



Lincoln's Words, America's Principles

1 **The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions:**

Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois
January 27, 1838

5 As a subject for the remarks of the evening, the perpetuation of our political institutions, is selected.

In the great journal of things happening under the sun, we, the American People, find our account running, under date of the nineteenth century of the Christian era.--We find ourselves in the peaceful possession, of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate. We
10 find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions, conducting more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty, than any of which the history of former times tells us. We, when mounting the stage of existence, found ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement or establishment of them--they are a legacy bequeathed us, by a once hardy, brave, and patriotic, but now lamented and departed race of ancestors. Their's was the task (and nobly they performed
15 it) to possess themselves, and through themselves, us, of this goodly land; and to uprear upon its hills and its valleys, a political edifice of liberty and equal rights; 'tis ours only, to transmit these, the former, unprofaned by the foot of an invader; the latter, undecayed by the lapse of time and untorn by usurpation, to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know. This task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity, and love for our species in general, all imperatively require us faithfully to perform.

20 How then shall we perform it?--At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it?-- Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never!--All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink
25 from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

1 I hope I am over wary; but if I am not, there is, even now, something of ill-omen, amongst us. I mean the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country; the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgment of Courts; and the worse than savage mobs, for the executive ministers of justice. This disposition is awfully fearful in any community; and that it now exists in ours,
 5 though grating to our feelings to admit, it would be a violation of truth, and an insult to our intelligence, to deny. Accounts of outrages committed by mobs, form the every-day news of the times. They have pervaded the country, from New England to Louisiana;--they are neither peculiar to the eternal snows of the former, nor the burning suns of the latter;--they are not the creature of climate-- neither are they confined to the slave-holding, or the non-slave- holding States. Alike, they spring up among the pleasure hunting masters of
 10 Southern slaves, and the order loving citizens of the land of steady habits.--Whatever, then, their cause may be, it is common to the whole country.

It would be tedious, as well as useless, to recount the horrors of all of them. Those happening in the State of Mississippi, and at St. Louis, are, perhaps, the most dangerous in example and revolting to humanity. In the
 15 Mississippi case, they first commenced by hanging the regular gamblers; a set of men, certainly not following for a livelihood, a very useful, or very honest occupation; but one which, so far from being forbidden by the laws, was actually licensed by an act of the Legislature, passed but a single year before. Next, negroes, suspected of conspiring to raise an insurrection, were caught up and hanged in all parts of the State: then, white men, supposed to be leagued with the negroes; and finally, strangers, from neighboring States, going
 20 thither on business, were, in many instances subjected to the same fate. Thus went on this process of hanging, from gamblers to negroes, from negroes to white citizens, and from these to strangers; till, dead men were seen literally dangling from the boughs of trees upon every road side; and in numbers almost sufficient, to rival the native Spanish moss of the country, as a drapery of the forest.

25 Turn, then, to that horror-striking scene at St. Louis. A single victim was only sacrificed there. His story is very short; and is, perhaps, the most highly tragic, if anything of its length, that has ever been witnessed in real life. A mulatto man, by the name of McIntosh, was seized in the street, dragged to the suburbs of the city, chained to a tree, and actually burned to death; and all within a single hour from the time he had been a freeman, attending to his own business, and at peace with the world.

30 Such are the effects of mob law; and such as the scenes, becoming more and more frequent in this land so lately famed for love of law and order; and the stories of which, have even now grown too familiar, to attract any thing more, than an idle remark.

35 But you are, perhaps, ready to ask, "What has this to do with the perpetuation of our political institutions?" I answer, it has much to do with it. Its direct consequences are, comparatively speaking, but a small evil; and much of its danger consists, in the proneness of our minds, to regard its direct, as its only consequences. Abstractly considered, the hanging of the gamblers at Vicksburg, was of but little consequence. They constitute a portion of population, that is worse than useless in any community; and their death, if no
 40 pernicious example be set by it, is never matter of reasonable regret with any one. If they were annually swept, from the stage of existence, by the plague or small pox, honest men would, perhaps, be much profited, by the operation.--Similar too, is the correct reasoning, in regard to the burning of the negro at

1 St. Louis. He had forfeited his life, by the perpetration of an outrageous murder, upon one of the most
worthy and respectable citizens of the city; and had not he died as he did, he must have died by the
sentence of the law, in a very short time afterwards. As to him alone, it was as well the way it was, as it could
otherwise have been.--But the example in either case, was fearful.--When men take it in their heads to day,
5 to hang gamblers, or burn murderers, they should recollect, that, in the confusion usually attending such
transactions, they will be as likely to hang or burn some one who is neither a gambler nor a murderer as one
who is; and that, acting upon the example they set, the mob of to-morrow, may, and probably will, hang
or burn some of them by the very same mistake. And not only so; the innocent, those who have ever set
their faces against violations of law in every shape, alike with the guilty, fall victims to the ravages of mob
10 law; and thus it goes on, step by step, till all the walls erected for the defense of the persons and property
of individuals, are trodden down, and disregarded. But all this even, is not the full extent of the evil.--By
such examples, by instances of the perpetrators of such acts going unpunished, the lawless in spirit, are
encouraged to become lawless in practice; and having been used to no restraint, but dread of punishment,
they thus become, absolutely unrestrained.--Having ever regarded Government as their deadliest bane, they
15 make a jubilee of the suspension of its operations; and pray for nothing so much, as its total annihilation.
While, on the other hand, good men, men who love tranquility, who desire to abide by the laws, and enjoy
their benefits, who would gladly spill their blood in the defense of their country; seeing their property
destroyed; their families insulted, and their lives endangered; their persons injured; and seeing nothing in
prospect that forebodes a change for the better; become tired of, and disgusted with, a Government that
20 offers them no protection; and are not much averse to a change in which they imagine they have nothing
to lose. Thus, then, by the operation of this mobocratic spirit, which all must admit, is now abroad in
the land, the strongest bulwark of any Government, and particularly of those constituted like ours, may
effectually be broken down and destroyed--I mean the attachment of the People. Whenever this effect shall
be produced among us; whenever the vicious portion of population shall be permitted to gather in bands
25 of hundreds and thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision-stores, throw printing presses
into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure, and with impunity; depend
on it, this Government cannot last. By such things, the feelings of the best citizens will become more or
less alienated from it; and thus it will be left without friends, or with too few, and those few too weak, to
make their friendship effectual. At such a time and under such circumstances, men of sufficient talent and
30 ambition will not be wanting to seize the opportunity, strike the blow, and overturn that fair fabric, which
for the last half century, has been the fondest hope, of the lovers of freedom, throughout the world.

I know the American People are much attached to their Government;--I know they would suffer much for
its sake;--I know they would endure evils long and patiently, before they would ever think of exchanging
35 it for another. Yet, notwithstanding all this, if the laws be continually despised and disregarded, if their
rights to be secure in their persons and property, are held by no better tenure than the caprice of a mob, the
alienation of their affections from the Government is the natural consequence; and to that, sooner or later, it
must come.

40 Here then, is one point at which danger may be expected.

The question recurs, "how shall we fortify against it?" The answer is simple. Let every American, every lover
of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the

1 least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of
 5 seventy-six did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution
 and Laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor;--let every man remember
 that to violate the law, is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the character of his own, and his
 5 children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that
 prattles on her lap--let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primers,
 spelling books, and in Almanacs;--let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and
 enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; and let the
 10 old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and
 conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.

While ever a state of feeling, such as this, shall universally, or even, very generally prevail throughout the
 nation, vain will be every effort, and fruitless every attempt, to subvert our national freedom.

15 When I so pressingly urge a strict observance of all the laws, let me not be understood as saying there are no
 bad laws, nor that grievances may not arise, for the redress of which, no legal provisions have been made.--I
 mean to say no such thing. But I do mean to say, that, although bad laws, if they exist, should be repealed
 as soon as possible, still while they continue in force, for the sake of example, they should be religiously
 observed. So also in unprovided cases. If such arise, let proper legal provisions be made for them with the
 20 least possible delay; but, till then, let them, if not too intolerable, be borne with.

There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law. In any case that arises, as for instance, the
 promulgation of abolitionism, one of two positions is necessarily true; that is, the thing is right within itself,
 and therefore deserves the protection of all law and all good citizens; or, it is wrong, and therefore proper
 25 to be prohibited by legal enactments; and in neither case, is the interposition of mob law, either necessary,
 justifiable, or excusable.

But, it may be asked, why suppose danger to our political institutions? Have we not preserved them for
 more than fifty years? And why may we not for fifty times as long?

30 We hope there is no sufficient reason. We hope all dangers may be overcome; but to conclude that no danger
 may ever arise, would itself be extremely dangerous. There are now, and will hereafter be, many causes,
 dangerous in their tendency, which have not existed heretofore; and which are not too insignificant to merit
 attention. That our government should have been maintained in its original form from its establishment
 35 until now, is not much to be wondered at. It had many props to support it through that period, which now
 are decayed, and crumbled away. Through that period, it was felt by all, to be an undecided experiment;
 now, it is understood to be a successful one.--Then, all that sought celebrity and fame, and distinction,
 expected to find them in the success of that experiment. Their all was staked upon it:-- their destiny
 was inseparably linked with it. Their ambition aspired to display before an admiring world, a practical
 40 demonstration of the truth of a proposition, which had hitherto been considered, at best no better, than
 problematical; namely, the capability of a people to govern themselves. If they succeeded, they were to be
 immortalized; their names were to be transferred to counties and cities, and rivers and mountains; and to be

1 revered and sung, and toasted through all time. If they failed, they were to be called knaves and fools, and fanatics for a fleeting hour; then to sink and be forgotten. They succeeded. The experiment is successful; and thousands have won their deathless names in making it so. But the game is caught; and I believe it is true, that with the catching, end the pleasures of the chase. This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already
 5 appropriated. But new reapers will arise, and they, too, will seek a field. It is to deny, what the history of the world tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us. And, when they do, they will as naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion, as others have so done before them. The question then, is, can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an edifice that has been erected by others? Most certainly it cannot. Many great and good men sufficiently
 10 qualified for any task they should undertake, may ever be found, whose ambition would inspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair; but such belong not to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle. What! think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon?--Never! Towering genius distains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored.--It sees no distinction in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It
 15 denies that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It scorns to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen. Is it unreasonable then to expect, that some man possessed of the loftiest genius, coupled with ambition sufficient to push it to its utmost stretch, will at some time, spring up among us? And when such a one does, it will require the people to be united with each
 20 other, attached to the government and laws, and generally intelligent, to successfully frustrate his designs.

Distinction will be his paramount object, and although he would as willingly, perhaps more so, acquire it by doing good as harm; yet, that opportunity being past, and nothing left to be done in the way of building up, he would set boldly to the task of pulling down.

25 Here, then, is a probable case, highly dangerous, and such a one as could not have well existed heretofore.

Another reason which once was; but which, to the same extent, is now no more, has done much in maintaining our institutions thus far. I mean the powerful influence which the interesting scenes of the
 30 revolution had upon the passions of the people as distinguished from their judgment. By this influence, the jealousy, envy, and avarice, incident to our nature, and so common to a state of peace, prosperity, and conscious strength, were, for the time, in a great measure smothered and rendered inactive; while the deep-rooted principles of hate, and the powerful motive of revenge, instead of being turned against each other, were directed exclusively against the British nation. And thus, from the force of circumstances, the basest
 35 principles of our nature, were either made to lie dormant, or to become the active agents in the advancement of the noblest cause--that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty.

But this state of feeling must fade, is fading, has faded, with the circumstances that produced it.

40 I do not mean to say, that the scenes of the revolution are now or ever will be entirely forgotten; but that like every thing else, they must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time. In history, we hope, they will be read of, and recounted, so long as the bible shall be read;-- but

1 even granting that they will, their influence cannot be what it heretofore has been. Even then, they cannot
be so universally known, nor so vividly felt, as they were by the generation just gone to rest. At the close of
that struggle, nearly every adult male had been a participator in some of its scenes. The consequence was,
5 that of those scenes, in the form of a husband, a father, a son or brother, a living history was to be found in
every family-- a history bearing the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in
the scars of wounds received, in the midst of the very scenes related--a history, too, that could be read and
understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned.--But those histories are
gone. They can be read no more forever. They were a fortress of strength; but, what invading foeman could
never do, the silent artillery of time has done; the leveling of its walls. They are gone.--They were a forest of
10 giant oaks; but the all-resistless hurricane has swept over them, and left only, here and there, a lonely trunk,
despoiled of its verdure, shorn of its foliage; unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few gentle breezes,
and to combat with its mutilated limbs, a few more ruder storms, then to sink, and be no more.

They were the pillars of the temple of liberty; and now, that they have crumbled away, that temple must
15 fall, unless we, their descendants, supply their places with other pillars, hewn from the solid quarry of
sober reason. Passion has helped us; but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold,
calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defence.--Let
those materials be moulded into general intelligence, sound morality, and in particular, a reverence for the
constitution and laws: and, that we improved to the last; that we remained free to the last; that we revered
20 his name to the last; that, during his long sleep, we permitted no hostile foot to pass over or desecrate his
resting place; shall be that which to learn the last trump shall awaken our WASHINGTON.

Upon these let the proud fabric of freedom rest, as the rock of its basis; and as truly as has been said of the
only greater institution, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

1 **Temperance Address**

Springfield, Illinois

February 22, 1842

5 Although the Temperance cause has been in progress for near twenty years, it is apparent to all, that it is, just now, being crowned with a degree of success, hitherto unparalleled.

The list of its friends is daily swelled by the additions of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands. The cause itself seems suddenly transformed from a cold abstract theory, to a living, breathing, active, and powerful
10 chieftain, going forth “conquering and to conquer.” The citadels of his great adversary are daily being stormed and dismantled; his temple and his altars, where the rites of his idolatrous worship have long been performed, and where human sacrifices have long been wont to be made, are daily desecrated and deserted. The trump of the conqueror’s fame is sounding from hill to hill, from sea to sea, and from land to land, and calling millions to his standard at a blast.

15

For this new and splendid success, we heartily rejoice. That that success is so much greater now than heretofore, is doubtless owing to rational causes; and if we would have it continue, we shall do well to inquire what those causes are. The warfare heretofore waged against the demon Intemperance, has, somehow or other, been erroneous. Either the champions engaged, or the tactics they adopted have not been the most
20 proper. These champions for the most part have been Preachers, Lawyers, and hired agents. Between these and the mass of mankind, there is a want of approachability, if the term be admissible, partially, at least, fatal to their success. They are supposed to have no sympathy of feeling or interest, with those very persons whom it is their object to convince and persuade.

25 And again, it is so common and so easy to ascribe motives to men of these classes, other than those they profess to act upon. The preacher, it is said, advocates temperance because he is a fanatic, and desires a union of the Church and State; the lawyer, from his pride and vanity of hearing himself speak; and the hired agent, for his salary. But when one, who has long been known as a victim of intemperance bursts the fetters that have bound him, and appears before his neighbors “clothed, and in his right mind,” a redeemed specimen
30 of long-lost humanity, and stands up with tears of joy trembling in his eyes, to tell of the miseries once endured, now to be endured no more forever; of his once naked and starving children, now clad and fed comfortably; of a wife long weighed down with woe, weeping, and a broken heart, now restored to health, happiness, and a renewed affection; and how easily it is all done, once it is resolved to be done; how simple his language, there is a logic, and an eloquence in it, that few, with human feelings, can resist. They cannot
35 say that he desires a union of church and state, for he is not a church member; they cannot say he is vain of hearing himself speak, for his whole demeanor shows he would gladly avoid speaking at all; they cannot say he speaks for pay for he receives none, and asks for none. Nor can his sincerity in any way be doubted; or his sympathy for those he would persuade to imitate his example be denied.

40 In my judgment, it is to the battles of this new class of champions that our late success is greatly, perhaps chiefly, owing. But, had the old school champions themselves, been of the most wise selecting, was their system of tactics, the most judicious? It seems to me, it was not. Too much denunciation against dram

1 sellers and dram drinkers was indulged in. This, I think, was both impolitic and unjust. It was impolitic,
 because, it is not much in the nature of man to be driven to anything; still less to be driven about that which
 is exclusively his own business; and least of all, where such driving is to be submitted to, at the expense
 of pecuniary interest, or burning appetite. When the dram-seller and drinker, were incessantly told, not
 5 in accents of entreaty and persuasion, diffidently addressed by erring man to an erring brother; but in the
 thundering tones of anathema and denunciation, with which the lordly Judge often groups together all the
 crimes of the felon's life, and thrusts them in his face just ere he passes sentence of death upon him, that
 they were the authors of all the vice and misery and crime in the land; that they were the manufacturers
 and material of all the thieves and robbers and murderers that infested the earth; that their houses were the
 10 workshops of the devil; and that their persons should be shunned by all the good and virtuous, as moral
 pestilences -- I say, when they were told all this, and in this way, it is not wonderful that they were slow, very
 slow, to acknowledge the truth of such denunciations, and to join the ranks of their denouncers in a hue and
 cry against themselves.

15 To have expected them to do otherwise than they did -- to have expected them not to meet denunciation
 with denunciation, crimination with crimination, and anathema with anathema, was to expect a reversal
 of human nature, which is God's decree, and never can be reversed. When the conduct of men is designed
 to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. It is an old and a true
 maxim, that a "drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall." So with men. If you would win a man
 20 to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his
 heart, which, say what he will, is the great highroad to his reason, and which, when once gained, you will
 find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of your cause, if indeed that cause really be a
 just one. On the contrary, assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his action, or to mark him as
 one to be shunned and despised, and he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and his
 25 heart; and though your cause be naked truth itself, transformed to the heaviest lance, harder than steel, and
 sharper than steel can be made, and though you throw it with more than Herculean force and precision, you
 shall be no more be able to pierce him, than to penetrate the hard shell of a tortoise with a rye straw.

Such is man, and so must he be understood by those who would lead him, even to his own best interest.

30 On this point, the Washingtonians greatly excel the temperance advocates of former times. Those whom
 they desire to convince and persuade, are their old friends and companions. They know they are not
 demons, nor even the worst of men. They know that generally, they are kind, generous, and charitable,
 even beyond the example of their more staid and sober neighbors. They are practical philanthropists; and
 35 they glow with a generous and brotherly zeal, that mere theorizers are incapable of feeling. Benevolence and
 charity possess their hearts entirely; and out of the abundance of their hearts, their tongues give utterance.
 "Love through all their actions runs, and all their words are mild." In this spirit they speak and act, and
 in the same, they are heard and regarded. And when such is the temper of the advocate, and such of the
 audience, no good cause can be unsuccessful.

40 But I have said that denunciations against dram-sellers and dram-drinkers are unjust as well as impolitic. Let
 us see.

1 I have not enquired at what period of time the use of intoxicating drinks commenced; nor is it important
to know. It is sufficient that to all of us who now inhabit the world, the practice of drinking them, is just as
old as the world itself, -- that is, we have seen the one, just as long as we have seen the other. When all such
of us, as have now reached the years of maturity, first opened our eyes upon the stage of existence, we found
5 intoxicating liquor, recognized by everybody, used by every body, and repudiated by nobody. It commonly
entered into the first draught of the infant, and the last draught of the dying man. From the sideboard of the
parson, down to the ragged pocket of the houseless loafer, it was constantly found. Physicians prescribed it
in this, that, and the other disease. Government provided it for soldiers and sailors; and to have a rolling or
raising, a husking or hoe-down, any where about without it, was positively insufferable.

10 So too, it was every where a respectable article of manufacture and merchandise. The making of it was
regarded as an honorable livelihood; and he who could make most, was the most enterprising and
respectable. Large and small manufactories of it were every where erected, in which all the earthly goods of
their owners were invested. Wagons drew it from town to town -- boats bore it from clime to clime, and
15 the winds wafted it from nation to nation; and merchants bought and sold it, by wholesale and retail, with
precisely the same feelings, on the part of the seller, buyer, and bystander, as are felt at the selling and buying
of flour, beef, bacon, or any other of the real necessities of life. Universal public opinion not only tolerated,
but recognized and adopted its use.

20 It is true, that even then, it was known and acknowledged, that many were greatly injured by it; but none
seemed to think the injury arose from the use of a bad thing, but from the abuse of a very good thing.
The victims of it were pitied, and compassionated, just as now are the heirs of consumptions, and other
hereditary diseases. Their failing was treated as a misfortune, and not as a crime, or even as a disgrace.

25 If, then, what I have been saying be true, is it wonderful, that some should think and act now as all thought
and acted twenty years ago? And is it just to assail, condemn, or despise them, for doing so? The universal
sense of mankind, on any subject, is an argument, or at least an influence not easily overcome. The success
of the argument in favor of the existence of an over-ruling Providence, mainly depends upon that sense; and
men ought not, in justice, to be denounced for yielding to it, in any case, or giving it up slowly, especially,
30 where they are backed by interest, fixed habits, or burning appetites.

Another error, as it seems to me, into which the old reformers fell, was, the position that all habitual
drunkards were utterly incorrigible, and therefore, must be turned adrift, and damned without remedy, in
order that the grace of temperance might abound to the temperate then, and to all mankind some hundred
35 years thereafter. There is in this something so repugnant to humanity, so uncharitable, so cold-blooded and
feelingless, that it never did, nor ever can enlist the enthusiasm of a popular cause. We could not love the
man who taught it -- we could not hear him with patience. The heart could not throw open its portals to
it. The generous man could not adopt it. It could not mix with his blood. It looked so fiendishly selfish, so
like throwing fathers and brothers overboard, to lighten the boat for our security -- that the noble minded
40 shrank from the manifest meanness of the thing.

1 And besides this, the benefits of a reformation to be effected by such a system, were too remote in point
of time, to warmly engage many in its behalf. Few can be induced to labor exclusively for posterity; and
none will do it enthusiastically. Posterity has done nothing for us; and theorize on it as we may, practically
we shall do very little for it, unless we are made to think, we are, at the same time, doing something for
5 ourselves. What an ignorance of human nature does it exhibit, to ask or expect a whole community to rise
up and labor for the temporal happiness of others after themselves shall be consigned to the dust, a majority
of which community take no pains whatever to secure their own eternal welfare, at a no greater distant day?
Great distance, in either time or space, has wonderful power to lull and render quiescent the human mind.
Pleasures to be enjoyed, or pains to be endured, after we shall be dead and gone, are but little regarded, even
10 in our own cases, and much less in the cases of others.

Still, in addition to this, there is something so ludicrous in promises of good, or threats of evil, a great way
off, as to render the whole subject with which they are connected, easily turned into ridicule. "Better lay
down that spade you are stealing, Paddy; --if you don't you'll pay for it at the day of judgment." "Be the
15 powers, if ye'll credit me so long, I'll take another, jist."

By the Washingtonians, this system of consigning the habitual drunkard to hopeless ruin, is repudiated.
They adopt a more enlarged philanthropy. They go for present as well as future good. They labor for all now
living, as well as all hereafter to live. They teach hope to all -- despair to none. As applying to their cause,
20 they deny the doctrine of unpardonable sin. As in Christianity it is taught, so in this they teach, that

"While the lamp holds out to burn, The vilest sinner may return."

And, what is a matter of more profound gratulation, they, by experiment upon experiment, and example
upon example, prove the maxim to be no less true in the one case than in the other. On every hand we
25 behold those, who but yesterday, were the chief of sinners, now the chief apostles of the cause. Drunken
devils are cast out by ones, by sevens, and by legions; and their unfortunate victims, like the poor possessed,
who was redeemed from his long and lonely wanderings in the tombs, are publishing to the ends of the
earth, how great things have been done for them.

To these new champions, and this new system of tactics, our late success is mainly owing; and to them
30 we must mainly look for the final consummation. The ball is now rolling gloriously on, and none are so
able as they to increase its speed, and its bulk -- to add to its momentum, and its magnitude. Even though
unlearned in letters, for this task, none are so well educated. To fit them for this work, they have been taught
in the true school. They have been in that gulf, from which they would teach others the means of escape.
They have passed that prison wall, which others have long declared impassable; and who that has not shall
35 dare to weigh opinions with them, as to the mode of passing.

But if it be true, as I have insisted, that those who have suffered by intemperance personally, and have
reformed, are the most powerful and efficient instruments to push the reformation to ultimate success, it
does not follow, that those who have not suffered, have no part left them to perform. Whether or not the
40 world would be vastly benefitted by a total and final banishment from it of all intoxicating drinks, seems to
me not now an open question. Three-fourths of mankind confess the affirmative with their tongues, and, I
believe, all the rest acknowledge it in their hearts.

1 Ought any, then, to refuse their aid in doing what the good of the whole demands? Shall he, who cannot
do much, be, for that reason, excused if he do nothing? “But,” says one, “what good can I do by signing the
pledge? I never drink even without signing.” This question has already been asked and answered more than
5 millions of times. Let it be answered once more. For the man suddenly, or in any other way, to break off
from the use of drams, who has indulged in them for a long course of years, and until his appetite for them
has become ten or a hundred fold stronger, and more craving, than any natural appetite can be, requires a
most powerful moral effort. In such an undertaking, he needs every moral support and influence, that can
possibly be brought to his aid, and thrown around him. And not only so; but every moral prop, should be
10 taken from whatever argument might rise in his mind to lure him to his backsliding. When he casts his eyes
around him, he should be able to see, all that he respects, all that he admires, and all that [he?] loves, kindly
and anxiously pointing him onward; and none beckoning him back, to his former miserable “wallowing in
the mire.”

But it is said by some, that men will think and act for themselves; that none will disuse spirits or anything
15 else, merely because his neighbors do; and that moral influence is not that powerful engine contended for.
Let us examine this. Let me ask the man who could maintain this position most stiffly, what compensation
he will accept to go to church some Sunday and sit during the sermon with his wife’s bonnet upon his head?
Not a trifle, I’ll venture. And why not? There would be nothing irreligious in it: nothing immoral, nothing
uncomfortable. Then why not? Is it not because there would be something egregiously unfashionable in it?
20 Then it is the influence of fashion; and what is the influence of fashion, but the influence that other people’s
actions have [on our own?] actions, the strong inclination each of us feels to do as we see all our neighbors
do? Nor is the influence of fashion confined to any particular thing or class of things. It is just as strong on
one subject as another. Let us make it as unfashionable to withhold our names from the temperance cause as
for husbands to wear their wives bonnets to church, and instances will be just as rare in the one case as the
25 other.

“But,” say some, “we are no drunkards; and we shall not acknowledge ourselves such by joining a reformed
drunkard’s society, whatever our influence might be.” Surely no Christian will adhere to this objection.
If they believe, as they profess, that Omnipotence condescended to take on himself the form of sinful
30 man, and, as such, to die an ignominious death for their sakes, surely they will not refuse submission to
the infinitely lesser condescension, for the temporal, and perhaps eternal salvation, of a large, erring, and
unfortunate class of their own fellow creatures. Nor is the condescension very great.

In my judgment, such of us as have never fallen victims, have been spared more by the absence of appetite,
35 than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have. Indeed, I believe, if we take habitual
drunkards as a class, their heads and their hearts will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any
other class. There seems ever to have been a proneness in the brilliant, and warm-blooded to fall into
this vice. The demon of intemperance ever seems to have delighted in sucking the blood of genius and of
generosity. What one of us but can call to mind some dear relative, more promising in youth than all his
40 fellows, who has fallen a sacrifice to his rapacity? He ever seems to have gone forth, like the Egyptian angel
of death, commissioned to slay if not the first, the fairest born of every family. Shall he now be arrested in

1 his desolating career? In that arrest, all can give aid that will; and who shall be excused that can, and will
 not? Far around as human breath has ever blown, he keeps our fathers, our brothers, our sons, and our
 friends, prostrate in the chains of moral death. To all the living every where we cry, “come sound the moral
 resurrection trump, that these may rise and stand up, an exceeding great army” -- “Come from the four
 5 winds, O breath! and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

If the relative grandeur of revolutions shall be estimated by the great amount of human misery they alleviate,
 and the small amount they inflict, then, indeed, will this be the grandest the world shall ever have seen.
 Of our political revolution of '76, we all are justly proud. It has given us a degree of political freedom, far
 10 exceeding that of any other nation of the earth. In it the world has found a solution of the long mooted
 problem, as to the capability of man to govern himself. In it was the germ which has vegetated, and still is to
 grow and expand into the universal liberty of mankind.

But with all these glorious results, past, present, and to come, it had its evils too. It breathed forth famine,
 15 swam in blood and rode in fire; and long, long after, the orphan's cry, and the widow's wail, continued to
 break the sad silence that ensued. These were the price, the inevitable price, paid for the blessings it bought.

Turn now, to the temperance revolution. In it, we shall find a stronger bondage broken; a viler slavery,
 manumitted; a greater tyrant deposed. In it, more of want supplied, more disease healed, more sorrow
 20 assuaged. By it no orphans starving, no widows weeping. By it, none wounded in feeling, none injured in
 interest. Even the dram-maker, and dram seller, will have glided into other occupations so gradually, as never
 to have felt the change; and will stand ready to join all others in the universal song of gladness.

And what a noble ally this, to the cause of political freedom. With such an aid, its march cannot fail to
 25 be on and on, till every son of earth shall drink in rich fruition, the sorrow quenching draughts of perfect
 liberty. Happy day, when, all appetites controlled, all poisons subdued, all matter subjected, mind, all
 conquering mind, shall live and move the monarch of the world. Glorious consummation! Hail fall of Fury!
 Reign of Reason, all hail!

30 And when the victory shall be complete -- when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth
 -- how proud the title of that Land, which may truly claim to be the birth-place and the cradle of both those
 revolutions, that shall have ended in that victory. How nobly distinguished that People, who shall have
 planted, and nurtured to maturity, both the political and moral freedom of their species.

35 This is the one hundred and tenth anniversary of the birth-day of Washington. We are met to celebrate
 this day. Washington is the mightiest name of earth -- long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty; still
 mightiest in moral reformation. On that name, an eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the
 sun, or glory to the name of Washington, is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce
 the name, and in its naked deathless splendor, leave it shining on.

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