

legislate partially on such a subject; and the result of our deliberations was, that what is now proposed was the safest and the best law that could be devised. It gives perfect liberty; and all its subordinate provisions aim only at proper responsibility. Things could not remain as they were; and any law of restriction would have been sad retrogression in legislation, and totally opposed to the spirit of the age.

You have alluded most justly to the difficulties that beset the forming of a law to restrain all excesses and injuries which may be committed by means of the press. On this point, I fear, legislation is set at defiance. We cannot apparently enjoy the liberty of the press without being exposed to its licentiousness. We must submit to the attendant evil for the sake of the predominant good. Although the boundary between liberty and licentiousness is perceptible enough in practice, it can hardly be defined by law without the danger of encroaching on useful liberty. The laws of England have utterly failed to prevent the licentiousness of the press; and yet, perhaps, could hardly be made more efficient without endangering its freedom. Much, therefore, necessarily depends on the good sense and good taste of those who wield the power which the press confers. The worst enemies of the press are such of its conductors as destroy its influence by prostituting its use for the gratification of base passions. When public measures are fully and freely discussed, and censured or approved, as may be, in a spirit of candour and justice, the influence of the press must be great and beneficial. But when men find themselves the objects of gross personal scurrility, without any reference to public measures or real character and conduct, they may at first feel pain; because sensitive men with benevolent dispositions toward all their fellow-creatures, grieve to perceive that they have rancorous foes busily employed against them, but working in concealment, the cause of whose enmity they know not, and whose wrath they have no power to appease; but they cannot respect the instrument of unjust virulence; they must know that such attacks proceed from personal hatred or wanton malignity, and they must learn to despise calumny which cannot be guarded against by any goodness of measures, or any correctness of conduct. The proper influence of the press is thus destroyed; and ultimately just censure, which would