

To the Honourable
ROBERT DINWIDDIE, Esq;

His Majesty's Lieutenant-Governor, and Commander in Chief, of Virginia.

SIR,

THE following discourse was at first written for the instruction and admonition of my own parish, without any view at that time, of its going farther; but being called, by your Honour, to preach before the General Assembly, I could not think upon any subject better adapted to the present circumstances of our country, and more necessary, to be insisted on. The Gentlemen of the House of Burgesses having honoured it with their approbation, and desired it should be printed, I very willingly comply with their request, as it may be a means of rendering the truths contained in it more publick and diffusive, and may possibly contribute something towards the cure of this enormous Vice.

IT was not without a sensible pleasure, that I observed a vein of piety run through your Honour's speech to the General Assembly, and a high regard expressed for the true interest of Religion. It is upon this, Sir, that the Thrones of Kings are established, and that Princes and Magistrates reign and decree Justice. So that every violation of the dictates of Religion and Morality is, not only an act of Rebellion against the Majesty of Almighty God, but also a flagrant offence against the real interests, and true felicity, of the State. And this is the reason, that all wise and well constituted governments have ever had the utmost attention to Religion, and made its Purity and Practice their first and principal concern.

BUT how destructive of every religious sentiment, and corruptive of all Honesty and Morality, this flagitious practice is, hath been, I hope, sufficiently set forth and explained in this Sermon. It is upon you, Sir, that the Executive Part of our Government now chiefly rests; and if, by a proper vigour in the execution of the laws against it, or by any other method, you can discourage and suppress this crying enormity, it will greatly redound to the honour of your Administration, which that it may be long and happy over us, is the sincere wish, and shall be the constant Prayer of, Sir,

Your Honour's most faithful

And most obedient Servant,
WILLIAM STITH.

The Sinfulness and pernicious Nature of Gaming

A
S E R M O N
Preached before the
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
of
V I R G I N I A:

At Williamsburg, *March 1st*, 1752.

By WILLIAM STITH, A. M.
Rector of Henrico Parish.

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Exodus XX. Part of v. 17.

Thou shalt not covet.

THESE Words contain the principal verb and perceptive Part of the tenth Commandment; and I have chosen them for a Discourse upon a particular kind of coveting, which is become a growing and crying evil among us. I believe, you will easily judge, that the coveting, which I mean, is that of Gaming; a Vice, that always hath its root in avarice, and which, in its greedy wishes and aims, devours its neighbour's houses and lands, his man-servants and his maid servants, his oxen and his asses, and everything else, that is his.

HOWEVER, it may be thought perhaps by some persons, that this is a subject below the animadversion and dignity of this place. But altho' Gaming is in itself a

very low and contemptible Vice, yet as it is, in all its complications and consequences, a sin of a very deep dye and aggravated nature; and as it is at present very prevalent among us, and hath, within these few years, grown visibly, and as it were to the eye; I am sure, I shall never esteem any such to be below my duty and function. On the contrary, both as a Minister of God's Word, and as a lover of my country, I shall joyfully embrace every occasion, as well publick as private, of bearing my Testimony against a practice, so very sinful and hurtful to men's souls, and so vastly injurious and destructive to every country, where it is much followed.

BUT it may perhaps be objected, that all Gaming is not of this heinous and sinful nature; but that, in some instances and degrees, it is a lawful and innocent diversion. This indeed is a disputed point among Moralists and Divines; but I believe, it is generally agreed to be sinful, as soon as ever it ceases to be a mere amusement, and becomes a contest for money, so that avarice mingles itself with, and corrupts, its nature. For whenever Gaming engrosses too much of our thought and affection, or employs too much of our time; - whenever it leads us into sinful habits, or betrays us into violent and criminal passions; - or whenever it makes us neglect more useful business and pursuits, or omit our necessary duties to God, our neighbour, or ourselves; - in all these, and other such cases, it immediately loses the harmlessness of its nature, and degenerates into downright sin and folly.

TO this it may be observed, that the spirit of Gaming is of a very growing and encroaching nature; so that no man can say to it, *thus far shalt thou come, and no farther*; nor answer for the evil consequences of indulging it, even in the lowest degree. It will therefore always be an especial point of Prudence, carefully to guard against, or even wholly to avoid, such a dangerous contagion; lest it gains insensibly upon the mind, and at last totally engrosses and enslaves us.

BUT besides, Gaming, in its most innocent degree, must be acknowledged to be at best only a supplement to good-sense, which serves to fill up the vacancies of useful discourse and diverting conversation. Its greatest use is to kill time, and to pass away those hours, which lie heavy upon the hands of the idle; and its highest praise is only the negative one, of keeping such persons from hard drinking, and other more sinful and pernicious courses. So that to give it its whole

due, it is nothing but a harmless kind of trifling, and a less hurtful manner of fooling away our time.

BUT however void of guilt so childish an amusement may be, yet no such thing, I am sure, can be pleaded in excuse of high Gaming, which is an evident and undeniable sin. For we therein sin against our neighbor, against our country, against our families, against ourselves, and against GOD. And therefore, in the prosecution of this discourse, I beg leave to make some observations on each of those heads. And,

1. IN Gaming we sin against our neighbor, as we therein covet our neighbour's goods, and are undoubtedly guilty of an eminent breach of this tenth Commandment. For covetousness is the mother-passion to the spirit of Gaming; and no true Gamester sits down to play with his neighbor, without a determined design against his purse and his property. It is not, to relieve the mind after hard application to other more severe and useful pursuits, or to divert and trifle away an idle hour, that the Gamester plays, -but it is wholly with a view to get money; -and the more he wins from his neighbor, his friend, or his very brother, the more is he pleased, and the better are his ends answered; so that, in mind at least, we are evidently guilty of hurting our neighbor, as we design and endeavor to gain from him his necessaries and conveniences of life.

AND indeed it were well, if it stopped there, and went no farther than a bare desire an intention of mind. I am afraid it is constantly led on and brought into Act, and too often settles into a fixed habit of fraud and knavery. For that man must certainly be an extraordinary person, who can be forever hankering after and eager for his neighbour's goods, and yet keep himself from all honest arts and fraudulent practices towards obtaining them. In truth, a settled habit of Gaming, and steady principle of honesty, seem to be utterly repugnant and inconsistent with each other. Our honesty will make us quit Gaming, or Gaming will make us desert our honesty. Two such opposite principles can never long agree and dwell together in the same breast.

AT first indeed the Gamester's deflections from the paths of honesty may be modest and fearful. He will perhaps only take, what, in the style of that art and mystery, are called fair advantages; that is to say, he will only take advantage of

his neighbour's ignorance, and cheat him by his own mistake. And this, according to the casuistry of the Gaming-Table; is entirely consonant to the Rules of Justice and Honour; altho' by all other Laws of GOD and Man it is accounted a palpable fraud and arrant knavery. For certainly, the man, that takes advantage of my ignorance and steals my horse, or that robs my house, by my mistake or inadvertency in leaving my key in the door, is as honest as he, that wins my money upon the like ignorance or mistake. And there is no Court of Justice, but what will oblige a man to rectify any errors, that may be committed in the settlement of an account, and refund the money, which he hath unjustly got from his neighbor, by his own acuteness, or the other's negligence or error. And yet from such principles doth the Gamester's System of Morality set out; such, I say, as contradict the plainest dictates of Reason and Justice. And when the mind is once debauched and corrupted by such wicked principles, it is no wonder, if it afterwards wades on from Guilt to Guilt, till it at last arrives at all insidious arts, iniquitous tricking, and knavish refinements of Gaming.

AND this habit cheating and tricking, which is contracted at the Gaming Table, will diffuse itself through all other parts of a man's dealings and conduct. He will not be able to buy anything without a nick, or to sell the least trifle without a bite. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? then may ye also do Good, that are accustomed to do Evil.* Jeremiah xiii. 23. The habit of shuffling and cousening will be so grafted and rooted in their very nature, that it will show itself in every branch of their behavior, and every the most indifferent Office of Life. So that Life itself is with them one continual scene of Gaming, and their whole Study and Employment in it is to lie upon the watch, and to take all advantages that offer.

BUT to proceed one step farther: I wish the Evil of Gaming terminated even here. But it is often found to go still farther, and at last to bring Men to downright stealing and robbery. For it is well known, that there never was any notorious thief or robber, who was not at the same time a notorious Gamester. And when the near prospect of Death obliges those wretched Creatures to repent of the Evil of their Ways, it may be observed, that a caution against this unrighteous and corruptive practice always makes one part of their dying Admonitions, as it hath always been one main road, that led them to that miserable End.

NEITHER is this the worst of it yet. For Gaming is often known to lead men to those blacker and more odious Crimes of Dueling and Murder. Nay, the despair and distraction of the ruin and beggary, which they have brought upon themselves and families, hath sometimes carried the unhappy wretches to that highest and most horrid of all Crimes, the Sin of Self-Murder; and his made them rush wildly into the presence of Almighty GOD, with all their Sins and Iniquities fresh upon them, and without a possibility of redeeming their conduct by a future Repentance and Amendment.

IN short; no good and prudent man can ever concern himself far with this abominable practice of Gaming. For if he is a good man, he will not himself cheat; and if he is a prudent man, he will never engage himself among a Pack of Thieves and Sharpers, where, if he will not cheat, he is sure to be cheated. – But as in Gaming we thus sin against our neighbour. So,

II. ARE we guilty of a very heinous Sin against our country. And this plainly follows from what has been urged under the former Head. For if Gaming has a natural and direct tendency, to sap the Honesty, and to corrupt the Morals of a People, then Gaming is undoubtedly a most grievous Offence against every Country, where it is practiced. For moral Virtue and Honesty is the grand Fountain of publick Honour and Felicity; as the Vice and Wickedness of a Nation are the certain Forerunners and Cause of its Disgraced and Destruction: According to that excellent remark of the Wiseman; *Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is a Reproach to any People.* Proverbs xiv. 34.

BUT besides, the strength and prosperity of every country entirely depend upon the number and honest industry of its inhabitants, who by their labour and manufactures increase the publick stock, and add to the general wealth of the Nation. Every honest Labourer, of any useful Trade or Profession, that faithfully and industriously follows the same, is so far a Benefactor to the Puclick, and contributes to the Wealth and Prosperity of his Country. As on the contrary every art or pursuit, that tends to make the People idle, and to draw them off from their honest Callings and useful Trades, immediately becomes hurtful and pernicious to the Community. These are some of the first Principles of Polity – and plainest Truths in the Science of Government.

BUT now, what can be imagined, more destructive of Industry, a greater Enemy to honest Labour, and more immediately calculated to draw men off from their useful callings, and to render them idle and vagrant, than this practice of Gaming? For when mankind can be so far gulled and deceived in their Hopes, as to promise themselves more profit from one Hour's Play, than from a Year's Labour, human nature will be apt to be too indulgent to itself, and joyfully to embrace the scheme of much money and little trouble. And thus are they induced to quit their several useful Callings and Professions, and to gad about from place to place, in pursuit of these wild Hopes, and imaginary Riches. Whereas, if they would give themselves the Trouble of making a just Calculation of the Matter, they would soon find so much expended in travelling charges, so much thrown away in drinking, rioting, and other concomitant Vices of Gaming, that upon the whole they are themselves great Losers, and that the Tavern-keepers, and other panders to their Vices, are generally the chief Gainers.

BUT on the other hand, what possible advantage can accrue to a Country from the Practice of Gaming? What useful art is promoted? What manufactures are carried on? Or what addition is there made by it to the publick Stock and Wealth of a People? None, certainly. For the whole of Gaming is only to shift the property and specie, which hath been acquired to a Country and brought in by the honest Labourer's Industry, from one hand to another, - and oftentimes from the more worthy to the most unworthy member of Society. And Arts and Manufactures are so far from being advanced by it, that it is the greatest obstruction imaginable to them, by drawing off those hands to the ways of Idleness and Knavery, which by GOD and their Station in Life, are designed for Labour, and which ought by all the Reason in the World to be so employed. So that to call them off from their necessary employments, is in truth to rob their Country of the profit, and advantage of their Labours, and even to run counter to GOD'S Providence, and to contradict his divine Will in allotting them their Rank and Condition in the World. And that this is the case among us is very notorious; when persons, who by their fortune and Figure in Life are marked out for Labour, dare to desert their Post at the Plow and the Hoe, where they may do their Country good Service by increasing the publick export and riches, and betake themselves to the more easy and idle, but less honest Employment of Gaming.

AND as his is true of the inferior sort of people, so is it more particularly applicable to Gentlemen and Persons of Distinction. As they have a greater stake

in a Country, and enjoy a larger Property, so are they bound, both in Gratitude and Interest, to be more studious of that Country's Good, and to prevent every art or practice, that shall be found hurtful to it. Instead of wasting and lavishing away their time, their money, and their Constitution, at the Gaming Table, they ought to be employed in *devising liberal Things*, in setting forward any useful Project or Branch of Trade and Manufacture, and in promoting everything, that may tend to the publick Good and Improvement. Instead of throwing away their money among the rapacious and unthankful Tribe of Gamesters, they ought to *cast their Bread upon the Waters*, by employing the honest and industrious Poor, and so *after many days* they will be sure *to find it again*, repaid with usury, both in this World and the next. Instead of defiling themselves with so foul a practice, and setting fashions to the lower People in Vice, they ought by their Example to lead them on to everything, that is virtuous and honest, and with the utmost severity of the Law to restrain and punish this execrable custom; a custom so evidently corruptive of the People, and so prejudicial to the Publick, that there is no Country in the World, where it rose to any height, that did not immediately prohibit it under the severest penalties. And this is certainly an unanswerable proof of the universal Sense of Mankind concerning its pernicious nature and tendency. But,

III. IN Gaming we are also guilty of a Sin against our families, For,

1. WE all owe to our Families an honest Diligence and careful endeavor to support and maintain them according to our several stations and abilities; which Duty, I am afraid, is not much regarded by the Gentlemen of this Profession. For although the Gamester may seem to be solicitous to provide for those of his own house, and may be thought to follow his Calling out of a View and Hope of enriching himself and his Family, yet shall we be greatly mistaken, if we think him such a careful Husband or Father. For how often is it found, whilst Gamesters are flaunting it and flourishing abroad, with their fine horses, rich furniture and clothes, and luxurious living, their Families are left at home in a pinching a starving condition? Everything they can scrape and rend is squandered away upon their own Vices and Extravagancies, without the least Thought or Concern how far it may affect the Happiness and Well-being of their Wives and Children. Neither is it to be wondered at. For this Vice is certainly very destructive of all the gentler passions and tenderness and humanity; and by the habit of taking all

advantages, and continually doing hard, unjust, and cruel things, it steels the mind, as it were, against every kind and benevolent Sentiment.

BUT yet farther: Although a Gamester should win much, yet is he at the same time obliged to be at a constant and great charge; and whether he wins or loses, his expenses are still high. So that upon the whole, taking their expenses into the calculation, every man bets against such odds, as in a long Run of Play, without the helping hand of a little cogg and cozenage, must undo the richest man alive. To which we may add that extravagancy, which will be naturally bred in the mind, by having such large sums perpetually flowing in and going out. This brings them to set but little Value upon money, and makes them think and act, as if they were the absolute and real Makes of all the cash, that passes through their hands. All which things will certainly intercept and run away with that Profit and Advantage to their Families, which otherwise a run of luck might possibly give them. But,

2. BESIDES this Duty of being careful and industrious and providing for our Families, we are still farther obliged to be watchful over their Manners and Behaviour, to set them a good Example, and *to bring them up in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*, Ephesians vi. 4. And this is a Branch of parental Duty equal, if not superior to the other. But how does the Gamester comply with this particular? To speak the Truth ingeniously, I think, I never knew any Profession, so constantly and regularly handed down from father to son, as this of Gaming. A Lawyer's son may be a Clergyman, and a Clergyman's son may be a Physician; but you may take it for granted, that a Gamester's son will forever be a Gamester. He takes the ply in his tender years, and can never forsake it his whole Life after. And as he advances in age and Dexterity, you may often see the Booby father transported at his Acuteness in Tricking and Knavery, and overjoyed to find him tread in his own steps with so great eagerness and proficiency. And however the Precepts of Religion and Morality may be inculcated, you may be sure, that no Maxim of Life will be more carefully distilled into his tender mind, than that of the Roman Satyrist: (Hor. Lib. I. Ep. I.) Be sure, my Son to get money; get it honestly, if you can, but if you can't, be sure at any rate to get money. This is the grand Principle of his own Life and Actions, and therefore will naturally become the main part of the Instruction and Education of his

children. – But as we thus offend against the Duty, which we owe to our Families, so,

IV. DO we also thereby sin against ourselves: And this with regard to our Bodies, our Minds, and our Souls. For,

1. HOWEVER innocent Gaming may seem to our Health and bodily Welfare, yet upon a just Examination of the Matter we shall find it very prejudicial to the Constitution. For the Gamester is obliged to be a man of all hours: he is forced to sit up, and to drink; and (as the Antitype of *St. Paul*) *to be made all things to all men, that he may by all means ruin some*. He is an insidious animal, that is eternally upon the watch for his prey; and however disgusting it may be to himself, or hurtful to his Constitution; he must either quit the Profit and Finesse of his Profession, or else he must universally conform himself to all kinds of Humours and Vices. However, his body may crave its Rest, at those hours, which GOD and Nature have assigned for Refreshment and Repose; yet hath he more sense than to obey the calls of Nature, and thereby lose the hopeful prospect of getting money, which will only cost him a little Trouble and much Knavery.

BUT as to those Gentlemen, who would not be thought to make Gaming their Profession, and that only now and then throw away part of their Time and Estates in this innocent and laudable Diversion, I refer it to their own Consciences, whether they do not often find themselves betrayed by it into hard drinking and late hours? And this will be forever promoted by the expert and dexterous Gamester; it being one of the honest arts and grand mysteries of their Craft and Calling, first to make men drunk, and then to win their money. In short, it is a constant and invariable Rule always to follow Nature; and whoever turns Night into Day, and Day into Night (however the Thing may be palliated and disguised, or however excused and defended) yet certainly runs counter to this Rule, does a Violence to Nature, and must injure his Health and Constitution. Neither,

2. IS it less injurious to our Minds, than it is to our Bodies. It exceeds the Power of Language to express the pangs and anguish, the remorse and bitterness of Soul, that must attend a ruined Estate and beggared Family. No colours can paint, nor words describe the grief and a distraction of such a man. And even when it does not come to that height; yet a bad run of

luck, and the loss of a sum of money, which we are in immediate and pressing want of, and which perhaps we know not how to raise again, must give a man no small pain and compunction. And indeed the Gamester's Art is the very Reverse of the Wisdom of the ancient Sages and Philosophers. One grand lesson of theirs, and a principal Aim of their Instructions, was to bring men to a settled peace and tranquility of Mind; without which they wisely concluded, there could be no such thing as happiness in this Life. And this Truth was so eagerly pursued, and so over-run, as it were, by some of the Sects, that they fell into the unnatural Absurdity of an Apathy, or a perfect unconcern and disregard for whatever can happen to us. But Gaming tends to the very contrary of this. It destroys all ease and Tranquility of Mind, and throws it into a continual confusion and perturbation. The transitions from grief to joy, from gain to loss, are so quick and perpetual, that the passions are forever kept in a Flame and Hurricane, and have not time left them to grow cool and composed. Philosophy professes to teach us, to govern our passions and command our appetites; but this Anti-Philosophy, with still greater Force and Efficacy, lets them loose, and renders them furious and ungovernable.

IN short, by committing ourselves to the blind Arbitrement of Chance, to the Cast of a Dye or Turn of a Card, we give the reins quite out of our own hands, and lose all Power and Authority over our Spirits. We are tossed to and fro by every wind of passion, and are enslaved to wild desires, excessive Hopes, impotent Joys and groundless Grievs. 'Till at last we are so abandoned to these frantic transports, that whenever things succeed not according to our wish, we immediately lose all Prudence, Temper, and Respect and grow impious and profligate. But,

3. Supposing the case to be otherwise, that the Gamester's *Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all his Paths are Peace*: Supposing, he is always successful and a perpetual Gainer; yet, may Brethren, *what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his Soul?* Matthew xvi. 26. For you may easily judge, from what hath been already said, that the Guilt of this Practice is very heinous and complicated; and that a State of Grace, and a State of Gaming, seem hardly compatible with each other. And that this may appear the more fully, I proceed to observe,

V. THAT in Gaming, we sin grievously against GOD. And surely of this there can be no manner of doubt. For how can that man be innocent in the sight of GOD, who breaks through and violates so many, so plain, and such important Divine Commands? How can he stand absolved towards his Creator, who sins against his neighbor, his Country, his Family, and his own Soul; and consequently, in each of those particulars, is guilty of a most egregious Offence against GOD?

BUT besides these oblique ways of offending GOD, Gaming naturally leads to, and is productive of, some of the most direct and audacious affronts imaginable against the Divine Majesty. For what horrid Oaths and Blasphemies, what dreadful imprecations, and shocking impieties, are constantly attendant upon this frantic and outrageous Diversion? The groundless, unprovoked, and abominable habit of cursing and swearing is indeed but too common through all parts of life; and cannot but give continual pain and concern to every serious and pious Christian. But yet the Gaming Table seems to be the peculiar Soil and darling Residence of Oaths and Blasphemies. There every puny Mortal, that has lost a sum of money, thinks himself authorized to call Divine Providence to an account; and is sure to lift up his voice aloud against GOD, and to pour forth the bitterness of his Soul against the Almighty. And these indeed do it in serious sadness, and in the height of their grief and frenzy; whilst others are led on by it to an habitual course of Blasphemy and Profaneness, and lose all sense of Reverence for the Name and Majesty of that *GOD, in whom they love, and move, and have their Being*. So that in cold blood, as it were, and unprovoked, they will be throwing forth their impieties; and even with studied jests, and out of mere wantonness, divert themselves with Blasphemies, *casting about Firebrands, Arrows, and Death, and saying; Are we not in Sport?* And accordingly we may observe, that in every Circle of Gamesters there is commonly one or two, who are the butts and diversion of the rest; and who chiefly shine by their talent in pouring forth queer and unexpected Oaths, and inventing new Figures of Speech in the Art of Swearing and Profaneness.

BUT however Divine Providence may be rated for their losses, and its Justice questioned, yet the case is quite altered, when they happen to win. Then they will be ready enough to *sacrifice to their own Net*, and to ascribe their success to their own Merit and superior Wisdom and Address. GOD must bear the blame of

their miscarriages; but they themselves are applauded, as the sole Authors, and dexterous Contrivers of all their good fortune.

BUT besides these open and daring insults on the dread Majesty of Heaven and Earth, Gaming naturally begets in us many other sinful ways and evil habits. And particularly, notwithstanding his perpetual use of the Lord's Name, yet hath the Gamester little or no Sense of GOD and Religion upon his Mind. No man can serve two such opposite Masters, as GOD and mammon; but our Love to the one will make us cold and negligent in our Duty toward the other. And the Gamester is so blinded by the god of this world, and so eager and devoted to his service, that it will soon bring him to neglect GOD'S Ordinances and Sanctuary, and at last induce a total deadness and insensibility to all the Duties and Pleasures of Religion. And thus does he habitually forget to sanctify the Sabbath, to honour GOD'S holy Name, and to tread the Courts of the Lord's House; gradually sinking into a state of Spiritual sloth and irreligion, becoming *an alien from the Commonwealth of Israel, and a Stranger to the Covenants of Promise, having no Hope, and being without GOD in the world.*

THUS exceeding great and grievous is the Guilt, contracted by this crying and execrable Sin of Gaming. I hope, that a just indignation against a Vice, so profligate and irreligious, and so productive of Sin and Evil; - so unrighteous in itself and injurious to our neighbor, so hurtful to our Country and destructive of all honest Labour and Industry, so prejudicial to our fortunes and Families, so pernicious to ourselves both in Soul and Body, and above all so madly audacious and affrontive to GOD; - I hope, I say, that a just indignation against so infamous and detestable a Vice, may plead sufficiently in my excuse, for any severity of Reflection, or bitterness of Language, that may have fallen from me. I am sure, nothing relating to our Country did ever give me so much Grief and Concern, as this frenzy grow, as it hath done of late, and so mightily prevail among us. It has seized, without exception, upon all ranks and conditions of our People; and hath equally infected *the high and low, rich and poor, one with another.*

AND what is the saddest circumstance of the whole, all this hath happened in despite and defiance of excellent Laws against it, and by the Influence and Example of those very Persons, who, by their Stations and Oaths, and by every other Reason of Duty and Interest, are bound to restrain and punish it. And we of the Ministry will lift up our Voice in vain, and may speak, and preach, and print,

against it without the least effect, as long as it hath to support it the Countenance and Example of Persons of Wealth and Eminence. For I have long observed by a melancholy experience, that the best written Discourse, nay even the plainest and most important instances of Duty, will lose all their Weight and Influence with the generality of the people, if they are contradicted by the Lives and Conversations, or even by the unmannerly Scoffs and irreverent Gibes, of their rich and powerful neighbours. As therefore, I believe, it is undoubted, that this madness first got footing among us, and spread itself by the Practice and Example of Persons of Fortune and Distinction; so will it chiefly lie upon them, to apply proper Remedies, and to put an effectual stop, to its Rage and Malignity. And this they are loudly called upon to do, as they will answer it to GOD and their Country. For GOD cannot but be highly provoked by such a complicated Scene of Vice and Wickedness, as the Gaming Table presents. And there is scarce Any other Vice to be found, so vastly pernicious and ruinous to a Country, as this of Gaming. It draws after it a long and dismal Train of other Crimes. Sharping, Robbing, Luxury, Drinking, Rioting, Lewdness, Dueling, with other such trifling peccadilloes, commonly serve and attend upon this grand and master Vice. So vastly prolific in Sin, and fruitful of Crimes, is this iniquitous Practice; and so directly destructive of all good Manners and sound Morality among a People!

IF therefore Gentlemen would but seriously consider, and follow the Dictates of their Reason, this unrighteous Custom would soon be discountenanced and discarded among us. For certainly, above all things, it is very prejudicial and disgraceful to a Gentleman. It degrades and brings him down to the Level of every Scoundrel; who, if he has the Rashness and Resolution to venture a large sum of money upon the Cast of a Dye, immediately commences a man of spirit; and without any other single good Quality to recommend him, is admitted as a fit Companion among Persons of the highest Dignity and most conspicuous fortune. And besides, the little Arts and mean Tricking of Gaming must be quite below the Character of a true Gentleman, who does not only act up to the strict Rules of Virtue and Honesty, but is governed by a still higher Principle of Honour; which implies a certain Nobleness and Generosity of Sentiment and Behaviour, that soars above every Appearance of Evil, and scorns, that the least Stain should be cast upon, or Cavil raised against it.

THERE are indeed very good and wholesome Laws at present subsisting against this practice, which only fail in the Execution. But whether there may not be

some farther and more effectual remedies found against it, I shall leave to the Wisdom and Consideration of our Legislature to determine. I shall only say that there is no reigning Evil among us at present, so virulent and outrageous, and which seems so greatly to demand their Regard and healing Hand, as this of Gaming; nor anything, wherein they can do their Country a more real and substantial Service, than by putting an effectual stop to it.

AS for my part, I am deeply sensible of my inability to do any great Good towards the Cure of this deadly Contagion. However, being by my station in GOD'S Church, *set as a Watchman upon the Wall, I will not be a dumb Dog, that cannot bark; that sleepeth, lyeth down, and loveth to slumber, Isaiah lvi. 10. I will never keep Silence, nor hold my Peace, Day nor Night, against so vile and flagitious a practice.* – And to conclude with the patriot Words and noble Admonition of the Prophet Samuel: *As for me, GOD forbid, that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; or in neglecting to teach you the good and the right Way. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in Truth with all your Heart; for consider how great Things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your Leaders, I Samuel xii. 23, 24, 25.*

NOW unto him, that is able to keep you for falling, and to present you faultless, before the Presence of his Glory, with exceeding Joy, - To the only wise GOD our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and evermore. Amen. Jude 24, 25.

F I N I S.

*The Sinfulness and pernicious Nature of
Gaming.*

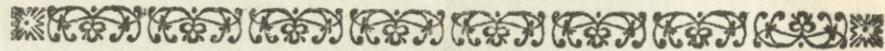
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S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D before the
G E N E R A L A S S E M B L Y
O F
VIRGINIA:

At WILLIAMSBURG, *March* 1st 1752.

By WILLIAM STITH, A. M.
Rector of Henrico Parish.

Publsh'd at the Request of the House of Burgesses.

W I L L I A M S B U R G :
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*Abstract from the Journal of the House
of Burgesses.*

Monday, March 2d.

Ordered,

THAT the Thanks of this House be returned to the Reverend Mr. *William Stith* for his excellent Sermon, preached Yesterday before the Council and this House, and that he be desired to print it; and that Mr. *Fry* do wait on him for that Purpose.

J. Randolph, C. H. B.

