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ADDRESS

of the

ANTI-DUELLING ASSOCIATION

OF NEW-YORK,

To the Electors of the State of New-York.

A number of your fellow citizens solicit your attention to a subject of great and common interest. They address you not as adherents to any political or ecclesiastical party—but as men who abhor that atheism which rejects the authority and government of GOD—as citizens who feel the importance of making the law respected; and who know the impunity of crime tends to destroy both public order and private happiness, with all the security of property, liberty and life—as friends, brothers, and fathers of families, to whom the social charities are sacred; and who can never hold cheap the blood of such as are united to them in the tenderest ties of amity, of nature and of love. They call upon you to consider and resist the prevalence of a crime which strikes at you in all these relations; which has hitherto eluded, but too successfully, the several efforts to suppress it, and which, emboldened by past impunity, threatens to leave nothing safe of all that is venerable and valuable in human life—the crime of DUELLING.

They need not prove the absurdity and atrocity of a practice which cannot reckon among its advocates a single wife or good man. Few, even of the most abandoned, venture to apologize for it upon any other principle than this, that 'it is a means, however bad, which the state of society renders necessary for the protection of person and character; and that if one should not resent an insult by calling out its author, or should decline an insult from another, he would become an object of universal contempt, liable to the meanest affronts, and incapable of maintaining his place among men of dignity and spirit. Briefly, that public opinion, which regulates private honor, is in favor of Duelling, and compels one to sacrifice his reason, his conscience and his wishes to the respectability of his social standing.'

Thus the Duellist assuming it as a fact, that he is to be rewarded with the approbation of the community, flies to his weapons of death; sates his revenge with blood, and produces public opinion, as a warrant for his murder.

On the morality of this doctrine, it would be superfluous to comment. There can be no judgment pronounced upon it by who recognize the distinction between right and wrong, as originating in a higher source than human custom. But if the altitudinal of fact is correct: if the Duellist rightly estimated the public opinion: if true that the American people look with satisfaction upon deeds which fill every man's breast with horror & dismay, then the condition is dreadful indeed. We cannot submit to such a libel upon

the understanding and the morals of this nation. Public opinion is merely the collective opinion of individuals. To be known it must be expressed. And when, where, how, has it been expressed in favor of Duelling? Let the man be produced who has from principle, refused either to give or accept a challenge, that has been pursued by public reprobation?

The true expression of public opinion is to be sought in the religion of the land; in its laws; and in the conversation of its inhabitants.

The religion of the land is decisive. That religion which is received by the people of the United States, as of Divine authority, and which has interdicted not only the matured act, but all incitements to the commission of it.

The laws of the land are decisive. They speak death to the man who kills another in a duel. They speak degradation & infamy to every one who, in any manner, assists in a duel. But the laws are merciful; they will not allow of any unavoidable risk of punishing the innocent. And the guilty, availing himself of their precaution and of the facility of escape, created by different jurisdictions, eludes their blow, and in the very act of shrinking from this expression of the public will, pleads public opinion in his own vindication.

The private circles are decisive. Go thro' the state from house to house; number the patrons of Duelling; and when you have found them one in a thousand of our independent electors, begin to speak of their opinion. Shall we then hear that our opinions collectively are in diametrical opposition to our opinions separately? And that the public applauds a practice which every one who contributes to make up that public, a handful of the desperate excepted, pronounces senseless and wicked? Yet strange as the facts are; full, peremptory, solemn and habitual as are the expressions of public opinion against Duelling, without one solitary expression in its favor, this baneful practice, the offspring of barbarous manners and bloody passions, is still fathered upon public opinion! And, what is deeply alarming, gains rapidly among our citizens—gains, in opposition to all the expostulations of reason and all the sanctions of religion; in opposition to the rebuke of the law; to the testimony of the wife and good; to the protestations of common humanity; to the tears of the widow & the sorrows of the orphan; to the agonies of a father's bosom, and the yearnings of a mother's bowels; to all that is affecting in this world, and all that is tremendous in the world to come!

Are we fathers? Are we brothers? Are we citizens? Are we men? And shall we permit a crime, the reproach of our land & the scourge of our peace, to stalk openly & impudently through our streets? Are we to tremble every hour of our lives lest a brother or a son on whom rests our fairest hopes, cross our threshold in the morning, to be brot' back, at noon, a victim to that Mo-

loch—modern honor? & as the sword passes thro' our souls, to be told, that we invited its point, and bribed the assassin by our own complacency in his character. But what shall be done? Reason has spoken and she is disregarded, Religion has spoken and she is mocked. The laws have spoken, & they are not heard. Humanity has spoken, and she is insulted. This is unhappily true.—One measure, however, still remains. A measure, simple, dignified, & probably more effectual than any which has been tried free-men of this state have only to refuse their countenance and their vote at the elections to every man who shall hereafter be engaged, either as principal or accessory in any duel, or in any attempt to promote one.—As the utmost art is used by offenders in this way, to frustrate the law, by rendering the requisite proof impossible, nothing more is necessary to cut them off from the benefit of their ill gotten impunity, than to make current report, or one's private persuasion, by what means soever obtained, the ground of withholding one's vote.

That the influence of such a determination, if generally adopted and acted upon, would be very great, cannot admit of a doubt. The only plausible objections are the two following.

1. That a judgment founded upon presumptive proof, such as common rumour of an article in the public prints, might condemn an innocent man: and

2. That the measure recommended may interfere with the freedom of election.

Upon the first objection it is sufficient to remark, that should the case ever occur, that a candidate for office should fail in his election from an unjust suspicion of his having been concerned in a duel, it would still be much better that an individual should be kept out of an office to which he has no right but the people's gift, than that an atrocious crime should go longer without coercion. The injury if any, would flow, not from the vote, but from the suspicion which existed prior to it, and therefore could be no way occasioned by it. But such a case would be so extremely improbable as not to be of any weight in the contemplation of a grand social reform. Among all those to whom a general and permanent suspicion has attached on this subject, it would be difficult if not impossible to point out an instance of mistake. And should a mistake happen hereafter, the person accused, knowing that the charge, if believed, is to shut him out from the people's honours, will not be slow in repelling it, and rescuing his character from unmerited odium.

With respect to the second objection—instead of interfering with the right of election, the expedient proposed is founded upon the broadest and freest exercise of that right. It is in the prerogative of every elector to give or to deny his vote to any candidate for any reason which to himself is satisfactory: or for no other reason than his own choice. He enjoys a controul over his own vote, which no man, nor body of men may question. And as he may give or refuse it to whomsoever he pleases, at the time of election, so he is at perfect liberty to declare beforehand what cause shall govern him in its application.

While the measure proposed does in no manner invade the freedom of election, it is recommended by the most forcible motives of public utility and virtue.

The class of avowed Duellists is too small
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