No. 192.

Well-doing the best argument against evil-speaking.
1 Peter, II, 15. - "For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

The best way to answer a calumny is to live it down. The silent reply of a good life gives the lie most effectually to the tale of slander. Doing well is a better defense of character, than talking well; your actions speak a language more powerful than the most eloquent plea in the most indignant vindication.

Such in brief are the principles which may fairly be drawn from the sentiment in our text. The Apostle reminds them, to whom he writes, of the various duties incumbent upon them with regard to such as were enemies to the thin faith. He advises them to demean themselves, as peaceable and good members of society, to submit dutifully to the established authorities, to shew that their religion had not made them the worse citizens as subjects of the state.
Thus he tells them, they will best refute the real
proaches of their enemies, "for it is the will of
says he, that by well doing, ye may put to en-
ience the ignorance of foolish men." This advice
was peculiarly necessary under the circumstances
in which the first items were placed. They were sur-
rounded by men, who wished to believe every-
bad of them, who were probably more indolent in
fabricating and circulating the worst reports of their
characters, sentiments, their prejudices against the
items were of the most violent, unreasonable kind;
and undoubtedly, as would indispose them to ha-
ten to any vindication or defence. Now under such
circumstances, surrounded by such enemies, it was
in vain for them to endeavour in any set way to
excitulate themselves, whatever, they could say
would fall upon deaf ears or incredulous hearts, as
they would be as far as ever from justifying them-
selves in the sight of those, who would listen to
no justification. The Apostle therefore counsels them
to defend themselves by well doing, to attempt no
plea or apology against their unexampled foes, except that such might be furnished by the faithful uniform practice of the true virtues, or by the habitual imitation of the peaceful and holy Saviour. Nothing would so effectually silence the ignorance of our adversaries, as this unanswerable testimony of a good life.

This excellent counsel of the Aposle is applicable to all times and circumstances. It is much to be lamented that the passions and prejudices of men should make this counsel necessary. But while there is so little moderation and candour among mankind, it certainly always will be necessary. There is scarcely any disposition so general as the disposition instantly to excuse and defend ourselves on the score of character and sentiments. The moment we hear of any thing, which tends to our reproach or disparagement, every feeling of indignation is at once excited, if we start up to vindicate ourselves. How common is it to hear it said, you may touch any thing but my character, but I will not bear to have that degraded? It would be amusing
to an unconsidered spectator of society, to see how all the world are in defending & excusing themselves. We use a great many words to show that we have done nothing wrong; we resort to every variety of reason & argument to show that no blame fairly belongs to us. We make out a glowing account of the transactions as if we are blamed, taking to dwell at length on the part of it which may set our actions in a favorable light, or cast a dark shade over some of our actions. Directing attention particularly to whatever discredits danger of our superiority, of benevolence in us, or of unkindness, unkindness, injustice in those with whom we had to do. To hear each man tell his own story, upon would think him the most innocent, unoffending of men; everyone can blame him; every step he took was judicious of purpose; every word he uttered was wise and well chosen. One action he performed could have been better. Now all this eagerness to defend ourselves against charges of reports as injudicious, foolish. One half this earnestness employed in well doing would serve our cause more effectually than all our grapple...
tions of excursions... This truth I propose to apply in two
distinct ways... in regard to our moral characters; in
regard to our religious opinions... for these two seem to
embrace most that is important in any view of the sub-
ject.
1. Well doing is the best argument against evil.

speaking... with regard to our moral characters. Every
day's experience will convince us, how much we are ex-
posed to unjust aspersions & the misrepresentations of
society as malicious design. The envenomed breath of ban-
der is mingled in the very air we breathe, given on
the purest names calumniating finds some blemish at white
aim to arrows. A great deal of the mischievous talkry
of the world is the effect of idleness or thoughtless-
ness... It is a sort of pest, in which we indulge with-
out thinking of the consequences, & regarding only
the present excitement of the present... Occasion-
ally one is found bad enough to commit outrage upon
the characters of others, from the worst motives, to get
ify bad passions, or to allay the thirst for revenge.
But generally more is attributed to levity, or to
the diseased desire of excitement, than to malicious
 hostilities are the connections we have with each other
 in life, so many are the ties, by nature, or in spite of our
 selves, we are bound to the world, that there must
 be numerous complicated causes of offence of great
 variety of opinion with regard to character and conduct.
 In the intercourse of life, the best men--sometimes
 like the pillars which conducted the Israelites, turned
 cloudy side toward the spectator. Now what is to
 press upon your attention is, that, frail as we are,
 exposed to so many conumcuses, it is better to trust
 the general tenor of our lives for an answer to evil
 speaking of the world, than it is to set about the
 work of direct vindication. Suppose your character
 is attacked, or in some points is held up to view in an
 unfavorable light:--if the charge be true, it is cer-
 tainly better not to attempt a defence, but to show
 by past instance of general conduct, that this particular
 instance was an exception to the usual tenor of your
 principles of behavior. This is the most honorable
 and natural method of proceeding.--It is likely in the end--
effectually to secure the esteem of the wise, of good than the most anxious, busy endeavours to exculpate yourself. But even if the charge be not true, in almost every case, it is useless, worse than useless, to be solicitous about vindicating yourself. Most of these, to whom you address yourself, will not understand your defence; of those, who do, will be quite as likely to give it the worst construction as any other.

The very ostentation, with which man shews to vindicate his character, is apt to excite suspicions in the mind of others: they will naturally think that he has not confidence enough in the purity of his motives, the correctness of his conduct, to trust them to take care of themselves. It will be disposed to conclude, that what needs so much defence is not worth defending. And we must know but little of mankind, if we suppose that ignorance is the spirit of detraction will listen to an apology or explanation with candor or fairness. Those, who are wicked enough to raise a false report to the injury of an innocent man, will surely not have virtue enough to ado...
mit his defence; - if there, who are silly enough to listen to the report, I am pleased with it, especially if it gratifies any previous feeling of ill will or private pique, will be likely to give at least as much credit to the slander, as to the reputation of the man who thus all the labour of answering calumny is lost. We have not known instances, in which the tale of slander has been abundantly answered without producing the least effect, or causing the least change in the opinions of others. No matter in some cases how paltry and inexcusable your statements may be, - no matter how stubborn and undeniable your facts, - how cogent your reasoning; - there are passions of prejudices, despised feelings, to which all you can say would be but as heating the air, which will in fact gain strength by the opposition you make, - or perhaps with perseverance of depraved ingenuity turn your arms against yourself. Meanwhile others, who are wholly indifferent to the merits of the case, will think it probably that there is about as much truth on the one side as on the other, - of all your pains to exculpate yourself.
will perhaps not gain you a single friend. And after all, a man who pleads his own cause, is seldom heard with much favor or favor; there is always a lurking suspicion of self-interest, which diminishes very much of what one can say in his own defense. Very often the more earnest and eager we are to answer a slander, the more strength of credit it will gain.

Indeed, in all accounts, the busy spirit of self-indication is useless, if not mischievous. The best and most satisfactory answer to almost every aspersion is the general character of a good life. This is a mode of defense liable to none of those objections which attend the other. It cannot be misunderstood; it speaks for itself; few will listen to your statements of arguments; but no one can refuse to give a good life its credit, to understand its meaning. The language of virtuous actions is a general language, known throughout the world; it pleads better than the most eloquent tongue; if there is a force in its accents unknown to the most eager attempts at self-defense, humility of insolence cannot easily put among constructions.
on the argument of a good life; it is a stubborn, inflexible thing, which stands up and gives its testimony without fear or favor, in the midst of foes and friends. Let a man, whose general character is known to be good, who is known in the circle of his friends and acquaintances, to practice the mean virtues in the mean spirit, who is distinguished for his uprightness, integrity, candor, sincerity of benevolence. Let such a man, I say, become the object of some slanderous report, some calumniating tale: what will be the consequence? Why, those who know him will reason from his general character, and give no heed to the aspersions. We have known this man, they will say, we cannot believe any thing to his discredit; we know that he is just, humane, generous, kind, faithful; so we therefore find an answer to the calumny in his life. Now the most ingenious defense he could set up would not have half the force and efficacy of this silent plea of a good life. I do not say, that there are no occasions, on which we should openly and plainly refute the charges, when...
be brought against us. Duty to ourselves or to others may sometimes require us to do this. A public accusation may demand a public defence. But I speak now principally of those sligher occasions of reproach which occur in the daily intercourse of society, that common trade of scandal which is carried on in neighbourhoods and small divisions of society. In all such cases, I believe you will find it to be the part of wisdom, to first to silence the ignorance of fools by well-doing, not by any set vindication or exclamations. In general, it may be safely asserted, that a character which will not take care of itself will not be protected by any studied defence. The fact is securely with taking care of. We must go on living well, doing well, and then we may defy the most envenomed shafts of slander, we shall thus build up a defence for our good name, which nothing can take from us. And which will save us all the trouble of continual reputation & explanation. Patient endurance in well doing is certainly a much better pleader for our character than
the most ingenious reasoning is the most fallacious appeal...
2. Well doing is the best argument against evil-doing, with regard to our opinions. And viewing the subject in connection with religious opinions, it is peculiarly pressed upon our notice by the state of things at the present day. Nothing is more common than for the different sects to charge each other with holding dangerous or pernicious opinions. It is the common claimant of these, who wish to cite odium against such as have the audacity to hold a different faith from themselves. You hold such and such opinions; therefore you cannot be a good man; this is the sort of satisfactory reasoning of hostile parties in religion. All the parties in the world are connected with our views of religious truths; if your views lead to every thing that is bad or unhappy, such is the intolerably disgusting Charisma of passing sectarians. Nothing is the best way for any man to put to silence this reproach of foolish men is by well doing.
such lives as shall prove that our doctrines have not
spoiled our hearts. If we are charged with believing
a creed from which bad consequences result, let us show
that whether the charge be true or false, these conse-
quences have not taken place with regard to our-
selves. Let us then that even if our theory of religi-
ion be bad, our practice of religion is good. Men may
deny our faith, if they please; but let it not be in
their power to deny our conduct. They may if they
choose, lay to the account of our opinions all the absur-
dities and abuses, which may have been committed by those
who believe as we do; they may tell of the laxity of
heresy of our faith; of those the effects of what
they call our new fangled opinions. They may say that
our creed opens the door for every kind of licentious-
ness; that we degrade the Saviour's holiness;
that we do despite to the grace of God, by
the redemption of the Gospel; that we do not seek the
remission of our sins, but lament them as we ought;
that we do not make enough on our theory of the
ful justice and severity of God. They may say all this.
as much more as they please, to the disparagement of our creed, yet if we can but place against their accusations and reproaches the testimony of a good life, we have nothing to fear; our well-doing will put to silence their ignorant folly; purity of life will triumph over their long array of charges of criminations. This after all is more effectual, if not more sound, than any other defense we can make; it will have a more powerful effect on the mind of our fellowmen, than the best reasoning. Not many perhaps could understand the arguments, by which we should defend the purity of our creed, from its good moral consequences; but all can understand the argument of a good life. First it speaks in a language all address, to the hearts and not the heads of mankind. I acknowledge that the charge of immorality may be true of a creed, but not of individuals who hold that creed, so that you can by no means in every case argue from purity of life to purity of belief. The truth is, after all, mankind are not influenced much by the doctrinal views, as such. There is a redeeming spirit.
in the good sense of moral feelings of mankind, in these few simple and deeply affecting truths which common to all sects, that happily saves men from most of the dangerous consequences of speculative errors. I confess, if mankind acted in thorough consistence with their creed, there are some popular modes of faith, which I should regard as having a very immoral tendency. But men do not act thus; they have a better guide than creeds of any kind. There are opinions which seem to me to deprive human beings of their moral agency and moral accountability, as having nothing to do, because they can do nothing, as being mere machines whose to be moved or operated upon independently of their own exertions; but I know that those who hold the opinions to which I allude, don't allow any such consequences, nor exhibit the appearance of them in their lives, and therefore I should be unwilling to charge them with the immorality of their doctrines. Men should be very slow in bringing against each other's opinions the accusation of immoral tendency, since men of equal piety may be found.
among all the different denominations... It is an
often quoted maxim, "he can't be wrong, whose life is
in the right." This, to be sure, I do not believe; for an
every good man may have a very erroneous faith; but
may we should be very cautious, that we do not fall
into that vulgar trick of crying down opinions as im-
mental dangerous, because they are different from our
own. And when we are accused by these who have more
real than knowledge, of maintaining a corrupt or pesti-
ment faith, I repeat it, the best way to silence the
folly and the malice of ignorance is by well doing; it
is emphatically the will of God that we should do so.
Hold up the shield of a pure and holy life, and the fiery
darts of angry sectarians will be heated at your faith
in vain; with regard to yourself at least, you may
show that your belief works by love of brother the
peaceable fruits of righteousness to the glory of God the
Father... When our opinions are calumniated, this silent
answer of a life becoming the disciples of Jesus will do
more to wipe off the aspersion, from more proselytes, than
all the heat of zeal, argument, disguise, excision.
nation of the ablest, most vigorous champions of its annals of controversy have furnished.

Let me then, my friend, exhort you, in conclusion, to live well, to live as becomes these who have the God of life as their guide, and thus to put to silence all calumnies against your character or your religious opinions. I can address you in no better language than that of the Apostle, beloved. Thee each you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, or war against the soul; having your conversation bereft among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil does, they may by your good works shew they shall behold glorify God in the day of visitation."

May 1823.

At home, May 18th, 1823 - afternoon.
At home, June 6th, 1830 - afternoon.