



MASSILLON

JEAN B. MASSILLON

JEAN BAPTISTE MASSILLON, a distinguished French divine and orator, "the Racine of the pulpit," as he has been called, was born at Hyères, Provence, France, June 24, 1663, and died at Clermont, of the see of which he was bishop, Sept. 18, 1742. In youth he studied under the fathers of the Congregation of the Oratory at Marseilles, and in 1681 he himself entered the order. For many years he lived in the Trappist monastery of Sept-Fonts, and left it at the instance of Cardinal de Noailles to become director of the Seminary of St. Magloire, in Paris. Here, and at Montpellier, he preached a series of notable Lenten sermons which made such an impression on his vast audiences that at the season of Advent, in 1699, he was summoned to preach before the French Court. This led, however, to no preferment, as Massillon was not given to flattery and possessed few of the arts of the courtier. The Regency was more favorable to him, and in 1717 he was nominated to the see of Clermont and bidden to preach the Lenten sermons of that year before Louis XV. He preached for the last time in Paris in 1723, and delivered the funeral oration over the body of the Duchess Dowager of Orléans. The remainder of his life he spent at Clermont, dying in his 85th year. His published works, embracing sixteen volumes, appeared in Paris in 1828.

THE CURSE OF A MALIGNANT TONGUE

THE tongue, says the Apostle James, is a devouring fire, a world of iniquity, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. And behold what I would have applied to the tongue of the evil-speaker, had I undertaken to give you a just and natural idea of all the enormity of this vice; I would have said that the tongue of the slanderer is a devouring fire which tarnishes whatever it touches; which exercises its fury on the good grain, equally as on the chaff; on the profane, as on the sacred; which, wherever it passes, leaves only desolation and ruin; digs even into the bowels of the earth, and fixes itself on things the most hidden; turns into vile ashes what only a moment before had appeared to us so precious and brilliant;

acts with more violence and danger than ever in the time when it was apparently smothered up and almost extinct; which blackens what it cannot consume, and sometimes sparkles and delights before it destroys. I would have told you that evil-speaking is an assemblage of iniquity; a secret pride, which discovers to us the mote in our brother's eye, but hides the beam which is in our own; a mean envy, which, hurt at the talents of prosperity of others, makes them the subject of its censures, and studies to dim the splendor of whatever outshines itself; a disguised hatred, which sheds, in its speeches, the hidden venom of the heart; an unworthy duplicity, which praises to the face and tears to pieces behind the back; a shameful levity, which has no command over itself or its words, and often sacrifices both fortune and comfort to the imprudence of an amusing conversation; a deliberate barbarity, which goes to pierce your absent brother; a scandal, where you become a subject of shame and sin to those who listen to you; an injustice, where you ravish from your brother what is dearest to him. I should have said that slander is a restless evil, which disturbs society, spreads dissension through cities and countries, disunites the strictest friendships; is the source of hatred and revenge; fills, wherever it enters, with disturbances and confusion, and everywhere is an enemy to peace, comfort, and Christian good-breeding. Lastly, I should have added that it is an evil full of deadly poison; whatever flows from it is infected and poisons whatever it approaches; that even its praises are poisoned, its applauses malicious, its silence criminal, its gestures, motions, and looks have all their venom and spread it each in their way.

Behold, what in this discourse it would have been my duty, more at large, to have exposed to your view, had I now proposed only to paint to you the vileness of the vice, which I am now going to combat; but, as I have already said, these are only general invectives, which none apply to themselves. The more odious the vice is represented, the less do you perceive yourselves concerned in it; and though you acknowledge the principle, you make no use of it in the regulation of your manners; because, in these general paintings, we always find features which resemble us not. I wish, therefore, to confine myself at present to the single object of making you feel all the injustice of that description of slander which you think the more innocent; and, lest you should not feel yourself connected with what I shall say, I shall attack it only in the pretexts which you continually employ in its justification.

Now the first pretext which authorizes in the world almost all the defamations, and is the cause that our conversations are now continual censures upon our brethren, is the pretended insignificance of the vices we expose to view. We would not wish to tarnish a man of character or ruin his fortune by dishonoring him in the world; to stain the principles of a woman's conduct by entering into the essential points of it; that would be too infamous and mean; but upon a thousand faults which lead our judgment to believe them capable of all the rest; to inspire the minds of those who listen to us with a thousand suspicions which point out what we dare not say; to make satirical remarks which discover a mystery, where no person before had perceived the least intention of concealment; by poisonous interpretations to give an air of ridicule to manners which had hitherto escaped observation; to let everything, on certain points,

be clearly understood, while protesting that they are incapable themselves of cunning or deceit, is what the world makes little scruples of; and though the motives, the circumstances, and the effects of these discourses be highly criminal, yet gayety and liveliness excuse their malignity, to those who listen to us, and even conceal from ourselves their atrocity.

I say, in the first place, the motives. I know that it is, above all, by the innocency of the intention that they pretend to justify themselves; that you continually say that your design is not to tarnish the reputation of your brother, but innocently to divert yourselves with faults which do not dishonor him in the eyes of the world. You, my dear hearer, to divert yourself with his faults! But what is that cruel pleasure which carries sorrow and bitterness to the heart of your brother? Where is the innocency of an amusement whose source springs from vices which ought to inspire you with compassion and grief? If Jesus Christ forbids us in the Gospel to invigorate the languors of conversation by idle words, shall it be more permitted to you to enliven it by derisions and censures? If the law curses him who uncovers the nakedness of his relations, shall you who add raillery and insult to the discovery be more protected from that malediction? If whoever calls his brother fool be worthy, according to Jesus Christ, of eternal fire, shall he who renders him the contempt and laughing-stock of the profane assembly escape the same punishment? You, to amuse yourself with his faults? But does charity delight in evil? Is that rejoicing in the Lord, so commanded by the Apostle? If you love your brother as yourself, can you delight in what afflicts him? Ah! the Church formerly held in horror the exhibition of

gladiators, and denied that believers, brought up in the tenderness and benignity of Jesus Christ, could innocently feast their eyes with the blood and death of these unfortunate slaves, or form a harmless recreation of so inhuman a pleasure. But you renew more detestable shows to enliven your languor; you bring upon the stage not infamous wretches devoted to death, but members of Jesus Christ, your brethren; and there you entertain the spectators with wounds which you inflict on persons rendered sacred by baptism.

Is it then necessary that your brother should suffer, to amuse you? Can you find no delight in your conversations, unless his blood, as I may say, is furnished toward your iniquitous pleasures? Edify each other, says St. Paul, by words of peace and charity; relate the wonders of God toward the just, the history of his mercies to sinners; recall the virtues of those who, with the sign of faith, have preceded us; make an agreeable relaxation to yourselves, in reciting the pious examples of your brethren with whom you live; with a religious joy speak of the victories of faith, of the aggrandizement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, of the establishment of the truth and the extinction of error, of the favors which Jesus Christ bestows on his Church, by raising up in its faithful pastors, enlightened members, and religious princes; animate yourselves to virtue by contemplating the little solidity of the world, the emptiness of pleasures, and the unhappiness of sinners, who yield themselves up to their unruly passions. Are these grand objects not worthy the delight of Christians? It was thus, however, that the first believers rejoiced in the Lord, and, from the sweets of their conversations, formed one of the most holy consolations to their temporal calamities. It is the

heart, my brethren, which decides upon our pleasures; a corrupted heart feels no delight but in what recalls to him the image of his vices; innocent delights are only suitable to virtue.

In effect, you excuse the malignity of your censures by the innocency of your intentions. But fathom the secret of your heart: Whence comes it that your sarcasms are always pointed to such an individual, and that you never amuse yourself with more wit, or more agreeably, than in recalling his faults? May it not proceed from a secret jealousy? Do not his talents, fortune, credit, station, or character, hurt you more than his faults? Would you find him so fit a subject for censure, had he fewer of those qualities which exalt him above you? Would you experience such pleasure in exposing his foibles, did not the world find qualities in him both valuable and praiseworthy? Would Saul have so often repeated with such pleasure that David was only the son of Jesse, had he not considered him as a rival, more deserving than himself of the empire? Whence comes it that the faults of all others find you more indulgent? That elsewhere you excuse everything, but here every circumstance comes empoisoned from your mouth? Go to the source, and examine if it is not some secret root of bitterness in your heart. And can you pretend to justify, by the innocency of the intention, discourses which flow from so corrupted a principle? You maintain that it is neither from hatred nor jealousy against your brother. I wish to believe it; but in your sarcasms may there not be motives, perhaps, still more shameful and mean? Is it not your wish to render yourself agreeable by turning your brother into an object of contempt and ridicule? Do you not sacrifice his character to your fortune? Courts are always so filled

with these adulatory and sordidly interested satires on each other! The great are to be pitied whenever they yield themselves up to unwarrantable aversions. Vices are soon found out, even in that virtue itself which displeases them.

But, after all, you do not feel yourselves guilty, you say, of all these vile motives; and that it is merely through indiscretion and levity of speech, if it sometimes happens that you defame your brethren. But is it by that you can suppose yourself more innocent? Levity and indiscretion; that vice so unworthy of the gravity of a Christian, so distant from the seriousness and solidity of faith, and so often condemned in the Gospel, can it justify another vice? What matters it to the brother whom you stab whether it be done through indiscretion or malice? Does an arrow, unwittingly drawn, make a less dangerous or slighter wound than if sent on purpose? Is the deadly blow which you give to your brother more slight because it was lanced through imprudence and levity? And what signifies the innocency of the intention when the action is a crime? But, besides, is there no criminality in indiscretion with regard to the reputation of your brethren? In any case whatever can more circumspection and prudence be required? Are not all the duties of Christianity comprised in that of charity? Does not all religion, as I may say, consist in that? And to be incapable of attention and care, in a point so highly essential, is it not considering, as it were, all the rest as a sport? Ah! it is here he ought to put a guard of circumspection on his tongue, weigh every word, put them together in his heart, says the sage Ecclesiasticus, and let them ripen in his mouth. Do any of these inconsiderate speeches ever escape you against yourself? Do you ever fail in attention to what interests your honor

or glory? What indefatigable cares!, what exertions and industry, to make them prosper! To what lengths we see you go, to increase your interest or to improve your fortune! If it ever happens that you take blame to yourself, it is always under circumstances which tend to your praise. You censure in yourself only faults which do you honor; and, in confessing your vices, you wish only to recapitulate your virtues. Self-love connects everything with yourself. Love your brother as you love yourself, and everything will recall you to him; you will be incapable of indiscretion where his interest is concerned, and will no longer need our instructions in respect to what you owe to his character and glory.

SIR ROBERT WALPOLE



SIR ROBERT WALPOLE, English statesman and financier, chief minister of the era of George II, was born at Houghton, Norfolk, England, Aug. 26, 1676, and died there, Earl of Orford (created 1742), March 18, 1745. Educated at Eton and at Cambridge, he entered Parliament in 1701, and in the following year became member for King's Lynn and a favorite of the Whig leaders. He rose rapidly in Parliament, became a member of the Cabinet and of the council to Prince George, was secretary of war in 1708, though personally a great lover of peace, and manager of the impeachment and prosecution of Dr. Sacheverell for censuring in his sermons the then Whig ministry. On the downfall of the latter, Walpole was accused of corruption (most politicians in his day had their price), and was for six months committed to the Tower. On the impeachment of Bolingbroke (Henry St. John) and the Tories, Walpole became chancellor of the exchequer and first lord of the treasury, and in 1721 he came into almost exclusive power as prime minister, a post he retained for twenty-one years. England at this era owed much to him for his wisdom and good government, and especially for his pacific policy and his untiring efforts to give the nation the benefit of a sound finance. It is moreover to his policy, in defeating the designs of the Jacobites, that the Hanoverian dynasty in great part owe their permanent occupancy of the British throne. Into the war with Spain, Walpole was driven against his will; in other respects, he was, though greedy of power, the greatest statesman of his time, and remarkable for his sound views on finance.

ON A MOTION FOR ADDRESSING THE KING FOR HIS REMOVAL

[The unpopularity of Walpole was greatly increased by the disasters of the Spanish war, all of which were ascribed to his bad management or want of preparation. The Opposition therefore decided, early in 1741, on the extreme measure of proposing an address to the king for his removal. Accordingly Mr. Sandys, who was designated to take the lead, gave notice of a motion to that effect on the 11th of February, 1741. At the end of two days the motion was made. A few days after, Walpole made a speech of four hours, in reply to Sandys and others, by whom he had been attacked. We have only an imperfect outline of his argument in the speech given below, but there is reason to believe that the introductory part and the conclusion are very nearly in his own words.]

IT HAS been observed by several gentlemen, in vindication of this motion, that if it should be carried neither my life, liberty, nor estate will be affected. But do the honorable gentlemen consider my character and reputation as