

Nor will it do to reply, that if what is said be slanderous, the ruler has ample means for vindicating—for indemnifying himself. The law is open. There is a deception in this. To see it clearly two things must be taken into account. (1) The liberty of speech and of the Press is completely secured by our precious Constitution. This liberty, one of its most invaluable and fundamental principles, is dear to the heart of every British subject; and is guarded by each with the most jealous care. God forbid it should ever be otherwise. Yet who can look at the way in which this liberty is abused, when turned into licentiousness, and not be greatly shocked? Yea, this capital principle in the Constitution is sometimes so viciously employed as to threaten its entire overthrow. Things not less strange have happened than that this liberty—licentiousness of the Press—should, in the end, lead to slavery. Because the Constitution has made the law of libel rigorously difficult and narrow for the prosecutor, and because men are patriotically delicate in giving a verdict for a slandered statesman, shall every low scribbler take advantage of these things, to spread abroad base surmises, and, by all possible means, blacken the character of rulers? Thus, alas, it is, that the most precious rights are abused. But (2) rulers, in many cases, cannot so easily prosecute the slanderer as some persons seem to think. Every contemptible defamer is not entitled to the distinction which such a prosecution gives. An infamous notoriety is valuable to such wretches. It secures bread as well as *fame* to them. Now they are not to be thus fed, or honoured. Prosecute them, and you give power to vice, and dignity to folly. Thus at least it is in many cases. Neglect is at once their punishment and their desert. Let the community thus treat them, and great good would follow. But further, a mind of true greatness, and conscious rectitude, is apt to treat slander, in many cases, with silent scorn, and *calmly leave its own worth* to find proofs, or, if need be, vindication, from time and events. Nor will it escape the notice of persons who reflect, that the dignity of office may forbid its possessor hastily to descend and meet some miserable calumniator, either through the Press, or in Court. Under these means of *protection*—for such they really are—the official and extempore slanderer pursues his vocation—disseminates the poison of calumny, until the public mind is, in the end, deeply and fatally affected by it. You are aware, that a falsehood may be so often repeated, and repeated under such a variety of forms, that it shall come at length to be credited by the simple-minded as if it were really a self-evident truth. In this way the credulity of men is scandalously abused by those who speak evil of dignities—who malign Government. The most