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The Saturday Reader.

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LAWYERS.

"He that fleeth from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed."

SO says Shakspeare; but the generality of mankind forget this wise and true remark of the poet's, and think that by taking away the character of their neighbours, they will make their own better: that by blackening others, they will whitewash themselves; that on the destruction of the fair name of others, their own will arise, phoenix-like, adorned with more gorgeous and splendid plumage. Oftentimes it is men of the most spotless and unimpeachable morals and most noble generosity that are thus traduced and defamed: often those classes of men, who have at all times and in all ages occupied the highest positions in civilized countries, have that, which to every honest man is more valuable than life itself, sacrificed and destroyed by the high-priests of envy, hatred and malice.

What an example we have of the truth of these statements, in the way those who devote themselves to the study and practice of the law—the handmaid of justice—are and ever have been assailed on every hand, in every country, by every person, be he poet, philosopher or fool; every one seems to consider it his bounden duty to cast a stone at the fair fame of "the lawyers." From the dull and prosy parson, who divides each sermon into half-a-dozen heads, and dismisses his wearied hearers after well nigh an hour's discourse, delivered in a monotonous, sing-song, whining voice, with "finally," "lastly," "in conclusion," and "one word before we part,"—yet complains of the slowness and wearisomeness of legal proceedings, of the verbosity and tautology of legal documents, of the dryness and stupidity of legal speeches; to the grocer who, while he mixes sand with his sugar, sells pieces of wood for spicy nutmegs, and waters his whiskey, yet proclaims aloud, with indignant gestures and bitter tones, the dishonesty of some paltry, pettifogging attorney, and purse-milking law driver. From the Poet Laureate, who, receiving a sovereign for every single line of his anything but fascinating or enchanting ditty, "What does little Birdie say," grumbles about the enormous fees of the lawyers, and the heavy expenses connected with the administration of justice,—to the criminal standing at the bar, to receive the just reward of his crimes, and who, although the evidence against him is as clear as the noonday sun, abuses his counsel for not getting him acquitted and set at liberty, to repeat his nefarious actions. One and all, forgetful of their own dullness and stupidity, of their own trickery and dishonesty, of their own exorbitant and excessive charges, or hoping that the huge clouds of dust which they raise about their neighbours will hide their own misdeeds—all publish abroad, with stentorian voices, and herculean labor and perseverance, that attorneys and solicitors, advocates

and doctors, barristers and counsel, are a generation of vipers, from whom every honest man should flee. In this tune every one screeches—on this string every one harps.

Let us hear what some of these righteous men who, being without sin themselves, undertake to cast stones at their brethren of the long robe, say.

Congreve says—and this self same man was a writer of plays, which are more noted for the cool systematic immorality, which is the chief ingredient, than for their wit and learning; he studied law for a time in the Middle Temple, but, soon wearying, he forsook the quiet and secluded precincts of the church of the ancient warriors of the cross, for the excitement and gaieties of a life of London dissipation, and then, renegade like, he thus attacks and abuses those who are "the counsellors, secretaries, interpreters, and servants of justice—the lady and queen of all moral virtues"—in one of his vile dramas—"Lawyer! I believe there's many a cranny and leak unstopped in your conscience. If so be one had a pump in your bosom, I believe we should discover a foul hold. They say a witch will sail in a sieve, but I believe the devil could not venture aboard your conscience."

Swift describes lawyers as "a society of men bred from their youth in the art of proving, by words multiplied for the purpose, that white is black, and black is white, according as they are paid." Did this severe divine, who was ordered by his master to judge not, ever read the declaration of that great and good man, lawyer and judge, Sir Matthew Hale—"I never used the advantage of my elocution, either to maintain a falsehood, or to abuse credulity into a foolish opinion or persuasion: or to deceive people or cozen them into a thing. I never used my elocution to give credit to an ill cause, to justify that which deserved blame, to justify the wicked or condemn the righteous, to make anything appear more specious or enormous than it deserved." And *ex uno disce omnes*.

Junius says:—"If there be any instance, as some there are undoubtedly, of genius and morality united in a lawyer, they are distinguished by their singularity, and operate as an exception." Burke said, in one of his speeches, "they are lawyers—men full of subtily." An old proverb, to characterize what is heathen, describes it "as cold as charity in the heart of a lawyer." Carey, who wrote a history of England in 1627, tells you, "that if you go to law for a nut, the lawyers will crack it, give each of you half of the shell, and chop the kernel themselves;" and the sketch below, representing two men struggling for the possession of a cow, while a bewigged lawyer is drawing away the milk, is something to the same effect.

Shakspeare makes two of his characters speak thus:—

"Dick.—The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

"Cude.—Nay, that I mean to do. Is not this a lamentable thing, that the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? That parchment, being scribbled on, should undo a man? Some say the bee stings; but I say, it is the beeswax, for I did but seal once to a thing, and was never my own man since."

Lord Macaulay, speaking of the English lawyers, insinuates that one would, "with a wig on his head and a band round his neck, do for a guinea what, without these appendages, he would think it wicked and nefarious to do for an empire; that not merely believing, but knowing a statement to be true, he would do all that can be done by sophistry, by rhetoric, by solemn asseveration, by indignant exclamation, by gesture, by play of features, by terrifying an honest witness, by perplexing another, to cause a jury to think that statement false."

Even the meek and gentle Wordsworth cannot let the profession escape without having a rap at it. His "Poet's Epitaph" contains the following lines—

"A lawyer art thou? draw not nigh;
Go, carry to some fitter place
The keenness of that practised eye,
The hardness of that sallow face!"

Although it would be comparatively easy to fill a volume with quotations from poets, historians, moralists, philosophers, and divines, marking the unmerited and undeserved scorn, obloquy and reproach which have been poured upon the devoted heads of the members of this profession; but, fortunately, with as little effect as oil poured upon a fire. Still, lest I be wearisome, I will give but one more, and that the concluding stanzas of a newspaper poem recounting a visit paid by his satanic majesty to a court of law. After reciting the wonder and astonishment of that gentleman at the way in which the attorneys argued (by the way, he had never seen a lawyer before), it winds up as follows:—

"Thus they quarreled, contended and argued so long,
'Twas hard to determine which of them was wrong;
And concluding he'd heard enough of the fuss,
Old Nick turned away and soliloquized thus:
They've guzzled the court with their villainous cavil;
And I'm free to confess it, they'd guzzle the devil;
My agents are right to let lawyers alone,
If I had them, they'd swindle me out of my throne!"

But are all lawyers, or even the majority of them, such foul sinks of iniquity as the authors of these extracts try to make them appear? Doubtless there are, and have been, black sheep among them, as there are and ever have been among every other class of men; but I would be ashamed of myself if I thought it necessary to attempt to disguise the character which has been so untruthfully attributed to them; I will not for one moment stop to shew their innocence. Have not these remarks been called forth, chiefly because the authors of them have, by "these agents of God in the administration of justice," been prevented at some time or other doing some act which the laws of God or of man forbid, or when they have chanced to have done such an act have been brought to punishment by these "orators, who use the power of their tongue and wit to shame impudence, to protect innocency, to crush oppressors, to succour the afflicted, to advance justice and equity, and to help them to right, who suffer wrong?" Junius, when he gave utterance to his bitter remarks, had just been beaten in argument by Sir William Draper, a lawyer; so smarting under his defeat, he sent forth a shower of sarcasms, which, like Lilliputian arrows, teased and annoyed, without inflicting any serious wounds. None knew better than