

THE

MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

MAY, 1851.

VOL. III.—NO. III.

THE VALUE OF AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS.

IN attempting to penetrate the spirit of American Institutions, to explain the phenomena, which they present, and to show the relative position of American civilization in the history of the world, it is improper to suppose that these things have taken place in some accidental manner,—that the outcasts of the old world, carried by some fortunate wind to the American shores, and favored by some undefined influence of our hills and vallies, our fountains and streams, commenced the superstructure of American culture, of American government, and American enterprize. So too it is equally as absurd to trace our American life to the noble spirits, that figured so extensively in our early history, as if it were owing to their originality, or powers of invention, that we have been made to occupy our present position in the history of the world. Our historic characters, or great men, and we have such as have made an impression on the world, were the embodiment of a spirit, that was not peculiar to them, but which was shared with them by others in distant lands; and how could they have been its originators? The time-spirit would disdain so recent an origin; it comes to us from afar, from the wreck of ancient, and venerated institutions; from the ruins of empires, from the tomb of former glory, and bears in its

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of the nursery rhyme. We can fully appreciate, with such a scene in our view, the sentiment expressed by the greatest of the Caesars when giving up the life struggle, and yielding himself to a sad sublime resignation he exclaimed, "Et tu Bruce!"—or the feelings of one greater than Caesar, who is described as showing his wounds, and saying "I was wounded in the house of my friends."

Sewickley, Pa.

D. E. N.

PONTIUS PILATE.

THERE are different methods of acquiring fame or notoriety in this world. Some seek and attain earthly glory and immortality, by the splendor and extensive influence of their achievements, mental, moral or military. Others become notorious, by their association, with persons, and objects of great interest and importance. There was once a Hero who found his way to fame, by firing the temple of Diana, one of the wonders of the world. Another will be held in everlasting remembrance, for having destroyed the Alexandrian Library, far more valuable than all the temples of ancient mythology! To this latter class, belongs Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator, "damned to everlasting fame," from his association with his illustrious victim, the greatest and best of all beings, and the incorporation of his name into the Apostles' Creed.

Unquestionably the Biography of the Bible, as well as every other part, was written for our knowledge and edification. Yea, "all scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable" and the design of the whole is to make "the man of God, perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good word and work." The excellencies of character, portrayed in those prayers by the pen of inspiration, are designed for our imitation. And they become more imitable, by assuming the concrete form of action. On the other hand, failures and sins are designed for our warning and correction, and on the same principle are more impressive and useful, when inwrought into personal life, than when presented as abstractions. With this view, not only are good men, but bad men, introduced to our consideration, in the Bible. We have on one hand the impetuosity and imprudence of Peter, and on another the vacillation and truckling of Pontius Pilate!

We propose in this paper, to consider some of the features of

character, belonging to this notorious Personage, as developed in, or easily deducible from, the scripture narrative.

Our first remark is, that Pontius Pilate may be taken as a representative of the *average* character of thoroughly worldly men, in all ages, whether in church or state. This, probably is not the usual impression; but we can come to no other conclusion, from a careful collection of incidents of the scripture narrative, and the facts derived from the testimony of profane history. We are apt to imagine that there was something almost demoniacal in the wickedness, that could consign such a Being as the incarnate Redeemer, to the ignominious death of the cross, at the instigation of a loathsome existing Hierarchy, and notwithstanding his acknowledged innocence. In our circumstances, and with our knowledge of the true character and mission of the Messiah, this is all very natural. But the illusion vanishes, when we analyse the state of Pilate's mind, and his relations to the Jewish people and their peculiar religious economy. Pilate's point of vision, was intensely and exclusively worldly. His feelings were thoroughly contemptuous towards the whole Jewish nation, high and low alike, sunk as they were then in the lowest depths of degeneracy. The Pharisees were the very personification of formalism and sanctified hypocrisy. The Sadducees, of levity and reckless devotion to pleasure. The mystic and ascetic class of Essenes had probably never crossed the path, or awakened the curiosity, of the Procurator. In this state of things, the controversy between the Hierarchy, and the Lord Jesus Christ, would possess in his estimation nothing but a personal, or at farthest a national interest—a strife for power, where both parties in turn had courted and secured the voice of the populace. To him as Governor of Judea, under Tiberius Caesar, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," though in reality the most glorious of all beings, and engaged in the work for which, the whole theatre of the universe was originally built, was but a state criminal, to be disposed of simply on the principles of an ordinary legal transaction, or according to his own personal determinations. "Knowest thou not" says he to the Saviour, "that I have power to crucify thee or to release thee?" He was one of "the Princes of the world, that came to naught," "and knew not the Lord Jesus." From his brief personal intercourse with the Saviour, he must have been satisfied of his innocence. He must have been struck also, if not awed, by the evidences of superiority, flashing forth amidst that wonderful scene of examination. He must have felt the sublimity of his silence. He knew moreover the low and mean motives, which

actuated his enemies, and that "for envy they had delivered him." But Pontius Pilate, had probably no acquaintance with the Old Testament delineations of the expected Messiah; he had not probably been witness to any of his works or listened to any of his words; the prejudices of his understanding had never been conquered, as was the case with Christ's adversaries by a process, which inflamed more intensely the prejudices of their hearts. Pilate moved in a worldly sphere of thought altogether. He looked at persons and events, Christ and Barabbas, the crucifixion of one or the other, simply as they stood connected with the advancement of worldly interests. He had probably no personal malice towards the Saviour, and would have preferred releasing him, had such a course been for his interests. As it was he evidently tries to shift responsibility, and place it on those by whose suggestions and instigations he was at last compelled to decide!

In all this, Pilate was not, as he is often imagined and indeed represented, an isolated case of unparalleled and unapproachable depravity. He was no monster of iniquity, so exalted above other men in the hellish nature of his acts, that there is no danger or possibility now of repeating his crimes. By such an imagination, we lose all the benefits, designed to be conveyed by the record of his history and the inspired portrait of his character. Thousands, in every successive age, have been quite as bad as Pilate; public men, in every country and every century, have trod in the footsteps of this notorious predecessor and representative of dereliction of principle for popularity, of this looking at Jesus Christ, in the person of his disciples, or the principles of his cause, in the light of present interest. Every where in history, alas! in the range of observation also in our own times and in our own country, in church and state, we find men, whose governing principles, are like Pontius Pilate's—who *placed in his circumstances*, would have acted just as he did, for in analogous circumstances they were actually swayed by the same motives. In ecclesiastical assemblies, underneath the judicial ermine, in the halls of legislation, and in the high places of power, when issues have been presented to worldly men involving a choice between principle and expediency, conscience and convenience, present apparent interest, popularity, pecuniary gain, and high office, on the one hand, or ultimate honor and lasting glory on the other, they have re-enacted, in all essential particulars, the course of the wily Roman Procurator, though from infancy they may have repeated that portion of the common creed of Christendom which says—"He suffered under Pontius Pi-

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late." But for the difference of effects in the one case and the other, such men would stand in the damning reprobation of all good men and all posterity in precisely the same category!

These considerations make the study of this character of value for all time, and no doubt, for this purpose, it has been recorded by the unerring wisdom of inspiration, in close association with the illustrious counterpart! It exhibits our common fallen humanity, an average character of worldliness, manifesting itself in peculiar circumstances indeed, which can never be repeated, but for our warning nevertheless. Pontius Pilate, in the history of our world, stands out eminent like a Pharos, to show public men especially where there are breakers, on which present character, and everlasting hopes, may be wrecked. It is a study eminently appropriate to all, who, from their position in church or state, are tempted to act on expediency, to aim at present popularity, or secure some temporary triumph at the expense of principle, in regard to the great interests of truth and righteousness, the prosperity of their country and the glory of God.

Our second remark is, that the character of Pontius Pilate, as developed in the scripture narrative, manifests the existence and influence of conscience, maintaining a long struggle, yet finally overpowered by the force of lower considerations. We have already stated that Pilate was, probably, ignorant of the character and claims of the Messiah, and viewed Him, as any other person brought before him for trial. Yet evidence of innocence is fully developed by the trial itself, and he solemnly and repeatedly asseverated: "I find no fault in him." His evident reluctance to condemn this obviously innocent person, indicate strongly the actings of conscience. First, he endeavors to transfer the whole case to the spiritual adjudication of the Sanhedrim, disclaiming civil jurisdiction, in a matter which involved the infraction of only ecclesiastical law. "Take him and judge him according to your law." Then, he eagerly avails himself of the plea, that he belonged to the territorial administration of Herod, waiving his prerogatives and making up a long existing feud, rather than assume responsibility. "As soon as he knew, he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod." Finally, by the impressive symbol of washing his hands, he designs to show that, in proceeding to the act of condemnation, he is impelled by the force of circumstances, not of his own convictions. He tries to make a protest to satisfy his conscience, while he surrenders the Son of God to the fury of the populace. Avowing the innocence of his victim, and conscious of the meanness of those who desired his official countenance to their iniquity, he violates

his inward sense of rectitude, under the ignoble fear of consequences and the miserable suggestions of expediency. "So Pilate willing to content the people, released Barabbas and delivered Jesus to be crucified." It is painfully interesting to watch this conflict between the higher and lower principles of man's nature, and to see which triumphs at last. So, in a multitude of similar cases we see a like result. There is a clear apprehension of right and wrong, a frank acknowledgement of an imperative rule of conduct, ordained by infinite authority and commended by infinite motives, an admission of the true glory of acting under all circumstances conformably to this acknowledged standard; yet, at the crisis, low and selfish influences of gain, popularity, present quiet, or acquiescence in surrounding numerical majorities prevail, principle is abandoned, like the Messiah by Pilate, and expediency chosen, like Barabbas by the bigotted Jewish Hierarchy! There are men, whose conscience and judgment are on the side of religion, who know and will admit that it is best and most noble, most certainly connected with present peace and final happiness to be christians, and openly and fully identified with Christ's cause and kingdom, yet because this course of evident right may involve self-denial or interfere with some chosen scheme of earthly aggrandizement, they will continue, for years, possibly to the close of life, in an attitude which conscience condemns, and by which the noble consciousness of rectitude, and all the elements of true greatness, are finally destroyed. There have been men, who have inwardly felt and even publicly avowed for example, their convictions of the wickedness of duelling—that the practice was contrary to the law of God, and their own sense of moral rectitude. Yet these very men, when insulted or challenged, have succumbed to the pressure of a perverted public opinion, and while making a protest, like Pilate, have sanctioned by bloody sacrifices, their own or of others, the misnamed code of honor. They were cowards to avoid the reproach of cowardice, choosing to *seem* rather than *to be* courageous. What an affecting illustration of this conflict is afforded by the case of Alexander Hamilton, one of the brightest names in American history, who for his years had few superiors in any age or country. It is most painful to read the protest he penned, just before he went out to the fatal field, and which was found among his papers after his death. He washed his hands deliberately of the guilt of premeditated murder, by proposing not to fire, and yet yielded himself up a martyr to a Juggernaut whose frowns he could not brave. So in other cases, involving the antagonism of the higher principles of conscience

and accountability to God, and the lower principles of expediency and the fear of man or of present disgrace, we find re-enacted the scene, where Pilate and Barabbas and the Son of God were prominent! Truth and conscience, led away to be crucified, and the robber, guilty of nameless crimes, released.

All such, men in high places especially, cowards in religion and base worshippers of public opinion, should study the recorded portrait of Pontius Pilate, and before they pronounce him a weathercock or monster of wickedness, see whether they are not in their sphere, as weak and wicked as he was.

Once more, a special characteristic of Pontius Pilate, developed, in the scripture narrative, is that he violated conscience and condemned the innocent, for fear of losing office with its connected honors and emoluments. Decisive influence, in the long conflict between conscience and expediency in his bosom, was exerted by the ingenious suggestion: "If thou let this man go, thou art no friend of Caesar—Who ever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar." There was magic, to the sensibilities of Pilate, in the mention of that name, embodying the might and majesty of Roman power in the person of its Emperor. Caesar was the centre of patronage, the sun around which the satellites of the mighty system of the Roman Empire, to its widest circumference, then revolved, and separated from which they were lost. To Pilate, who identified, as worldlings usually do, glory with civil advancement and the frown of the court with political death, this suggestion presented an overwhelming difficulty. Could right be done and office retained, the innocent spared and the good esteem of the sovereign and patronage of the influential at the same time secured, his course would have been plain. But, he must choose between these two irreconcilable courses; either venture on danger and political death, in the discharge of duty, or retain office, honor and emolument, by doing wrong. In this dilemma, he falters, trifles with the first dictates of the inward monitor, usually most distinct and accurate, and finally yields to the popular clamor and the pressure of political ambition, as multitudes in every age have done, when placed in a similar predicament.

Oh! how often since the age of Pontius Pilate, and notwithstanding the plain lesson of his history, have analogous influences produced similar results, with the time serving votaries of popularity, the ambitious aspirants of office, or the cowardly worshippers of numerical majorities!!

The price or prospect, by which the power of conscience is torpidified or suspended, varies in different individuals and periods.

Sometimes it is high office in the state, and again the high places of ecclesiastical power. To one man, it is a commanding position in a political party, to another, "to be called of men Rabbi, and to have the chief seat in the synagogue." Some are swerved into tangent or tortuous courses, by the presence and interposition of only a large attracting body, their conscience being large and massive. Others, whose moral gravity is inconsiderable, may be deflected from the right orbit by means amazingly small. As the Deceiver once said to the Saviour, after shewing him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," the mightiest attraction ever presented to the ambition of the heart, "All this will I give thee," so suiting the power to the resistance to be overcome, he says to the vacillating conscience and the excited aspiration, "All this, will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me," and relinquish right, God's approbation and thine own! On the other hand, says the wily tempter: "If you do this, though it is right, and you will meet the cravings of what men called conscience, you will always be poor"—"You can never secure or exert any large influence"—"As the world goes, success is the criterion of excellence and you are doomed, if you allow your chivalrous sense of honor or the fictions of the moral sense to sway you, to be identified with the crushed party; and then, farewell to the glory and emolument of high and honorable elevation." There have been men, who under these influences have deliberately changed sides in politics or religion, and adjusted themselves without special inconvenience to their new position, though it involved a practical oblivion of all their previous thinking, speaking, and acting. I heard once of a Physician, who subscribed a new creed of politics in a single night, from the promise of the special patronage of the party, and who became "rich and increased in goods" from that crisis, and of another, who refused the same offer, from the same source, and who maintained afterwards a long and manly fight with poverty, upheld and cheered by a good conscience. No doubt, the clerical profession, if we were fond of rioting in the garbage of fallen humanity would furnish similar sickening illustrations. Many a Pontius Pilate, since the crucifixion of Christ, has delivered up the noblest attribute of humanity, under such suggestions, to be crucified; and as a righteous consequence, in God's retributive arrangements, has been doomed to lose, both the happiness of an approving conscience, and the very honors and emoluments for the sake of which he consented to become morally humiliated! Oh! it is a glorious thing, though rare, to see a man, of "like passions with

others," willing and purposed to do right, regardless of present consequences, nobly heedless of popular clamor, or court favor, contented in the consciousness of consistent rectitude, as the crushed hero on the field of Pavia, to lose every thing but honor; preferring the smile of God to the smile or sunshine of Caesar. In the great crisis of a country, a church or a race, these are the men "whose price is above rubies." Their position, in proportion to its perils and temptations, Posterity will approve, if a contemporary and perverted generation should condemn. Such a man was Andrew Marvel, in the corrupt age of Charles II; and such a hero was Marion, in the midnight of the Revolution! Such principled heroes, however, counter parts of Pontius Pilate in every point, are not formed on worldly maxims of carnal policy. The recognition of a higher power—an omniscient God—assimilation to a nobler model, even the mind of Christ, the sweet consciousness of a better inheritance and an amaranthine crown, and a steadfast appeal to an impartial final tribunal, are the elements, which enter into the composition of such a character. Against a man, entrenched in such fortresses the weapons of carnal expediency, wielded ever by Satanic cunning have no power.

" Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,
Mente quatit solidâ."

The all-sufficing reply to all suggestions of temporizing, or tortuous policy, all appeals addressed to ambition and vain glory, is compressed in words of this kind: "How can I do this thing, and sin against God"—"Thou God seest me"—"Get thee behind me Satan." These are the shields of imperilled virtue, the talismans of its triumph. "As ever in the great Taskmaster's eye," such a man will do right, even at the loss of all things, nor do conscious wrong, were the whole world, and the kingdoms and the glory of it, conveyed to him, in fee simple, from its present usurped Proprietor!

Well were it for our country and our race, if the men to whom its guidance is committed, and by whose agency its destiny is influenced, were always men of this high moral stamp, and if no successors of Pontius Pilate were found in the Legislative, Judicial and Executive departments of influence in our world! Well—it is vain, simply to wish; it is not enough merely to say, that such may be the case. Every man, especially every christian man, is responsible to the extent of his influence, in all his relations, for shaping such a state of political morals, as will

make it the *interest* of all men, everywhere, to do right, even if higher motives are inoperative. Every christian, is at least obligated, when occasion is afforded on a lower or higher scale, to exhibit a personal exemplification of a character, in every aspect the moral antithesis of Pontius Pilate's! Christianity is designed, not only to qualify men for citizenship in glory after leaving "this present evil world," but to make them "the Light of the world and the Salt of the Earth," in their present intermistic relations. Other countries have failed in their struggles for inalienable rights, because, amidst the wild tempests of revolutionary fury, there was not enough of principled christianity infused and living, to counteract the violence of depraved passions or the meanness of personal aggrandizement. If ever our country perishes, which may Heaven in mercy forbid, indeed as a succession of individuals, but for all the high purposes of a nation, it will be because the representatives of Pontius Pilate, men who prefer Barabbas to Jesus Christ, if such a course will subserve their sinister purposes, are placed in power, in the misguided exercise of our elective franchises!

Finally, the subsequent history and terrible catastrophe of Pilate's life, is fraught with warning and instruction. Authentic history informs us, that shortly afterwards he was superseded in office, accused before the Emperor, and banished to a distant part of the Empire, where he perished at length by his own hand! Such was "the end of Earth" to Pontius Pilate, who condemned "the Just one." A wild Irish legend tells us, that *Ireland*, was the place of his banishment, and one of its dreariest mountain deserts the theatre of his miserable and unsolaced suicide! The legend, goes on to say, that he is doomed to wander over the earth, a disturbed spirit to this hour. Enough is known to prove, that in his case "vaulting ambition, o'er leapt itself, and fell on t'other side." That, for which he surrendered truth and conscience, he after all failed to secure, he lived disappointed, died in despair, and is now and will forever be, in some world, reaping the bitter fruits of his earthly career.

An instructive picture is here presented to the men, who in any age, and for any consideration, crucify the Son of God afresh, or go against conscience, to secure some temporal interest or please some regnant party in church or state! Oh! how emphatically cheerless the old age, and grand climacteric of a worldling, who sold his conscience and was after all cheated of the promised reward. After the fever and strife of busy life is over, how pitiable is it, to have no good conscience to sustain, amidst the withering of earthly expectations, and the infirmities

and infelicitities incident to old age under the most favorable circumstances. With no pleasing recollections of the past, and a fearful looking for of future and eternal gloom, how terrible the final struggle with "the king of terrors." Even the legendary punishment, to which Irish superstition consigns the legal Destroyer of the Son of God, is a faint picture of the actual doom of all, in after ages, that follow in his footsteps. Condemned, to wander, "in the blackness of darkness," while cycles of ages, are rolling away, with a distinct consciousness of the past, a vivid sense of the present, and fearful anticipation of the future! "Better for that man, that he had never been born," a deeper damnation than Pilate's, on the principle announced by the Saviour, will belong to those, who, in our day, and with all the light now enjoyed, consent for paltry gain, or present popularity or fleeting pleasure, to crucify their consciences, sell their souls and abandon their Saviour. Halters between two opinions, palterers with principle, captives of Satan, deluded votaries, of a world passing away and perishing! Yet even such need not despair, and will not perish, if they do not persevere. Even for Pontius Pilate there would have been mercy and merit enough, had he repented and believed! For the murderers of Christ, who imprecated his blood on themselves and their children, that blood would have availed for pardon and cleansing. "The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." For the vilest and guiltiest there are provisions and proffers of pardon, and there is no absolute necessity now that any should perish, provided, they do not procrastinate too long, or finally grieve away "the Holy Spirit, by which we are sealed to the day of redemption."

Pittsburgh, Pa.

D. H. R.