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J. THELWALL.

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THE LECTURER.

To paint the voice, and fix the fleeting sound. HAYLEY.

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of connection ought to have followed immediately that which is here concluded. But a catastrophe of another kind deranged my plan. The parent whose approaching dissolution I alluded to in the preceding lecture, expired in less than six and thirty hours after its delivery, and the mind, struggling between the duty of fortitude, and the pangs of affection, was naturally distracted from the regular pursuit of previously digested plans. On the Friday evening my place was supplied by a friend: and on the Wednesday following when I resumed my situation in the rostrum, I was instinctively led to the consideration of a subject in some degree connected with the event that had taken place, and the state of my private feelings: nor was it till I came to correct the preceding pages for the press, that I recollected that my course of lectures relative to the present unfortunate hostilities was not completed. The subject, however, demands the most serious and persevering investigation; it will, therefore, be resumed, in the course of the present season. In the mean time, it will not perhaps, be disagreeable to the reader to have the theme diversified; and I proceed accordingly with the lectures in the succession in which they were delivered.

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Lecture—On the Moral and Political Influence of the Prospective Principle of Virtue.

CITIZENS, neither the forms of the world, nor my own feelings permitted me to address you on the last Friday evening; and I would, if I could have devised any effectual means, have prevented on that evening any assembly in this place. But as I found that impracticable, or rather, as my mind was not in a state to seek for expediency, I thought the best way to prevent any disturbance, which might have arisen from a multitude of persons assembling, who could not gain admittance, was to get a friend to take this situation for me. I did accordingly procure a Citizen of whose understanding and excellent principles I have the highest opinion, and who, I am sure, is well qualified to utter those truths to which it is worth the while of any individual to listen.

Citizens, the subject of this evening's lecture is "The Prospective Principle of Virtue;" or, in other words, "That
all Virtues consist in so directing our exertions, and regulating our passions that we may be constantly promoting the future good of mankind." This is a principle, Citizens, in itself, so consistent with reason that it, almost at the very first blush, presents itself to us as unanswerable and self-evident. And yet, Citizens, when we come seriously to investigate this principle, when we come to follow it through all the mazes of practice, into which it will lead us, perhaps there are few of us who have not some prejudices, some habits of mind which will be shocked, some dispositions and principles long imbibed which will be found to be very deeply and materially wounded by this principle.

It is our duty, however, in the first instance, seriously and maturely to deliberate upon the principles of human action; and when we have brought them to the test of reason and argument, and are thoroughly convinced of their truth and authenticity, we must not be terrified at any particular conclusions that may result. Particular conclusions are only the branches of the tree; frequently only the leaves at the extremities of those branches. If the root, therefore, is good, for principles are the root—the flamina of all moral excellence—we must not take it into our heads, that we are at liberty to root them up—to fell them to the earth, because there are particular conclusions resulting from them, which are hostile to our passions, or inconsistent with our habitual mode of thinking. I am, however, aware that liberal as the auditory I have so frequently the honour of meeting here has generally been, notwithstanding their habits of free enquiry, that, yet, I may, perhaps, in the progress of this investigation, advance some doctrines, so new and unexpected that their minds may, in the first instance, revolt from them. Let it be remembered, however, Citizens, that novelty is of itself no proof of falsehood, that the opinions of six moments and of six thousand years, if such an opinion should be found, stands precisely upon the same basis, the basis of reason and argument; and, therefore, must be brought to the same test of experimental investigation, or else must be permitted to fall at once, and be abandoned as unworthy our adoption.

Citizens, though I shall speak my opinions with that firmness which results from the conviction of my own mind, yet I warn you again—I have warned you frequently, but I cannot too often, that I do not deliver opinions from this place, for you to adopt them without examination. I advance them for your serious
serious investigation, and I warn you again and again, to beware of that prejudice which, from having formed attachments to individuals, leads us to take for granted all they say. I most seriously recommend you to be as averse to a Pope in Beaufort Buildings as to a Pope at Rome.

Citizens, giving you this warning, I shall proceed without remorse or fear to cut up wide and deep rooted prejudices, with all the power and energy I am master of. These things which appear to be prejudices to me, may perhaps upon better examination appear to others well founded truths. My opinions (though the results, I believe, of very dispassionate, and I am sure of very anxious enquiry) may, also, upon more mature deliberation, appear even to myself to have been taken up too hastily, and I shall never be ashamed publicly to change my opinions as often as I am convinced they are wrong. We live to improve, if we are wise; and if we are virtuous, we live not only to improve ourselves but to improve our fellow beings, by encouraging free and liberal enquiry, and submitting, with candour and sincerity, to their investigation, the sentiments which we believe important to their felicity and virtue: and if we treat with detestation the wretch who hoards his gilded counters in a box; with how much more contempt ought we to look upon that individual who locks up in secrecy the more invaluable treasures of the human mind, the discoveries (be they small or be they great) which he has either made, or supposes he has made in the progress of his enquiries. The widow’s mite, we are told, was an acceptable offering; the mite of science is an acceptable offering also; and he it remembered that with knowledge, as with coin, we must divide it into small parts before we can diffuse it through the general circle of society, and fit it for the accommodations and uses of common life.

If, Citizens, virtue consists in promoting the happiness of mankind—if virtue, in reality, means neither more nor less than intentionally doing that which is best for general happiness and welfare, it results, I conceive, as an inevitable consequence, that all virtue must be of an active, not of a passive nature; and, therefore, that it is the duty of every individual to keep his eye steadily fixed upon that which is before him, and to lose none of the powers and energies of intellect in unavailing glances upon what is past, and never can return. Citizens, this argument will lead us to many conclusions hostile to the general sentiments of mankind. Superstition, with her hood and cowl, presents herself before us at every step, with her
her doctrines of repentance, contrition, retaliation, and retributive justice, and points us back again to the dark and gloomy paths of error, which we, and which others may have passed; and bids us, in sackcloth and ashes, consume our faculties in unavailing lamentations, which can never undo the acts that are past, but which have but too powerful an influence to unfit us for what is to come. We shall find, also, that many of the institutions and habits of society are equally unfriendly to a steady and consistent perseverance in this prospective principle: and hence the general disposition of mankind to brood over the past; to hatch in fullen silence the gloomy passions of despondency and revenge;—hence also the fullen traits of misanthropy which deform the human character and reduce it almost to the brute. Nay, strange to say, the wisdom of ages has conspired to aslift this malignant retrospective principle; and the administration of civil justice almost every where recals to our minds the evils which, because they are irreparable ought to be forgotten, and plungs us, thereby, but too frequently, in others that might have been avoided. You have been told, it is true, in this country, that punishments (such is the cant and theory of law!) are inflicted, not because particular acts of criminality have been done, but because they should not be repeated. But look at the general practice of mankind, mark the arguments with which they maintain their systems, and then tell me whether another principle, the fullen principle of revenge, is not the legitimate offspring of the system; and frequently, and evidently, the prompting motive even with the legislature itself.

Citizens, the retrospective system, the system of brooding over the past, instead of looking forward to the future, has also another tendency of a most fatal description. It frequently sinks the first and greatest characters into despondency and lethargy. We have found, by a gloomy interference of superstition, man unnerved of the energies of his nature; we have seen characters whose powers of mind might have darted like lightning from one extremity of the universe to another sunk by this enfeebling principle into fullen misanthropic monks, and devoting their lives to melancholy sighs and unavailing regrets for the errors (superstitious or real) into which in the vigour of intemperate youth they had been betrayed: and monarchs, and great commanders have shut themselves in their closets to beat their breasts, and rend their souls in repentance for past transgressions, while the cruel, but less infatuated invader, routed their armies and defoliated their country.

Citizens,
Citizens, whatever may have been our errors, let us recollect, that there is a nobler path for man to tread. Whatever wrongs he may have committed, whatever errors he may have fallen into, while energy remains, there may be reparation to society. Virtue and beneficence are still attainable; and the same energies which, under the delusions of error, made him criminal, guided by the light of truth, might produce such qualities and such effects as would make full compensation to the world.

Charles VI. after desolating whole nations, and plunging into all the crimes which conquerors (and none but conquerors, and would be conquerors) can perpetrate, retired within the walls of a monastery to white-wash his soul with prayers and repentance, and brood over the remembrance of his inhuman guilt. But if, instead of this he had exercised those powers and faculties of mind which he possessed, and used in a proper manner the advantages of his elevated situation, he might have rendered the latter period of his life as beneficial to the cause of truth and virtue as the former part had been inimical to the happiness of the human race.

Citizens, I do not mean to condemn that retrospective glance which surveys the vices and errors of the past, with a view to enable us to avoid them for the future; or which contemplates the virtues of former times, to increase the useful energies of mind. Certainly not. If the page of history ought to be explored, it is still more important that the history of our own private conduct should be searched with critical severity. But for what purpose? That we may afterwards lose our time in repentance—that we may exclude ourselves from the society of those fellow beings who have a just claim upon our exertions in the promotion of the general happiness? No: These are not the objects we are to have in view; and if we are to study with real views of wisdom and benevolence, the history of the human mind, we shall find that every moment of our existence has its duties, that every power and energy has its correspondent obligations, and that, therefore, not one moment, not one thought can virtuously be cast away in any other employment but that of seeking to promote the present and future happiness of mankind, with whose happiness our own is incorporated; and without the promotion of which no generous mind can itself receive the smallest particle of consolation.

But, Citizens, the contrary conduct so frequently preached and enforced by all the artifices which could be invented, has
its charms for a particular class of people; and we cannot be surprised that there have been men who found it their interest to encourage the desponding, listless, melancholy misanthropy of the retrospective principle.

Yes, Citizens, there is a particular class of jugglers in the world, to whom truth is by no means acceptable; who cannot digest—(though, in some respects, they seem to have the digestion of an ostrich, and no stone is too big, no iron too hard or too rusty for their stomachs;) notwithstanding this, they are not capable of digesting so plain, simple, wholesome, and alimentary a maxim as that "the only thing a man can do in this world that entitles him to respect and veneration, is prompting the happiness and welfare of his fellow citizens."—Fellow Citizens of the world, I mean! Not Citizens of a town or district.

These men, therefore, finding it their interest to support a different sentiment, have chosen to oppose a system to beneficial to the human race, and to teach those who have the misfortune to fall under their tuition, that melancholy and repentance, are the proper feelings with which the lamp of life should be consumed; because they know very well, that such dispositions unnerving the energies of the human mind, filling the soul with images of terror and apprehension, though the most unfriendly to human happiness and virtue, are very well calculated to make the poor slave of their ridiculous artifices, obedient to their exactions, and subservient to their ambition. If they can make terror, in this manner, the order of the day, they know very well that, in consequence of the bugbears which the melancholy imagination is too apt to realize, they can make the poor victims come to them with their laps full of those good things, which might, according to my opinion, be better distributed among the industrious orders of the community. But they, right wisely, no doubt, think otherwise. Their inspiration teaches them—and who shall contend with the inspirations of the spirit, that these good things are more fit for the luxurious accommodation of their tables than to be thrown to a poor, despicable, grunting, swinish multitude, who, as they have no fleece to be shorn certainly cannot expect to be considered as part of their flock!

Thus, then, Citizens, this retrospective system which has such a tendency to unnerve the character of man, to annihilate those active virtues by which only the human race can be benefited, and to reduce him to the sole dominion of melancholy
choly, terror, and dejection, are principles which we must expect will continue to be propagated so long as one class of mankind are paid for deluding the rest.

Is it not evident then, Citizens, that the only energy of character likely to be produced by this retrospective principle, is the feeling of revenge: a passion, indeed, active enough in its operation, and productive of many and many a tale over which the eye will pour with anxious avidity, but which no friend to human happiness will wish to see encouraged.

This has hitherto been the common principle of action between nation and nation. Hence is the page of history deformed with continued tales of slaughter and devastation. Hence imaginary insults, which the flag, or the flag-staff of one country (for I see no difference between the gaudy rags and toys of national vanity and the sticks that carry them), may receive from the flag or flag-staff of another. Hence the slightest injury offered to Courts and Princes, has plunged the world in scenes of horror and desolation. Hence it stands recorded on the page of history, that the favourite of one great man bidding against the favourite of another great man for a ring, at a common auction, plunged the Roman empire, that is to say, almost the whole of the then known world into a destructive civil war, which ended in the tyrannous usurpation of Augustus Cæsar, and the total overthrow of the profligate Mark Anthony.

Citizens, whether this last anecdote is accurately true or not, is not worth our investigation. We have witnessed of late, a quarrel almost as ridiculous. We have seen two great nations on the eve of being plunged into a chaos of mutual slaughter and desolation for a few cat skins. It is very true, the agitation of this question might have been encouraged by a bird’s eye prospect of a better ground of quarrel; and the two nations that pretended to be about to clapper-de-claw one another about the insult offered to these said cat skins, might, perhaps, have had their eyes upon a sweeter piece of vengeance; and while they were pretending to quarrel, were, perhaps agreeing to divide the robe of which they thought to strip the insolent, Jacobinical nation of France, which had dared to provoke the just revenge of all regular governments, by talking of rights and liberties.

Not only between nation and nation, has this spirit of revenge, the first fruit of the system of retrospective virtue, as it is called, been plunged in war and desolation; but party has whetted the dagger against party, and faction uplifted the axe.
axe against the head of faction from the same detestable cause. Thus we find in almost all the histories of the universe, that one party seldom prevails over another, but the scaffold streams with the blood of the vanquished, and scenes of horror present themselves on every hand, from the contention of principles and struggles of intellect, which might have been productive, but for these revengeful principles, of the greatest portion of happiness and instruction to mankind.

See, Citizens, from this principle of revenge what dreadful consequences have taken place in France! The most noble, the most virtuous, the most magnificent principles that ever were broached by man, have produced effects which tyranny itself can hardly surpass. We have seen from the seeds of freedom, a harvest of desolation. We have seen party struggling with party, stimulated at first, perhaps, by the private feelings of ambition, or the more destructive, though at the same time, in some degree, more excusable principle of universal suspicion, but embittered by opposition, rising to a horrid enthusiasm of revenge which the soul of benevolence trembles to contemplate. The prodigacy of manners and the inflexible rage of vengeance, which the cruelty of the Court and the superstition of the Church had conspired to engender in that country, bursting forth in the ferment of the revolution, laid for awhile in the dust the bleeding limbs of that freedom which the revolution was intended to promote: though, happily for mankind, physicians have been found to stanch the wounds and restore her again to the universe.

Citizens, I had hopes that the excesses and cruelties of the system of revenge in that country were entirely at an end. I did believe that the benign principles of benevolence and liberty had completely triumphed; that the scaffolds were to stream with the victims of vengeance no more; but that peace and universal philanthropy were to twine their myrtles together with that laurel which triumphant energy has reaped in the fields of victory; but, alas! I cannot read without regret one part of the present transactions in that country. Perhaps while I am speaking, four individuals who, whatever may be their vices, certainly shine conspicuous in the ranks of intellectual energy, have fallen by the guillotine of vengeance, victims to the party that now prevails in France.

Citizens, this is not the howl of apathy, this is not the lamentation of a man who wishes for a pretence to desert his principles. I adore—I care not what danger there may be in the declaration! I will not exist longer than I can speak the truths.
truths that I believe to be useful to my fellow Citizens!—
I will proclaim my principles, because I am sure if mankind
would but act candidly and fairly, and avow the genuine feelings
of their hearts, that system of terror and tyranny which has
to long subjugated the nations of Europe, must fade and
shrink away without a struggle—without an individual vic-
tim.—I glory in the principles of the French Revolution! I ex-
ult in the triumphs of reason! I am an advocate for the rights
of man! nor will I desert my principles, without a better rea-
son than the example that other men have acted inconsist-
ently with theirs. But daggers and guillotines are not prin-
ciples. The disordered imagination of a Burke, the meta-
physical phrenzy of a Windham, or the artful and studied
arrangements of that great mathematician Pitt, may confound
things together as opposite as darkness to light, or as their dar-
ling measures to the interests of humanity and justice; but we
will not be so deceived. Daggers and guillotines are not prin-
ciples; massacres and executions are not arguments; the prin-
ciples of truth still continue to be true, though those men
who have them most frequently on their lips, should happen;
in some instances, to have them least frequently in their
hearts. It is not the men of France, that I glory in; it is not
the execution of the King—I am an enemy to all execu-
tions! it is not the fall of the Bastille, for a Bastille, a Lux-
emburg, or a Newgate are to me indifferent; it is not for
names it is for principles that I am anxious—it is to prin-
ciples, not to unprincipled actions, that I am wedded; and the
wanton and revengeful cruelties of Robespierre and his party
can no more prove the principles of the French revolution to
be wrong, than the sanguinary attempts of a faction in this
country, who, with all their vices without any of their vir-
tues, should attempt to establish the same system of terror
without the energy to support it, would prove that the new
fangled inquisitorial system of spies and informers, which has
supplanted the constitution of Britain, is right.

That which I glory in, in the revolution of France is this,
That it has been upheld and propagated as a principle of that
revolution, that ancient abuses are not, by their antiquity,
converted into virtues; that it has been affirmed and estab-
lished that man has rights which no statutes or usages can
take away; that intellectual beings are entitled to the use of
their intellects; that the object of society is the promotion
of the general happiness of mankind; that thought ought
to be free, and that the propagation of thought is the duty of every individual; that one order of society has no right, how many years forever they have been guilty of the pillage, to plunder and oppress the other parts of the community, whose persons are entitled to equal respect, and whose exertions have been much more beneficial to mankind.

These are the principles that I admire, and that cause me, notwithstanding all its excesses, to exult in the French Revolution. But I do not believe that violence and cruelty, I do not believe that scenes of carnage and execution, can either be the promoters, or the consequences of principles like these. No: the excesses and violence in France have not been the consequences of the new doctrines of the Revolution; but of the old leaven of revenge, corruption and suspicion which was generated by the system of cruelities of the old despotism.

Citizens, I am still the unaltered friend of liberty. But if liberty has not a tendency to promote the feelings of benevolence, to promote the happiness of mankind, and to make us better members of society, and more happy in our individual capacity, take your liberty, for I will have none of it.

I am convinced, however, that liberty has all these tendencies. I am convinced also, notwithstanding the excesses which have taken place in France, that the struggle in that country will be eventually beneficial, not only to that country but to the human race. I believe it was good that such a despotism as existed in France should not perpetuate itself from generation to generation; and all that I lament is that a few turbulent and ambitious spirits should have stained with their excesses the annals of the most glorious era in the history of man. Let us, however, be just to this great nation. They have received obloquy and abuse enough; they have received threats and injuries enough; let us not dwell only on the gloomy side of the picture; let us not be fond of recapitulating their vices and their errors only; let us speak, also, of those more amiable traits of character, which they have discovered; and which, even at this time, are gaining a considerable ascendency. Let us not forget the magnanimity with which they have spurned, in some very striking instances, this gloomy retrospective principle of revenge which I am so anxious to see exterminated from the human character. See how they have treated their prostrate enemies; let us remember that they present the first picture ever exhibited in the world of a conquering army imparting freedom and felicity to the people over whom they had triumphed. Think of Holland—