No. 194...

On recompensing evil for ourselves.
Proverbs XX, 22. "Say not thou, I will avenge evil: but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee."

It would be well, thinks, if this wise advice of the wise king were not so often disregarded in the turmoil of passion in the violence of dispute. If it were a settled principle with us, not to recompense evil for evil, but to wait till the natural course of things should recompense it for us, there would be much less vice and unhappiness in the world, if less of life would be wasted in corrupting pursuits and excitements.

I am not now going to discuss the question, whether we ought justified in any case in indulging the desire of vengeance upon those whom we think to have done us wrong; but merely to maintain that even if we do give place to this feeling, it is neither good policy nor virtue to resolve—I will recompense the evil—but that we should wait on the Lord; he will save us. I know that resent.
ment is natural to man; if because it is natural it is doubtless intended to answer a good or wise purpose in the moral constitution. We know in fact that it does answer good or wise purposes. It is sometimes a powerful handmaid even to energetic deeds of virtue, to awaken and sustain a noble spirit, that might have slumbered in quiet indifference, had it been left to the cold calculations of reason. When we look on the oppressor, who lives only for himself, who treads in the dust his fellow beings, who make it his pastime to devastate, to crush, to destroy, whose heart does not rise in all its strength of resentment to pluck down this haughty cruelty? When you see some one, whom wealth & success have made insolent, spurning with the feelings of such as by the chances of the world are placed beneath him, shutting his heart against the benevolence of he owes to these, who bear the image of God, as well as himself, of doing violence to these ties of brotherhood which should bind man to man, - the resentment of God that hath implanted in your breast, fires the brain.
of contempt on that man, and make you rejoice to see the power of doing wrong taken from him. These to be sure, are instances of a too public kind to leave common; if it is indeed, when the happiness and rights of others are in question, that resentment appears most dignified and proper. The greatest difficulty and danger is when the case concerns ourselves. Here resentment, though perfectly allowable, is more liable to abuse. We ought to be much more careful about resenting our own wrongs, than those of others. In the one case it may be connected with the best and most honorable feelings of the heart; in the other, there is great danger that it may degenerate into coarse and vulgar revenge. The sentiment of resentment, for evil or wrongdoing is so natural, as to be almost instinctive. We cannot, we ought not, to suffer what we believe to be open injustice, without nature, stirring up within us. But we are to be very cautious, how we use this natural feeling in our own behalf; for there is always great reason to suspect, that we shall be but too partial judges in our own case. We may think we are injured where we are not; one may ascribe the worst
motives, where no such motives exist; your stock of resentment may be excited to bear in a most unworthy manner, be wasted in a wrong pursuit. To these various other abuses we are exposed in the indulgence of this natural feeling. Still it is not to be proscribed, extirpated, or treated as a criminal in all cases. It has its uses, to these it was designed to be devoted by him, who gave us all our capacities for excitement and feeling. I will not now speak of the bounds in which resentments should be exercised, nor of the canons which should be hung upon its operations to retard its progress. The single principle on which I wish to incate is this: that even in cases where we think we have the most just cause for resentment, we should not allow ourselves hastily to gratify that resentment; we should not say to ourselves, we will recompense evil for evil. Should coolly and quietly wait; the course of the world comes or hates bring us recompense for the evil we have sustained. I am not asking you never to resent an injury; this might not to be expected or desired; but I ask you, when you do feel the spirit of resentment working in you, to suspend for a while at least the
gratification of that resentment... I see whether you do not soon get ample satisfaction for the injury done you, as you have suffered, without seeking revenge yourself. I will endeavor to show that this course of conduct is less good policy, than it is your duty.

One reason why it is so, is that if we refrain from compounding the evil of those who have done us wrong, we may be almost certain that the course of things will in a long or shorter time bring us the relief and satisfaction which we desire. So wait patiently is therefore better than to revenge hastily, because you will have all the gratification without any of the guilt of passion. It is in the very nature of things, that base and malicious conduct that bring repentance and disgrace in its train. If you are certain that the right is on your side, time, the course of God's providence will completely avenge you. You say, that someone has injured or attempted to injure you by every means in his power. Well, granting the justice of your complaint, supposing it to be true, that this man has done so, upon had
better let him alone...though you feel resentment, not gratify it for the present. In the at place, give him time enough if he may sincerely repent of the wrong he has done or meant you. Many a man does that in an hour of passion or excitement, for as the is afterwards very at heart. As such and how we all do say more than we can justify, we look back upon it frequently with bitter remorse. Now this man, who intended to trespass your rights or to hurt your feelings, may in a short time see the injustice or unkindness of his conduct in as strong a light as you do...may lament it as much. But in order to this, you must not give fuel to his passions by seeking to reinforce the evil upon his head. If then you may once, he will not repent of what he has done or tended; your opposition will but what his hostility gives a keener edge to his angry feelings: he will in all probability then begin to justify or define himself more clamorously; but you must refrain as far as possible at least, from every expression of...
a desire for revenge, you must treat him with
mildness as if you pitied rather than hated him.
you must let him have time to think over what
he has done in his calm and solitary moments. if
it may be, contrition will subdue his heart, he will
make you perhaps all the amends with a than can de-
mand or desire. now if such should be the result
of your forbearance, with how much more satisfac-
tion would you look back upon such a course of
conduct, than if you had given indulgence to the
bitter feelings of revenge, even though it might
be on your side. it is surely better that a fellow be-
ing should be softened, by kindness of his own
penitence, into penitence, than that he should be
subdued by force, and reluctantly give you an enti-
ed satisfaction. but in the 2d place, even if the
man, who has injured you does not or will not repent,
it is better for you to wait, to have the evil accom-
penced for you than it is to be in a hurry to accom-
pence it at yourself. i know there are many men who
can deliberately do an injury, or deliberately receive
in it, without being for a moment softened by re-
gret; that upon such kindness & forbearance have
little or no effect... But even with regard to such
it is better to put off revenge, & let things take their
course. Such men are doing themselves, worse hurt, than
you can do them. Their character & conduct are better
fitted to work their own destruction & shame, than any
means wh you can use for that purpose. The man
who gives full indulgence to his bad passions, who
willfully injures his neighbours, & seeks to aggravate
the injury, by making it as acute as possible, who
perseveres in a course of outrage or the feelings of en-
frinshes of these around him, seems never to know
what it is to relent... Such a man, long, is aware
enemy to himself than any other one can be to him
shors the foundation for a plentiful stock of hatred can
tempt from his fellow men. Now if one of this charac-
ter attacks his happiness, & trespasses wantonly upon
your interests, you have only to leave him to him-
self, & if revenge be desirable, you can have no bette
revenge. God has set the stamp of infamy dis-
grace to such traits of character, they cannot escape their fate. He who delights in injuring his fellowmen will have but a short lived triumph, for when he attempts to injure will find that the course of God's providence will soon recompense the evil fpotten without any exertions of their own.

Another reason why we should not be in any haste to recompence evil for ourselves is, that we are very apt to suffer our feelings to carry us too far, even when our cause is just. Resentment, though it be a feeling natural to man, though in many cases it is allowable, is yet to be restrained within certain limits of propriety; at least, the expression of it is to be thus restrained. When it passes beyond these limits, it receives no sympathy from others, but excites a stronger sentiment against those who entertain it, than against those, who are the objects of it. If we are seen hating, pursuing, exterminating, relentless, bent upon satisfaction, then even those who think we have been unjustly injured, in
stead of going along with us, are repelled by the
wrenchful feelings we display, and lose all the sym-
pathy they once felt in our sufferings. If you hear
that one of your acquaintance has been grossly
wronged, you feel at once a sympathy of resent-
ment with him: but, if you are told that he
has taken upon himself to recompence the evil in
flicted, to retaliate upon the offender with unpar-
alizing severity, in short, that he evidently thirsts for
revenge, if you, upon hearing this, your sympathy
with his resentment is almost sure to vanish,
in fact begins to go over to the other side. We give
to the man who is the object of so inspiring a sys-
tem of vengeance... We therefore lose friends by
detaching our anger to recompence evil proffered,
many who would have thought well of our cause
felt an interest in our suffering are compelled
to think we are as passionate of severe and pernicious
denunciation, as our opponents, will come at last to
think that one discovers about as much sympathy
thy as the other. But in the other hand, if you are observed to be mild, yet firm, under the reception of injury, not insensible, yet not burning for revenge, ready to forgive, to wipe off the debt of wrong, not only with the looks of defiance, but with the looks of manly gentleness, if they are observed to behave in this way, when we are unsettled, depend upon it, the sympathy of the virtuous will find in that an ample satisfaction than we should in the most deadly revenge. Even the world does honor to that manly forbearance, that noble self-command, who can receive injury and not be angry, who can be wronged and not wish to revenge. And let us never forget that we ourselves shall probably lament more than others can do, the readiness with which we gave up to our passions, even when we became to think our cause just. There is an hour after revenge is over, when the spirit of resentment is sate, with gratification, an hour of stillness and reflection.
the melting stream of passion has gone by, all that we wished for is obtained, the evil has been fully repaid, and that is almost always an hour of bitter regret. We begin to think we have gone too far, we feel a compassion for him and them we have wreaked our vengeance. "When we have broken down his stanchness, made him a taunt and reproach, we shall be turned to mercy, our tears will fall down over his wretchedness; our anger will come back on us; if we shall mourn over the desolation of our hands. When we have humbled all that we wished to humble, destroyed all that we hated to destroy, when we cease to be supported by strong passions, when we cannot retract or repent, then we shall begin to repent." Let us not then deny regard to the good opinion of others, is to ruin happiness, if we value the sympathy of our fellow men or would save ourselves from many a bitter pang for the future, let us not say to ourselves, we will repel evil, but let us wait in the sure promise of God that will save us.
Another reason for forbearance is, that we have always reason to suspect, that we have been partial to our own cause, & have thought ourselves much more injured than we are. Jery, we have always reason to suspect this; for we are a great deceived. It is very easy for us to dwell on the wrong we have received, till it is magnified into a most overwhelming principle in our views; & therefore we should certainly be very cautious then we hastily recumence evil. Let us pray for, fairly ask ourselves, “are we not deceived? have we not magnified some trifling circumstances, to swell the amount of the injury as much as possible? “are we sure that the cause of our resentment is altogether just? Have we collected the most ample evidence? Have we examined it with the closest attention? Have we suspected our passions? Have we questioned our self-love? When we make such terrible resolutions of eternal hatred, when we disdain the great rule of the God, when we proclaim ourselves as punishers & avengers: it at least behoves us to know, that we have been facts as they really are,
I reasoned rightly upon them. But the truth is, no man ought to be bold enough to expose his heart to such peril; no man ought to say, I am so one of my own passions, that I will risk upon them my peace in this world, my safety in the next; I see every day, that the hatred of others is unjust, but I am sure that mine is just; I am warranted by pride, by error, by infirmity, and I only am candid, temperate, and good. Such language, I say, buiten, no man ought to hold; for it supposes impartiality of fairness, more freedom from bias from the distorting influence of passion, than we have any right to claim for ourselves. This then is not a very good reason, why we should not be in haste to recompense evil; for it may be, we shall recompense what is in truth no evil. So what was not meant to be such. Let us distrust ourselves. It is always easy to suspect that the calculation we make of the evil we have sustained is entirely overdone, that after all we have much more reason to forgive than to avenge. Our own weakness should teach us this les-
and good angels and men will appear as the more for practicing it.

In looking back on this subject, as I have so often brought before you merely because it is so often necessary, there is reason to fear itself, that no administration will be of any avail against the violence of excited passion. Yet surely it is very possible to combine temperate resistance to present injustice with a tendency to forgive what is past, to be firm in the maintenance of just rights, while we abstain from inflicting avenging injuries on our enemy. It will not be long before hatred and persecution must cease in the grave; the years of our delusion pass quickly on in the midst of these passions. This warfare, death comes, we smile with the fury of an avenging heart burning in our breast, or the object of our hatred is taken from us, we have no more time to refuse or to forgive. May God call upon us to be forbearing towards each other; even in the case of real injuries of true sufferings, there will be look on that anger which rises in our innocence, or when those who are rendered implacable
by imaginary notions. Therefore, as the Scripture saith,
repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, save
every day, be mild and forgiving, for the kingdom of heaven
is at hand: for, while forbearance is overbearing,
while there remains enough of life for the re-
newal of kindness, while you have something else
to better on repentance, than lingering looks of flattering
words. Think not: it is monstrous to die with a load
of passion, folly of vice, without a particle of mercy
for the passions, the follies, the vices of others. Think
then again can inspire G. in that same breath with all
you threaten man… If you have never forgiven, or
except, or listened, or lifted up the bruised & contrite
it, think how you will ask for mercy in that day,
when vengeance is near at hand, when every rock of
hill shall be molten with heat, when the bow of
God shall be bent; & the thunder of the word of heav-
en shall roll above your head.”

May, 1823.
At home, May 25th, 1823 - afternoon