A SERIOUS ADDRESS

TO ALL

GENTLEMEN OF THE LAW,

Who are zealous for promoting

The Honour of their Profession,

BY AN ATTORNEY.

----- Mens sibi consilia Reddi. VIRG.

LONDON:

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[Price One Shilling.]
To the Right Honourable
Sir Robert Henley, Knt.
LORD-KEEPER
OF THE
GREAT SEAL OF GREAT-BRITAIN.

My LORD,

O whom can I more properly apply for patronage and protection to the Plan proposed in the following ADDRESS, than to your Lordship; whose approved Abilities have justly raised you to the Highest Post of Honour in the Profession, and whose private Virtues and Qualifications as justly render you the Ornament of the age you live in?

PERMIT
Permit me then to hope, my Lord, that this daring attempt in an Anonymous Author, will be generously forgiven; and that should his Scheme happily merit your Lordship's approbation, it may, under that Sanction, meet with all the Encouragement, which from your Lordship's Influence and Authority may reasonably be expected.

In all events my Lord, I shall have the conscious satisfaction of a humane and disinterested Intention in proposing it, and shall ever remain, with the most profound respect,

My LORD,
Your LORDSHIP's
Most Devoted, most Obedient,
And most Humble Servant,
The AUTHOR.
Charity, considered in its utmost extent, is a duty obligatory upon, and ought to be exercised to, all ranks and degrees of mankind, without partiality, or distinction: but yet, there are some particular instances of it, more limited and confined, though not less laudable and beneficial. Some of these, as they will serve to open my design in this Address, and are somewhat similar to it, in their nature and effects, I shall beg leave briefly to take notice of.

The fund establish'd for the support and provision of the widows and children of the indigent clergy, is, perhaps the most glorious, as well as
the most extensive instance of this kind of charity, that ever was projected. It cannot fail of affording matter of great consolation to a poor clergyman, who, from the scantiness of his stipend, is scarce able to maintain himself and family, in any tolerable figure, much less to lay up any future provision for them; when he reflects, that there is a fund, from whence they have a Right to demand relief after he is gone, and are certain of receiving it.—A fund, that extends its aid equally to his unfortunate widow, and his fatherless children, and that in a greater proportion perhaps, and in a manner more conducive to their true interest, than what he could possibly have ever been able to do for them.

The fund establish'd for the benefit of the widows of the officers in the army, is another pregnant instance of the utility of this kind of charity. For it must needs afford great satisfaction to these Gentlemen, when they consider, that though they should lose their lives in the service of their country, yet an ample provision is made for the support of their widows after their decease.

Nor ought I in this enumeration of instances, to pass over in silence, those many Associations entered into, and
and supported by the poorest of our mechanics, for the same laudable purposes. The meanest labourer, who is a member of any of these societies, (vulgarly call'd Box Clubs) is charitably supported by them in illness, is buried at their expence, and a sum of money given to his poor widow, to put her in a probable way of procuring her future subsistence.

Surrounded as we are, by almost innumerable instances of the various kinds of charity, I have often reflected how highly useful, and necessary it would be, for the Gentlemen of the LAW, to establish a fund for the benefit of the widows and children of their indigent Brethren; and have as often wondered, that no proposal should ever have been made for that purpose. In so large a community, there certainly cannot fail of being several individuals, who scarce leave enough behind them to satisfy their just debts, and whose families are thereby rendered destitute of any immediate support or assistance.

To establish a Fund therefore, for the relief of such real objects of compassion, would be well worthy so honourable and respectable a Society. And to recommend such an establishment, is the sole intention of the adventurous Author of this Address:
induced thereto, by no other motive, than a humane and tender disposition, which deeply enters into, and sympathizes with the miseries of mankind; and is ever ready to mitigate and relieve them.

With all due deference then, to the superior judgment of that learned Body to whom I write, I shall just delineate the out-lines of such a Plan, as I imagine necessary to be followed, in carrying this great and beneficial design into execution, and humbly submit the same to their serious consideration; hoping only, that they will candidly interpret my intentions in so doing; and in the full contemplation of the utility and advantages of the Scheme itself, overlook the incapacity and imperfections of it's Author.

The first necessary step, I apprehend, will be to open Subscriptions at proper places, to receive the voluntary contributions of the whole Fraternity, for so truly charitable a purpose; and to cause the most public intimation thereof to be given, and at the same time to desire, that no individual member, will subscribe a larger sum at first, than what he proposes annually to continue: hence the constant amount of the Fund will be easily ascertain'd, and the applic
cation thereof made with a proper degree of precision.

The next step will be, to nominate a certain number of the most Eminent Subscribers, who are chiefly resident in town, as a Committee to take upon them the management and direction of the Fund; with full power to make such rules and orders, and to appoint such officers under them, as they shall judge necessary, and expedient, for the dispatch of such business, as may from time to time arise.

That a general meeting of all the Subscribers, (or such of them as can most conveniently attend) be held once in every year; and that at such general meeting, a new Committee be chosen, the accounts of the preceding year audited and settled, and the balance remaining in the treasurer's hands, (if any) be placed out at interest, on Government, or other good security, and erected into a sort of Exigental Fund, to answer and supply whatever deficiencies may happen in any succeeding years.

The Fund being thus establish'd, the next particular that comes to be consider'd, is the Proper Application of it.
This in a great measure depends upon the wisdom and discernment of the Committee, in proportioning their relief, to the wants and exigencies of those who apply for it. And as therefore it is impossible to lay down any fixed or invariable rule for their conduct herein, I shall content myself with giving a few general Hints, that may be improved by them.

Upon every application made to the Committee by the persons entitled to the benefit of this charity, a proper enquiry ought to be made into the circumstances and situation of their deceased Husbands, to know whether their effects are, or are not more than sufficient to pay their just debts, and whether the widow and children have any other dependance for support than what they hope to receive from this Fund: and, when these particulars are reported to the Committee, that then they may settle such an annuity upon the widow, DURANTE VIDUITATE, as they shall think answerable to the exigencies of her case.

If indeed, she be left with any Children, too young to be sent into the world; then I think it would be necessary, to allow her a certain annual sum for each child, (besides her annuity) to defray the charges of educating and maintaining them, till they arrive
arrive at proper ages, to be put out apprentices; that then such Additional Allowance should cease, and the children bound to such masters and mistresses as should be approved of by the Committee, to learn such useful trades, as may best suit their genius and capacity; and that a certain sum be given as an apprentice-fee with them.

This is a rude and imperfect sketch of a Plan, for the establishment and application of this Fund. It may now be expected that I should set forth and display, with all the force of language, the many great Advantages that will necessarily result from it; and likewise endeavour to invalidate and confute all possible Objections that may be raised against it.

But as the Advantages that will certainly arise from an Institution, founded upon such pious principles, and directed to such beneficial purposes, are so very obvious, that they must needs occur to the mind of the most superficial reader; it would be affronting the understanding, and anticipating the judgment of those Gentlemen, for whose approbation only I am ambitious, were I to enter into a minute detail of them. There is however one good purpose, which such an understanding may in a great measure
sure contribute to promote, and which as it may not immediately occur to the mind of every reader, I hope to stand excused in mentioning.

A very strong Prepossession has for many years been imbibe against the whole Fraternity of Lawyers, from the Chicanry, and other scandalous practices of a few; a Prepossession, not more unreasonable in its extent, than prejudicial in its consequences to the honest part of the Profession. And though the utmost precautions have been taken by our Courts of Justice to discountenance the causes of it, yet the universal odium being once fix'd, it has been found a difficult, if not impracticable task, to eradicate it.

The motives to such actions as afford the multitude a pretence to cast dishonourable reflections upon the members of this Profession, generally arise from the urgent necessities of those who are guilty of them: and, though such a plea, will never divest a criminal or immoral action of it's innate turpitude and malignity; yet, if it be real (as I have charity enough to believe it frequently is) I cannot help thinking that man, who, stimulated by the force of it, acts inconsistently with the maxims of integrity and
and honour, as much an object of pity, as he certainly is of censure.

For the distress of any man, who from a knowledge of his present circumstances, perceives, that, when the uncertain period of his own existence is determined, his widow and children must be reduced to the utmost degree of penury and want, is scarcely to be conceived: But when he reflects, that those who so immediately depend upon him, and to whom he is united by the strongest ties of love and affection, are certain of being provided for, by the charitable institution of such a Fund as I have mention’d, it cannot fail of administering great consolation to him under his present pressure, and of being an inducement to him to regulate his conduct in business by the strictest rules of honesty and fidelity.

From whence it may fairly be deduced as a necessary consequence, that the establishing such a Fund, will prove the most effectual means of retrieving the Honour of the Profession, and of preventing the malevolent tongue of slander and detraction from blasting it any more. For when this plausible motive to all instancies of male-practice is thus removed, the continuance of them will, I doubt not, in a great measure cease.
It may be objected, That as far the greatest part of the Fraternity are men of large and ample fortunes, who are never likely to be reduced to the necessity of seeking relief from any charitable institution whatever; and that the Profession itself being a very lucrative one, it is in the power of most of the members of it, by a frugal management of their income, to lay up such a future provision for their families, as to enable them to live in a decent manner, without standing in need of any public assistance at all; there is not therefore the least shadow of necessity for establishing such a Fund as is here proposed.

But to destroy the force of this Objection, it ought to be considered, that very few of those large and ample fortunes arise solely from the profits of the business, but from other extraordinary means, which are quite unconnected with it; and that though the Profession itself may be (and doubtless is) very lucrative, yet it is nevertheless extremely fluctuating and uncertain in its duration. No man, I dare venture to affirm, can insinure the continuance of a certain extent of Practice, for any determinate space of time; the common vicissitudes of human affairs, render such an attempt vain and impracticable. For how often do we see men of the Greatest Practice
Practice in the Law, who live in the most elegant, and splendid manner, who give their children a liberal and finish'd education, and who are generally reputed able to make an ample provision, for their future advancement in the world; how often, I say, do we see these men, by a sudden and unaccountable reverse of fortune, reduced to such low circumstances, as to be scarce able to acquire a bare subsistence for the remainder of their lives, and at last leave their widows and children, so many living monuments of the instability of all human grandeur?

It ought further to be considered, with respect to those, who having no estates in possession, nor any expectancies in reversion, can have no other dependance for support than the bare profits of their Practice; that as the education, as well as the profession of a Lawyer, gives him the rank, and procure him the respect of a Gentleman; so it is natural for, and even expected of him, to support and preserve that character, by all the external marks of dress, company, and domestic economy: and allowing that he may be able so to do, by meer dint of diligence, and assiduity, in business; yet, the loss of a friend, or patron, the caprice and insolvency of clients,
clients, the unsuccessful determination of a particular suit, the carelessness or infidelity of clerks, or a thousand other accidents, which can neither be foreseen, or avoided; and, which no way impeach his probity or capacity, may reduce his practice to a very narrow compass. And, supposing, (what frequently happens) that a train of disappointments, frequently bring on a lingering illness, which at last terminates in death; what a deplorable, and pitiable situation, must the widow and children of such a man be left in? destitute and deprived of all visible means of support, bred up and initiated in the modes and maxims of polite life, and consequently entire strangers to the method of following any occupation that may procure them a subsistence!

That this is not the mere picture of an invigorated fancy, warm'd with the contemplation of its subject, but a melancholy and serious truth, I might appeal to every man of the least observation or experience, could I suppose any one so totally destitute of either, as to gainsay, or contradict it.

As, therefore, so unfortunate an event may possibly happen to a great number of practising Attorneys in the kingdom, it cannot be deemed either a vain or unnecessary undertaking, to make
make a suitable provision for those who are left in such circumstances of real and undissembled distress. Nor, from the consideration of the small number of the Profession, who leave their families in such a pitiful situation, can it be either reasonably or charitably inferred, that those of their brethren, whom Providence has blessed with a larger portion of the good things of this world, should not exert their utmost endeavours, and cheerfully contribute to relieve the wants and distresses of the widows and children of those who do.

I shall only take notice of one Objection more, which may possibly be urged against the execution of such a design; namely, that there are so many Parochial Work-houses and Schools, instituted and supported for the relief and education of distressed widows and orphans, that any particular Institution for that purpose is absolutely unnecessary.

But not to insist on the great difficulty of obtaining admittance into most of these parochial foundations, I would only observe, in answer to this plausible objection, that the provision in any of them is not adequate to the necessities of those who may be entitled to assistance from the establishment of such a Fund as I have proposed.
For, in the first place, it is to be considered, that all, or the greatest part of the Widows, for whose immediate benefit and support this Fund is to be erected, are generally women descended from good families, and who bring a sufficient fortune to their husbands to secure a competent provision for themselves. Now these women are very seldom possessed of any other abilities to provide for themselves, in case of their husband’s dying insolvent, than a bare proficiency at their needle, which in an advanced age is very rarely sufficient to furnish them, even by the most intense labour, with the common necessaries of life. And to be reduced at once from an easy situation,

tuation, to the dismal alternative of perishing for want, or living in a Workhouse, is a transition that requires the most heroic degree of fortitude to render it tolerable.

For though Parochial relief may be very well adapted to the necessities of many who have moved in a narrow sphere of life, and been inured to struggle with hardships and difficulties from their cradles; yet it cannot from hence be inferred, that a woman in such circumstances as I have described, can meet with any assistance from a parish adequate to her wants: the natural delicacy of her constitution, and the many incidental ailingments to which she
is in a more peculiar manner liable, render it almost impossible.

How truly necessary then, is it to make a suitable provision for the support of such distressed Gentlewomen, to enable them to live in some degree analogous to their former situation? And what Plan can be more conducive to so charitable a purpose, than that which I have here laid down?

But if we consider the other part of the Objection, which relates to the Children, namely, the putting them to Parish Schools, then the necessity of such an Institution I am now recommending, will (if it's possible) more evidently appear.

Very few, if any, of these Schools, do more for the children, than educate and cloath them, till of proper ages to be bound apprentices; but who is to be at the expense of maintaining them in the mean time? their unfortunate Mothers are scarce able to do any thing, that may procure a bare subsistence for themselves, and consequently quite incapable of affording any assistance to their unhappy offspring; they must therefore be early exposed to want the common necessaries of life, and by that means become an easy prey to the artifices of those, whose infamous occupation it is, by taking advantage of their necessities, to encourage them in the commission
commission of such crimes, as meet with their proper punishment, in an ignominious death. How extremely advantageous then, will it be to those helpless innocents, to be maintained under the fostering care of their surviving parent; whose affection and authority, will greatly contribute to mould their tender minds into habits of piety and virtue, and make them useful and worthy members of the common-wealth? And how satisfactory also, must it prove to such a parent, to have an opportunity of so doing, from the charitable and seasonable assistance, which this Fund will afford her?

Upon the whole then, if to restore the long lost Honour of the Profession, by providing against those motives which induce its Members to transgress; if to relieve the necessities of the unfortunate Widows and helpless Orphans, of your indigent Brethren, be considerations that claim the least attention or regard, I am persuaded you'll suffer them to have their proper weight and effect; and indulge a full scope to those humane and benevolent dispositions, which they are formed to raise and excite.

Let it not be said of a Fraternity, which can boast the high honour of distributing Justice and Equity to a
Nation; and furnishing Ministers to a State, envied and admired by all the world; which can outvie most other Communities among us, in the number, as well as the opulence of its Members; that they are deaf to the importunate cries of the fatherless and widow, or strangers to those sensations of charity and beneficence, which exalt the human nature to the highest degree of perfection it is capable of.

But rather let it be recorded in the annals of posterity, That the Members of such a Fraternity, did, to their immortal Honour, generously contribute to the establishment of a Fund calculated to answer the most laudable and

and beneficial purposes; a Fund, that will at once make the Widow’s heart overflow with joy and gratitude, and teach the Children yet unborn, to lispe blessings on the pious memories of their Great and God-like Benefactors.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 15, Line the last, for Understanding read Undertaking.
And particularly proposed to have
willst at once marke the Widow's heart
and provoke with joy and gratitude, and
rescue the Children yet unarmed to lift one pledge on the plains incunabula
of their Youth and God like done.

ERRATA

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