the suppression of vice, may be the only effectual method to preserve our liberties, it is not supposed that moral societies alone can effect this: they are to be considered rather as an addition to existing means, and calculated to impart to them additional efficacy.

Our religion is unquestionably our greatest security, and the preservation of divine institutions, an object of the first magnitude. Let the sabbath be annihilated, and the sanctuary abandoned; let irreligion and vice be extended through the mass of our nation, and our liberties cannot be preserved. We may form free constitutions, but our vices will destroy them; we may enact laws, but they will not protect us.

At present we are highly distinguished. We enjoy a freer constitution, and milder laws than any nation under Heaven: and, let it never be forgotten, that it is by our habits of Religion, and our moral habits which grow out of our religion, that we have attained the happy eminence on which we stand. Philo-

fophers have ascribed this distinction to our morals. Do they suppose our morals to have no cause? Why could they not penetrate deeper, and behold that cause in our religion?

Our ancestors esteemed religion to be the principal thing. To enjoy it, they encountered the dangers of the ocean, and the wilderness; and, when they began to form civil constitutions, religion was not forgotten, or crowded into a corner. It stood prominent in all their conduct. They taught it to their children, they taught it in their schools, and made provision to have it taught on their sabbath. On this firm basis, they founded our liberty. On this basis, it now rests. Religion is the corner stone; remove it, and the building falls.

Two considerations render, to us, the preservation of religion and morals, peculiarly important. The first is, the nature of our government; the second, the circumstances in which we commenced our national existence. The iron rod may, in arbitrary governments, supply in some degree, the defect of moral restraint; but in a republic, the virtue of the citizen is the life of the government. In proportion as the fear of God is effaced, crimes will abound, and the arm of power must be strengthened to suppress them; until the nature of the government becomes essentially different.

Nor should this transition, with respect to ourselves, if our vices continue, be deemed chimerical, or distant. We commenced our existence at a point of civilization and luxury, to which other nations rose gradually from a state of barbarism. Our past progress has been rapid; and, unless it be arrested, our destruction slumbereth not.

But, it may be asked, What can we do to preserve the nation; a small town, and one only among thou-

fands ? We can do our part. The nation is formed by the addition of such small districts ; it is preserved by their purity, and destroyed by their vices. Every town is a member of the body politic, and, if a healthful member, is a great national blessing ; let every town reform, and the reformation will be national. Who can tell how far the influence of our example may extend ? how great a matter a little fire may kindle ? Who can tell how much kindness God has for us ? Already has he enkindled an extensive zeal to send the blessings of religion abroad ; and may we not hope, that he will add to it, a zeal to secure the fruits of religion at home.

It is not to be expected that in every town, a society may be established with the same ease. Local situation, and already existing habits, may increase the difficulty. But difficulties are not impossibilities. Is there any town where nothing can be done ; where not so much as five can be found to commence the good work ; and, because it is difficult, because all that is desired cannot be effected, shall nothing be done ? Let the virtuous in every town unite, be vigilant, prudent and firm, and their influence will be felt. The cause of virtue will ultimately prevail. Let such associations be scattered through the nation, and what a barrier against the encroachments of vice, what a pledge of the continued smiles and protection of heaven.

But if our nation, like others before it, must fall a victim to the influence of sin ; let us fight manfully, contend every inch of ground, and let this be the last place that expires in the general ruin. Which leads to observe,

2. That the danger of vice to ourselves, as a people, should be to us a strong inducement to continue, and extend our efforts to limit its influence.

Whatever may become of the nation, our own happiness, and the happiness of our children, is an object of magnitude. This happiness is endangered. We have not escaped the influence of irreligion, the current of vice has begun to flow. It must be arrested, or with the besom of destruction it will sweep away our blessings.

The present is the happy moment to concentrate our strength, to unite our vigilance and wisdom. The plan is no novel project of theory, it has been tested by experience. It is practicable, and if we are destroyed, O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself. God may suspend our doom, until the measure of our iniquity be full ; but all experience testifies, that with no unusual vigilance and activity, our progress will be downward, and our doom inevitable. The laws of our country, the bible, the sabbath, the sanctuary, and the voice of the watchman, will in vain interpose. Sin is in its nature anti-social. It will funder the ties of society ; lead us to bite and devour ; to be hateful, and to hate one another. God has cursed a departure from the laws and institutions of his government, with discord and misery. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

All that we hold dear, then, is at stake. Sin hath no mercy. Its captives will experience no quarter. Let every member of community awake, stand up in his place, and do with his might, whatsoever his hand findeth to do.

Magistrates are under great obligations, and enjoy peculiar advantages, to co-operate in the suppression of vice. They are appointed for this very thing : are invested with the authority of law, and intrusted with the sword of justice, to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well.

Parents, and all heads of families, are greatly in-

interested in the suppression of vice. Let them be vigilant, and restrain their households from the ways of evil. Advise them, warn them, govern them, instruct them in religion, and spare no pains to form their morals. Without these efforts, what security can be given for the virtue, and dutiful conduct, of their children. Will those children honour their parents, whose parents permit them to dishonour God? Will they treat them kindly, when permitted to treat with ingratitude their Maker?

Youth are deeply interested in the suppression of vice, and promotion of virtue. They are the most exposed to the contagion of bad example; and they of all others, will be the most permanent sufferers. The aged will soon be taken from the evil to come; but young people, if vice prevail, will, many of them, live to realize its bitter fruits. By uniting with others, they may at once receive and communicate much good.

To conclude. Let every one engage in this necessary and important work. Commence a formidable resistance, be vigilant, be united, be strong, and let us indulge the hope, that our town, and our nation may reach the maturity of age, and the summit of prosperity, never to descend; but to continue to the latest posterity, the happy people whose God is the Lord.

AMEN.



A P P E N D I X.

THE following is the substance of the Constitution of the Moral Society, in East-Hampton.

On the 23d day of February, 1803, a large number of the inhabitants of the town of East-Hampton, assembled in the house of public worship, and after a sermon delivered on the occasion, formed themselves into a society for the suppression of vice, and the promotion of virtue, and useful knowledge; to be known by the name of the Moral Society. The following constitution was then proposed and adopted.

Article I. There shall be chosen annually in the society, a President, ³Vice-Presidents, Clerk and Treasurer. It shall be the duty of the President, and in his absence, of the ^{next} Vice-President, to preside and preserve order, in the meetings of the society. The clerk shall record the proceedings, and the treasurer shall keep the accounts of the society.

There shall be chosen, also, annually, a committee, who between each meeting of the society, shall conduct at discretion the affairs of the society, and report their proceedings at each stated meeting. In addition to the report of their proceedings, the com-

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mittee shall, also, at each meeting, report in answer to one or all the following questions,

1. What evils of a moral nature, are now existing in this community ?
2. What is the probable cause of those evils ?
3. In what manner can they, with the most probable success, be remedied ?

Art. II. It shall be the duty of each member of this society, to abstain, and if a parent or master, to endeavour to cause those committed to his care, to abstain from such immoral practices, as it is the object of this society to prevent ; and if any member shall persist in immoral conduct, he shall cease to be a member of this society.

Art. III. It shall be the duty of the members of this society, to use their influence to prevent such immoral conduct as falls under their notice ; and it shall be the duty of the society to support their committee, and to support individuals, in all prudent measures, to suppress vice and promote the objects of the institution.

Art. IV. Any person of good moral character, who wishes to join the society, shall, on subscribing to the constitution, become a member. And any in regular standing, who shall be disposed to leave the society, shall on his signifying it to the meeting, have that liberty.

It is an obvious reflection, and one which in the formation of the society in this place was early realized, that the constitution of a moral society, must be adapted to the local circumstances of the people proposing to unite. In populous cities, where neighbours have less intercourse, and vice is more bold, it may be practicable to stipulate what, in given

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cases, will be done ; but in a country town, connected by ties of blood and neighbourhood, too great particularity in the constitution, would, it was found, intimidate the virtuous, excite the opposition of the vicious, and defeat the proposed union. It was soon perceived that the utility of the society would depend less on what was said in the constitution, than on what was done by the society, when formed ; and that it would be easier to prescribe remedies, as circumstances should require, than to secure their application beforehand, by the provision of a constitution.

It will not escape observation, that in a society instituted for the suppression of vice, it cannot be expected that every member will experience at all times, and permanently, that zeal which is necessary to perpetuate the institution ; or, that those duties, which it equally belongs to all to perform, will, by all, be performed so promptly, and correctly, as if devolving on a smaller number. This consideration led to the selection of an annual committee, to transact at discretion the affairs of the society, and report at each meeting. This arrangement, in connection with the report on the moral state of society, has been found to answer the most salutary purpose. The zeal of this body will be more easily kept alive, vices will be more early noticed, and in the report of the committee, held up to public notice. This alone, will, probably in most instances, supersede the necessity of appealing to the laws.

In few places where the formation of moral societies may be attempted, will there be found any so hardened, and destitute of character, as openly to oppose the real object of the institution. The novelty of the thing may excite the prejudices of some at heart friendly to order ; and the secret enmity of

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others will lead them to excite suspicion, and circulate misrepresentation. Too great care cannot, therefore, be taken to proceed with caution, and to circulate the earliest, and most correct information. And if, in its progress, a society should meet with opposition, and be charged with creating disturbance, it should constantly be remembered, that vice is the criminal cause of the mischief, and not those who are engaged to suppress it.

FINIS.