No. 137. -

On following the multitude.
Exodus xxiii. 2. "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil."

This admirable precept has respect, in its original connexion, to the administration of justice. It was intended as a prohibition against following the multitude in overbearing, depressing any man, whose cause was subjected to their judgment, or required their evidence. But we may easily and profitably pass from its particular to its general meaning, and make it the subject of general instruction. "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil," is a charge that should be written on our hearts, engraving it on our ears. Doing as others do, because others do it, has been the bane of our virtue, than almost anything else. This spirit of imitating, of aspiring, of changing upon others, is the death of everything noble and elevated in character. And yet the disposition to conform to those around us, as far as virtue will
promits; it is both innocent & necessary... It is one of the conditions on which society depends. God has formed us to associate with each other. He has given us these dispositions of affection & prompt us spontaneously to social union. Hence we that intercourse, which mutual wants, & weakness, & dependence, send so pleasant, & indeed so indispensable... Man is helpless & unhappy; but united with his fellow men, he becomes strong & full of joy. Why do the statesmen shut themselves from the chain of society, & stand insulated & free from others, fighting against the design & appointment of God? We are placed here, as in the theater of action, where we amuse, & enjoy with those who have the same care to discharge, & as ourselves, we may perform our duties, strengthen each other's hand, & encourage each other's hearts. For as the case may be, we have many members in one body, & all members have not the same office; so are many many are one body in, as every one member one of another. Such is the constitution, that God has most generously assigned theses; & may almost exact an influence in each other, we may give mutual support, & counsel of direction; we may instruct & receive light & warmth; the same comes, friendly long
last months, every body practises them, and therefore their influence is felt among the crowd; and perhaps even appears commendable. We say to ourselves, what so many do at all costs, I cannot do; it is wrong; I cannot make as bad a figure as the popular vices; popular vices are necessary evils, necessary evils; it is sufficient for us that others indulge in them, and that is reason enough why we should indulge; many man satisfies himself with that plan. When applied to the excuse of vice is one of the most base and sordid habits; that it is customary, that though the desire that society among his children, have an equal chance to be a fellowship in good deeds and good principles, yet by the tendency we have to imitate, it becomes too often a general vice, in which my hand is held back, the up in the cause of magnificence. Thus are followed the multitudes to do evil, natural. Thinking whether that cause will be? us, without reflecting that fear is with the multitude, we must be condemned with the multitude.

But you will ask perhaps, would you go further as to follow the multitude in any respect? Would you represent it as criminal to yield in any case to the popular customs of the day? If religion require each man to act differently from all other men? No. If it does not forbid us to follow the multitude in any case, but only when they would lead to evil. To be selfish, unaccommodating, given in regards of religion. Nothing can be more mistaken than to suppose that the man must necessarily be of an unco-operative spirit. There are many things in this concourse of society concerning which it is a matter of indifference what man may do when they are done; if therefore when custom has established a particular way of doing them, it would be foolish not to conform to it. And besides, there are circumstances in which the spirit of duty may relax itself by compliance for the sake of affecting good. We may thus enter into the views and feelings of others, at least as far as may be, without the sacrifice of principle. The only way in which we can hope to be good to others, is by meeting them in some common ground, where a bond of union may be formed; if we are more at a distance from them, here as it were in a separate world, we shall find that we have cut ourselves off from that usefulness of enjoyment, to which we might have attained. All these emphases of duty, in a country, or well directed to each man, is the honest love of doing good in the best way, many
a mere determination of the spirit of reform, of the world that has itself to be a necessary ingredient, and to the cause of virtue, she would at last be in its exaltation, for she is as offensive as possible for her singularities of sternness. But, says, the danger does not lie here; it is all on the other side. We must fear that we shall not follow the multitude everywhere. Only fear, that we shall follow them too much. The first thing is clearly comprehensible; that of clashing in society with the fullness of the multitude, from motives of self-interest, from a desire of being singular. We have mainly to do here, not to follow the multitude, but to follow us up in our actions, not lest we should change it too much, if God knows, that our tendency is to lose the thing in the accord. Many men, consequently, to observe the part of duty, because if we remain there we must change alone. It sinks down into a singing,属写, followers of the multitude, to do evil, rather than to assume a spiritual condition. It is the same, doubting if we are strong, most dangerous tendency. We see it exemplified in a thousand instances so forcibly, that we cannot mistake the danger. There is in still some remaining class of cases, when at it, perhaps in secret, hence around the heart, it strikes itself into the motives, wholly undeserved. We are often in fact following the multitude, when we think we are following our own judgment. The atmosphere, although the has no effect on the mental current, that supplies us with, while we are conscious of it, in sending its influences throughout bodies. So it is with our personal atmosphere; it operates indirectly on our minds; yet once we have begun to follow the multitude, our opinions, instead of taking the true, our feelings gradually take these characters from the influences to which we have surrendered ourselves. What is it, that in values so many people to write this time, that sees of immortality, as permanent rammants, fit for the future, if not examined, without an idea, of a regret? It is because this companions do so, because they have begun to follow the multitude to do evil. Some who have been hasten, will not wait to know, but to procure all that they overreaching, reconciling within the bounds of all, of if you ask them, how they can reconcile them with their sense of duty, they will persuade that such practices are very common, that they may as well use them as others, they regard society as a union in which each one is on the vote to see how much yet by such sound, retention, as is not fin.
The strict principles of integrity, decent bearing, and reasonableness of conscience. This is essential to follow the multitude, fasting with its most deadly effects in the hearts of the young. Unpracticed as they are in the ways of the world, it is nothing short of a guide to their conduct; it is natural for them to fall into that, the most compromising and disastrous. If they have not acquired the habit of thinking, what they are about to be, consistent with the dictates of conscience, or with the word of God, they will probably follow the leadings of the young, veteran sinners, who seem fitted for the hands of ministers. The young victim recoils to the scene of transgressions, pleasure, and all is called good. But, it may be, he heeds the lathesome scenes for a time of good. His implantation in the youthful breast, starts up a vision with indignation. But he has not followed the multitude long; before their feelings are quelled; of this and his mind become accustomed to the seducing laugh. The brutal acts of evil-thinking among his companions he soon learns the degrading that tends to good, good people have taught him, and all the pure emblems of early days are swept off, as scarcely a hand that felt its good is left; if he at length sinks as low in blindness of purposes as any of his elders accompanied. I would like to sleep, that this were not fancy; but it is, alas! too late a picture of what is done as our example. All but tell an hour story when I shall open. What are the fatal effects of following the multitude, both on the young and old hearts? It is the operation of the same principle of doing what others do, something what others omitted, that induces men to neglect it in time, because the ordinances and institutions of religion. They see no reason why they should be so much more attentive to them than the rest of us, or because the great majority neglect them; the instances of baptisms, the Lord's Suppers, and our imaginations that he has a good cause for neglecting them, a thinker's books of deceiving upon himself for much remiss observation. These, with those mentioned, are but a few of the instances on which the law of following the multitude is the sure guide to every gullible. That course on which millions are ascending, the thousands are hastening after them, is but to sink.
much of the multitude is driven by an impulse to follow the multitude to do evil; such the blind compliance with even the quietest customs of the crowd, so much the herd of men, that leads so many of our race captive at its will. And now tell me, what is there in the voice of the multitude, that should so charm you? What is there that acts on them to become a sacrifice of principle in the part of the sin? And the multitude, so bright and so warm, so candid, so constant, they are for to say: leader, is that it is becoming an open to submit to their guidance? At all. The shining feelings of the multitude, or the multitude taken as an average of human beings. There is a set of shining followers, who are handed down from one generation to another, and this in part because of influence on every age. For them, the multitude and held them can give one reason, if there were any to be given; they excite them blindly a goodly number, the name of accustomed customs, who have a hold on the minds of the multitude. Yet, the multitude, to lose what they came, up

whether they will conduct them. In an emphatic sense, they are blind, leaders of the blind. And more is the irrational being, of the most important concerns, concerns that relate to eternity as well as time, would deliberately consent to place himself under the guidance of such leaders? Would you estimate vice for the number of those who practice it, rather than by its own acting nature of qualities? Think upon that. Because insanity is common, it is therefore less detectable. Because it is more so large a surface, do not lose its character? No, every particle of it is still as bad as ever, yet when the multitude leads to evil, externally that in the smallest degree less censurable, than when it exists, but as an individual case. Do not then fall ourselves, that when you are following a multitude to do evil, you are doing a harmless thing. God has not destined you to lead to them for destruction; he has leased to you to lead to the dictates of conscience, to his unfailing word. If you will not make them the man of your counsel, you cannot be mistaken, you cannot go wrong. Remember, that whenever you follow the multitude, to do evil, you then endeavor to man.
yourself in account of all the numbers who are your companions in guilt, you are practicing upon yourselves a most wicked piece of self-destruction, as we will at one appear to be, if it were applied to the case of a civil transgression among men. Where is she, if she were constantly at the original sin of a kind of the kind, would have the heaviest load to bear, that she had seen the laws so often violated by others, as to come to the conclusion, that she could as they might, trample upon it with impunity? And if the criminal were to make his plea, she would give an answer, that he did the same thing, under the same circumstances? And yet, this is precisely the doctrine we object to their transgressions of the laws of God. Usually we see it quite on the contrary, that, as we have heard, the truth, that we can believe the M. by much less, do we, should not, for a moment, admit in the concerns of human justice. The voice of Scripture has said—she says not conformed to this world! "Heeds the way of destruction, so near, there be to go in the path." Let us not imagine that we can with more safety, because we are in compliance with multitudes. There is but one standard by which to try our conduct, if that is the revealed will of God. No matter though all the world besides do, let the claim all will still you are not exempt to from the obligations of obedience. The law of God has always the same binding force, you prove its number can cancel its eternal obligations.

Thus we perceive, that when we follow the multitude to do evil, we are wholly without excuse before God. Let me then exhort you to set up a different standard of actions, for yourselves, one to which you can safely trust. Be as diligent as you please in discharging all the offices of justice, humanity, kindness, enter as heartily as you please with all the benevolent and noble virtues of the world around you, make all these commendations all these praises, and great virtue will follow, but, in the meantime, self-indulgence and selfish conduct, be there to render yourself acceptable in the presence of being serviceable to mankind. But when the multitude would lead you to evil, that moment stop, have the
Among the faithful, faithful only he:
Among immovable faith, unmovable;
Indurated, unchangeable, unshaken.

His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
No narrow, unexampled aim, unsoiled.
To prove their faith, to change their constant mind.

Though bright:

Not such he was, no such feelings, such a resolution, no views of man or the desire of imitating others, may tempt us from the path of unbending integrity among the people. And there is one truth, all men should not forget, that is, that the surest test of a pure heart is to examine the character of the person. Will [person's name] regard the mean of man, and be convinced, if so in the cause of duty. Let [person's name] speak no more of looking for the examples with approbation. There is a beautiful model of manners, of character, furnished by the great English poet in his description of the seer,achel.
laughter, as he stands like the rock on which the wave's beat & breaks in vain... There is something in the firmness of virtue, no drawn damage even from vice: it has a majesty, before all even the nicheh. Low down. But my, I marred by no means stuff there. Though guidance at least soften affectional forces even from the world, because you will not follow a multitude to do evil, yet this is but the lowest virtue which I would propose to aspire to signifies of brutality. I would tell you that it is the only way to gain that your whole is that living kindness is better than life. I would tell you that he who refuses to follow the multitude to do evil is looking who wears whom the whole ancient judge shall give him the great day. Before the every other accumulated honorable into enmity. You may at the price of your high calling heaven. If then you cannot easily follow the multitude to do evil on earth. Remember that the word of truth lies to you: that the patient continuance in well doing shall be awarded honors. Long, immortality; then in the holy cause of virtue, waves onto...

I cannot close the subject without requiring serious attention to it, particularly upon the young. For them we earnestly them to any others. From I'd say, follow not the multitude to do evil. Beware, Peruse, again, beware. Of profligate companions. If you have any regard to your future character, standing in life—any regard to the annals cared effective of your parents, any regard to the distant events upon you an eternity. If you have any desire to secure the confidence here of your own, as the approach of age en high, by any old all these motives, be enticed to go out into the company of evil men, avoid it therefrom it.

Here's away: do not resort to places where intemperance hold, the worst, if the name of God is profaned, or every thought serious, deceit is laughed at or despised. By all that is freezing in time eternity. I charge you to reform from following the multitude to do evil. Right, if we ought to feel. One no then me to do the moral welfare of the opening; we are too dead in this subject, while we are treasurer up those are to succeed us in life, let us not care more than the opening of life, such objects of gravity indulgence, such temptation device, as shall fulfill; vitalize the heart on its worm.
grant that at the last day the blood of the young may not be found on the skirts of our garments.

Feb. 4th 1822.

Other, the sacred groves e'er thou didst behold, in peace, for brightness of understanding, and duty of the Frenchmen, to practice it. May our hearts, as men of God, do evil; may our minds be the symbols of our principles of action, both to the word of the truth, when we are not given ourselves apt to the fear of men, nor brought to a snare, but may the fear of the hand be from our minds, every other fear. We pray for the young, that they may be kept from the influence of false, ungodly companions and scenes of vice, that they may be raised amidst the influences of good instruction, the word of religion. And that we may feel the importance of obtaining the moral welfare of those, in whom the very hopes of society are laid, that we may see if such be dreadful, it is to fear the influence of vice on the young mind is ofhat the student design for the work of innocence, purity. Give us the grace to do good, to secure thee in another generation, that we may at last be accepters of this through thy beloved Son.
At home. Feb. 21st, 1822, afternoon.