
LAST ADVICE

OF THE

REV. CHARLES PETTIGREW

TO

HIS SONS,

1797.

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THE LAST ADVICE TO J. AND E. P., BY THEIR FATHER.

My Dear Sons,—Life is precarious, and it is not likely that I shall remain long with you. The symptoms of a radical decay of constitution indicate the approach of my dissolution. And I can only say "the will of the Lord be done."

From the happiness which I enjoy in my family, in a social capacity, a continuation of life is flattering and truly desirable; but, particularly, on your account I wish to protract life to a more advanced period. My sons, I feel myself greatly interested in the turn you may take. Could I stay but long enough to guard you from the rocks and shoals which are so numerous, and so dangerous to youth, as just launching out into the troubled ocean of this life; and more especially, could I be so happy, as with success to direct your feet into the paths of virtue, religion and happiness, with a rational hope that you would persevere therein, the bed of death would be rendered comparatively soft, easy and comfortable.

As this is, however, a privilege which I do not expect to be favored with, I think it an indispensable duty now to testify the love which I bear to you as a father, who desires above all things to promote your interest and happiness through life and in death. In order to this I shall leave you a few cautionary hints and observations on paper, that you may, from a principle of filial duty, have recourse to *them*, as speaking for *me*, when I shall be silent in the dust.

Then, my sons, that you may derive some advantage from my age and experience, and the observations I have made, during my progress through life, for more than half a century, *attend* while I assure you, that your temporal happiness will greatly depend on the principles which you *have*, and may yet imbibe of *justice*, *honor*, and *religion*. To acquire, and to maintain these principles with unshaken firmness and fidelity in your transactions, both of a moral and religious nature, will secure to you the approbation of the wise and discerning part of mankind; and, what is infinitely more desirable and happifying, it will secure to you the enjoyment of an approving mind. It will at the same time inspire you with a rational hope in the divine approbation. This hope towards God is a source of consolation and support under the heaviest calamities of human life.

A dishonest man, who has no regard for the principles of *justice* and *equity* in his intercourse with the world, lives like *Cain*, in a state of self-condemnation, which excludes the possibility of his being happy. Sentiments of *honor* have no influence upon such a man. He is under the entire government of selfish principles. The interests of his neighbour

cannot stand in competition with his own, which, when laid in the opposite scale, always preponderate. In the view of gain, he loses sight of reputation and descends to such meannesses as often render him an object of just contempt. With their good opinion, men are induced to withdraw their confidence from such a man, leaving him to make his way through life the best way he can. This you will think a very uncomfortable state of dereliction; indeed it is. And I pray God that you may never fall into it.

To prevent this it will be necessary to act always on your guard. Never to be too self-confident, but rather jealous over your own heart; for such is the imperfection of human nature, that men are often deceived in themselves, while exposed to the eye of the world, in a very different light from that in which they are accustomed to view themselves.

Let me then entreat you to let simple honesty, and undisguised truth characterize your transactions, both civil and social, and particularly in your matters of trade and traffic. Honesty is, and will ever be found, the best policy.

There is nothing more disgraceful to a man, than a disposition to deviate from the simplicity of truth, either by misrepresentations, prevarications, or a passion for idle story-telling, whereby some men who might otherwise have been respectable, have rendered themselves very ridiculous, and even contemptible. In respect to these things, I wish you never to be off your guard.

The world is envious and ill-natured. I have found it so, particularly since I became possessed of property. To possess more than some others, is a crime

sufficient to make the naturally envious and splenetic one's enemies. From a general notion that wealth gives power and influence, those who may be below you in this respect, will always view you with a jealous eye, and be ever ready to misconstrue your best actions. When you see this observation verified, let it not excite your resentment, but endeavour to overcome *this evil with good*; at the same time maintain your firmness, in the exercise of religion, and those noble and manly virtues which I have mentioned. I have more than once seen such a conduct make an enemy ashamed of himself, and in some instances even convert him into a friend.

Be the disposition of the world towards you as it may, it will be your best policy, to be always closely united with each other, in the bonds of fraternal affection, a two-fold cord is not easily broken; counsel and advise each other, with candour and love. Do not, as I have known some brothers do, live at variance, and make parties against one another. Such live in disgrace, and are ridiculed by the partizans they make. Besides, as if under the curse of heaven, I never knew them do well. Therefore, my sons, "let brotherly love continue."

In respect to the conduct which I wish you to observe towards your mother, it is proper to observe, that it will always be no less your interest than your duty, to pay her every attention that would be proper and becoming to an own mother. To this she has a just claim, for sundry weighty reasons; as,

1st. Because she has treated *me*, your *father*, with every attention which might have a tendency to augment or increase a felicity which I have enjoyed in

my union with her almost without jar or interruption; and, in a word, has in all respects been every thing that I could have wished or desired in a wife. May you have as much to say with equal truth, when you shall have been as long married, as I have been to her!

She has spirit, without which, no woman was ever good for any thing; she has also a considerable share of discernment, so that an impropriety of conduct towards her would be sure to be noticed, and perhaps excite a proper degree of resentment on her part. I must therefore, as a father who loves you, and wishes above all things else of a temporal nature, to promote your interest and happiness, request that you will observe the exactest propriety in your deportment towards her; that you will at all times, observe the strictest decorum, and that upon all occasions you will be kind and obliging. She is very capable of advising you in your affairs, no less so than myself, who have a thousand times been advised by *her*, and I now beg that you will attend to her *directions*, as to the wise counsels of a parent. To such attention from you she is, in the second place, entitled—

Because ever since she has been my wife she has been your mother also, not in *law only*, but in the exercise of an unwearied attention to what she thought would promote your interest, or rational gratification; indeed I have often been prompted by her in matters of indulgence towards you both. Then forget not to exercise the same tender care and indulgence towards her, in her disconsolate and widowed state, when I shall be no more to comfort her.

Look not for perfection in human nature; and make

every possible allowance for age and infirmity. You may appear no less imperfect to *others* than they do to *you*, and when most disposed to blame, the fault may be most in yourselves; when we expect too much from others, we are sure to meet with disappointment.

I became possessed of a negro property by my union with your mother. This (though, alas! a most troublesome property) I have carefully kept for you as a sacred deposit. I have been so far from squandering or spending it, that I have carefully improved it, by all the frugality and economy I have been master of. The addition I have made, has been chiefly in lands and improvements. The lands I have procured for you are some of the most valuable in point of fertility, timber and conveniency to trade, in the county. Care and industry, sobriety and economy, are all that are necessary to make you *wealthy* in a few years. But to be wealthy alone, is not sufficient to make you either happy or respectable. In order to *this*, you must be *prudent, wise, discreet, and affable* in your deportment, contented in the enjoyment of a competency, with which an indulgent Providence has blessed you, and above all things, you must never forget the liberal author of your blessings, but piously devote *yourselves* to *him*, and in all things imitate his benevolence in the exercise of charity and a diffusive good will towards men.

The moment you become *irreligious* and insensible of your obligations to God, you will begin to grow remiss in your duty towards men, and cease to be happy. You will ever find that the truest happiness results from an unshaken integrity in the exercise of

your duty both towards God and towards your neighbour. I can truly say I have found it so, and when I have heard myself unjustly reproached, I have derived great consolation from the approbation of my own mind. I am however mortified on a retrospect, to think that my life has been so imperfect, and I wish you to improve on my imperfect example; and as you tender your happiness and respectability in life, be ever on your guard against whatever may tend to seduce you from the practice of *virtue, sobriety and economy*; lest you finally sink into *idleness, extravagancy, and dissipation*, which are sure to terminate in disgrace and misery.

You can never be treated with superior respect unless your conduct should entitle you to it, by its superiority to that of the vulgar and low-bred. *People* are generally better judges of merit than we think they are: and where it *really* is, it never fails to command less or more of respect and esteem. Unjust pretensions set a man in the light of a counterfeit—a despicable pretender to what he is not.

They are often no less accurate in their judgment of what is becoming the character of a gentleman; and on the contrast of what fixes a disgraceful stain upon a conspicuous character.

The character of a christian and a gentleman are very consistent. The latter is highly improved by the softening and meliorating influence of the former. I wish you, my sons, to unite them, that you may be in favour with both God and man.

To this end cultivate the softer tempers, in the exercise of resolution and firmness. Beware of giving up the reins to passion; unbridled passion will grow

daily more and more turbulent, and at last spurn all restraint from the rules of decency and good breeding. This renders a man a truly pitiable object. To manage *negroes* without the exercise of too much passion, is next to an impossibility, after our strongest endeavours to the contrary; I have found it so. I would therefore put you on your guard, lest their provocations should on some occasions transport you beyond the limits of decency and christian morality.

Let this consideration plead in their favour, and at all times mitigate your resentments. They are slaves for life. They are not stimulated to care and industry as white people are, who labor for themselves. They do not feel themselves *interested* in what they do, for arbitrary masters and mistresses; and their education is not such as can be expected to inspire them with sentiments of honor and gratitude. We may justly expect rather that an oppressive sense of their condition would naturally have a tendency to blunt all the finer feelings of nature, and render them callous to the ideas of honor and even honesty.

It will be necessary that you keep an *overseer*: and this will be attended with so much *expense* that it will require you to be very cautious, that your expenditure may not in the run of the year, exceed the clear income of your respective farms; and to fall back but a little every year, will soon destroy your small capital. Endeavour, therefore, to *gain a little* every succeeding year to the principal, without which you can live neither safe, easy, nor happy.

This will make it necessary that you keep exact accounts of *profit* and *loss*; also that you pay a close attention to the man into whose hands you entrust the

management of your plantation affairs. Overseers are too generally very unfaithful in the discharge of the trust reposed in them. This never fails to injure the indolent and careless employer.

To make him attentive to your business be not too *familiar*. Familiarity will totally destroy your influence over him, and while you maintain a prudent reserve towards him, be not wanting in decent *respect* for him as a *man*, and a man whom you have honored with a trust. If he has any merit he will endeavour to deserve it—and if he has none, it may have a different effect; in this case it will be proper, if you can do better, to dismiss him.

Endeavour to treat your negroes well, and to get your plantations in the best order possible, as a change may take place sooner than is generally expected in respect to slavery.

Should that change take place, this low, laborious land will not suit you altogether. But as it is kindly to the production of wheat, you had better fall into the northward manner of farming: that is, to have meadow, to furnish hay for your stock in the winter, and have fewer hogs, that much corn may not be necessary. It would be advisable to get a man from the northward, to initiate you into this way of living, and their manner of husbandry.

Should it please God to prolong your lives, you may think it best to sell your possessions in this low country, and to move westwardly. If you should, be sure to procure a good and convenient spot, and well situated for health; that is, *high*, and not having any low or marshy ground to the southward of the house. Such low lands, if brought into cultivation, are ex-

tremely unwholesome, from the copious exhalations which are thrown in upon a family by the southwardly winds, which prevail naturally in the summer season.

The lands which I have procured for you in Cumberland are, I hope, good; and should you think of going to that country, they will be valuable—and although you might not approve their local situation, you will be able to sell them and buy where you would choose to live.

Above all things, strive to imbibe the *sacred spirit of religion*; it consists in the *love of God shed abroad in the heart*. This *love*, where it is, regulates the *conduct* of the christian towards every one with whom he may be conversant; it is *this principle*, and the *exercise* of it, that can make him happy, both in life and death—and it is this principle, (namely,) the love of God prevailing in *his soul in time*, that prepares the christian for the *full and final* enjoyment of *God in eternity!* where the righteous shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars with undiminished splendor for ever and ever. May God almighty bless you, my sons! and make you better and more useful men than your affectionate father has had it in his power to be.

CHARLES PETTIGREW.

The above was drawn up without study or premeditation: you will therefore, my sons, take it, not as a correct and studied performance, but as the friendly effusions of a father's heart. Taking it thus, I flatter myself you will let it have its due weight on both your hearts and lives. Vale, semper vale!

