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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SERIOUS PROPOSAL TO THE LADIES, FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THEIR TRUE AND GREATEST INTEREST (IN TWO PARTS) \*\*\*

A Serious

PROPOSAL

TO THE

LADIES,

FOR THE

Advancement of their

True and Greatest

INTEREST.

In two Parts.

\_By a Lover of her SEX.\_

\_LONDON\_:

Printed for \_Richard Wilkin\_ at the \_King’s-Head\_

in St. \_Paul’s Church-Yard\_, 1697.

A Serious

PROPOSAL

TO THE

LADIES.

LADIES,

Since the Profitable Adventures that have gone abroad in the World

have met with so great Encouragement, tho’ the highest advantage they

can propose, is an uncertain Lot for such matters as Opinion, not real

worth, gives a value to; things which if obtain’d are as flitting

and fickle as that Chance which is to dispose of them; I therefore

persuade my self, you will not be less kind to a Proposition that comes

attended with more certain and substantial Gain; whose only design is

to improve your Charms and heighten your Value, by suffering you no

longer to be cheap and contemptible. Its aim is to fix that Beauty, to

make it lasting and permanent, which Nature with all the helps of Art

cannot secure, and to place it out of the reach of Sickness and Old

Age, by transferring it from a corruptible Body to an immortal Mind.

An obliging Design, which wou’d procure them \_inward\_ Beauty, to whom

Nature has unkindly denied the \_outward\_, and not permit those Ladies

who have comely Bodies, to tarnish their Glory with deformed Souls.

Wou’d have you all be wits, or what is better, Wise. Raise you above

the Vulgar by something more truly illustrious, than a sounding Title

or a great Estate. Wou’d excite in you a generous Emulation to excel

in the best things, and not in such Trifles as every mean person who

has but Money enough may purchase as well as you. Not suffer you to

take up with the low thought of distinguishing your selves by any

thing that is not truly valuable, and procure you such Ornaments as

all the Treasures of the \_Indies\_ are not able to purchase. Wou’d help

you to surpass the Men as much in Vertue and Ingenuity, as you do in

Beauty; that you may not only be as lovely, but as wise as Angels.

Exalt and Establish your Fame, more than the best wrought \_Poems\_ and

loudest \_Panegyricks\_, by ennobling your Minds with such Graces as

really deserve it. And instead of the Fustian Complements and Fulsome

Flatteries of your Admirers, obtain for you the Plaudit of Good Men and

Angels, and the approbation of Him who cannot err. In a word, render

you the Glory and Blessing of the present Age, and the Admiration and

Pattern of the next.

And sure, I shall not need many words to persuade you to close with

this \_Proposal\_. The very offer is a sufficient inducement, nor does

it need the set-offs of \_Rhetorick\_ to recommend it, were I capable,

which yet I am not, of applying them with the greatest force. Since you

can’t be so unkind to your selves, as to refuse your \_real\_ Interest, I

only entreat you to be so wise as to examine wherein it consists; for

nothing is of worse consequence than to be deceiv’d in a matter of so

great concern. ’Tis as little beneath your Grandeur as your Prudence,

to examine curiously what is in this case offer’d you, and to take care

that cheating Hucksters don’t impose upon you with deceitful Ware. This

is a Matter infinitely more worthy your Debates, than what Colours are

most agreeable, or what’s the Dress becomes you best. Your \_Glass\_ will

not do you half so much service as a serious reflection on your own

Minds, which will discover Irregularities more worthy your Correction,

and keep you from being either too much elated or depress’d by the

representations of the other. ’Twill not be near so advantageous to

consult with your Dancing-Master as with your own Thoughts, how you

may with greatest exactness tread in the Paths of Vertue, which has

certainly the most attractive \_Air\_, and Wisdom the most graceful and

becoming \_Mien\_: Let these attend you and your Carriage will be always

well compos’d, and ev’ry thing you do will carry its Charm with it. No

solicitude in the adornation of your selves is discommended, provided

you employ your care about that which is really your \_self\_; and do

not neglect that particle of Divinity within you, which must survive,

and may (if you please) be happy and perfect, when it’s unsuitable

and much inferiour Companion is mouldring into Dust. Neither will

any pleasure be denied you, who are only desir’d not to catch at the

Shadow and let the Substance go. You may be as ambitious as you please,

so you aspire to the best things; and contend with your Neighbours

as much as you can, that they may not out do you in any commendable

Quality. Let it never be said, That they to whom pre-eminence is so

very agreeable, can be tamely content that others shou’d surpass them

in \_this\_, and precede them in a \_better\_ World! Remember, I pray you,

the famous Women of former Ages, the \_Orinda\_’s of late, and the more

Modern Heroins, and blush to think how much, is now, and will hereafter

be said of them, when you your selves (as great a Figure as you make)

must be buried in silence and forgetfulness! Shall your Emulation fail

\_there only\_ where ’tis commendable? Why are you so preposterously

humble, as not to contend for one of the highest Mansions in the

Court of Heav’n? Believe me, Ladies, this is the only \_Place\_ worth

contending for; you are neither better nor worse in your selves for

going before, or coming after \_now\_; but you are really so much the

better, by how much the higher your station is in an Orb of Glory.

How can you be content to be in the World like Tulips in a Garden, to

make a fine \_shew\_ and be good for nothing; have all your Glories set

in the Grave, or perhaps much sooner! What your own sentiments are I

know not, but I can’t without pity and resentment reflect, that those

Glorious Temples on which your kind Creator has bestow’d such exquisite

workmanship, shou’d enshrine no better than \_Ægyptian\_ Deities; be

like a garnish’d Sepulchre, which for all its glittering, has nothing

within but emptiness or putrefaction! What a pity it is, that whilst

your Beauty casts a lustre all around you, your Souls which are

infinitely more bright and radiant, (of which if you had but a clear

Idea, as lovely as it is, and as much as you now value it, you wou’d

then despise and neglect the mean \_Case\_ that encloses it) shou’d be

suffer’d to over-run with Weeds, lie fallow and neglected, unadorn’d

with any Grace! Altho’ the Beauty of the mind is necessary to secure

those Conquests which your Eyes have gain’d, and Time that mortal Enemy

to handsome Faces, has no influence on a lovely Soul, but to better and

improve it. For shame let’s abandon that \_Old\_, and therefore one wou’d

think, unfashionable employment of pursuing Butter-flies and Trifles!

No longer drudge on in the dull beaten road of Vanity and Folly, which

so many have gone before us, but dare to break the enchanted Circle

that custom has plac’d us in, and scorn the vulgar way of imitating all

the Impertinencies of our Neighbours. Let us learn to pride our selves

in something more excellent than the invention of a Fashion; And not

entertain such a degrading thought of our own \_worth\_, as to imagine

that our Souls were given us only for the service of our Bodies, and

that the best improvement we can make of these, is to attract the

Eyes of Men. We value \_them\_ too much, and our \_selves\_ too little,

if we place any part of our desert in their Opinion; and don’t think

our selves capable of Nobler Things than the pitiful Conquest of some

worthless heart. She who has opportunities of making an interest in

Heaven, of obtaining the love and admiration of GOD and Angels, is too

prodigal of her Time, and injurious to her Charms, to throw them away

on vain insignificant men. She need not make her self so cheap, as

to descend to court their Applauses; for at the greater distance she

keeps, and the more she is above them, the more effectually she secures

their esteem and wonder. Be so generous then, Ladies, as to do nothing

unworthy of you; so true to your Interest, as not to lessen your Empire

and depreciate your Charms. Let not your Thoughts be wholly busied in

observing what respect is paid you, but a part of them at least, in

studying to deserve it. And after all, remember that Goodness is the

truest Greatness; to be wise for your selves the greatest Wit; and

\_that\_ Beauty the most desirable which will endure to Eternity.

Pardon me the seeming rudeness of this Proposal, which goes upon a

supposition that there’s something amiss in you, which it is intended

to amend. My design is not to expose, but to rectifie your Failures.

To be exempt from mistake, is a privilege few can pretend to, the

greatest is to be past Conviction and too obstinate to reform. Even

the \_Men\_, as exact as they wou’d seem, and as much as they divert

themselves with our Miscarriages, are very often guilty of greater

faults, and such, as considering the advantages they enjoy, are much

more inexcusable. But I will not pretend to correct their Errors,

who either are, or at least \_think\_ themselves too wise to receive

Instruction from a Womans Pen. My earnest desire is, That you Ladies,

would be as perfect and happy as ’tis possible to be in this imperfect

state; for I love you too well to endure a spot upon your Beauties, if

I can by any means remove and wipe it off. I would have you live up to

the dignity of your Nature, and express your thankfulness to GOD for

the benefits you enjoy by a due improvement of them: As I know very

many of you do, who countenance that Piety which the men decry, and

are the brightest Patterns of Religion that the Age affords; ’tis my

grief that all the rest of our Sex do not imitate such Illustrious

Examples, and therefore I would have them encreas’d and render’d more

conspicuous, that Vice being put out of countenance, (because Vertue

is the only thing in fashion) may sneak out of the World, and its

darkness be dispell’d by the confluence of so many shining Graces.

The Men perhaps will cry out that I teach you false Doctrine, for

because by their seductions some amongst us are become very mean and

contemptible, they would fain persuade the rest to be as despicable and

forlorn as they. We’re indeed oblig’d to them for their management, in

endeavouring to make us so, who use all the artifice they can to spoil,

and deny us the means of improvement. So that instead of inquiring

why all Women are not wise and good, we have reason to wonder that

there are any so. Were the Men as much neglected, and as little care

taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they wou’d be so far from

surpassing those whom they now despise, that they themselves wou’d sink

into the greatest stupidity and brutality. The preposterous returns

that the most of them make, to all the care and pains that is bestow’d

on them, renders this no uncharitable, nor improbable Conjecture. One

wou’d therefore almost think, that the wise disposer of all things,

foreseeing how unjustly Women are denied opportunities of improvement

from \_without\_ has therefore by way of compensation endow’d them

with greater propensions to Vertue and a natural goodness of Temper

\_within\_, which if duly manag’d, would raise them to the most eminent

pitch of heroick Vertue. Hither, Ladies, I desire you wou’d aspire,

’tis a noble and becoming Ambition, and to remove such Obstacles as

lie in your way is the design of this Paper. We will therefore enquire

what it is that stops your flight, that keeps you groveling here below,

like \_Domitian\_ catching Flies when you should be busied in obtaining

Empires.

Altho’ it has been said by Men of more Wit than Wisdom, and perhaps

of more malice than either, that Women are naturally incapable of

acting Prudently, or that they are necessarily determined to folly, I

must by no means grant it; that Hypothesis would render my endeavours

impertinent, for then it would be in vain to advise the one, or

endeavour the Reformation of the other. Besides, there are Examples in

all Ages, which sufficiently confute the Ignorance and Malice of this

Assertion.

The Incapacity, if there be any, is acquired not natural; and none of

their Follies are so necessary, but that they might avoid them if they

pleas’d themselves. Some disadvantages indeed they labour under, and

what these are we shall see by and by and endeavour to surmount; but

Women need not take up with mean things, since (if they are not wanting

to themselves) they are capable of the best. Neither God nor Nature

have excluded them from being Ornaments to their Families and useful in

their Generation; there is therefore no reason they should be content

to be Cyphers in the World, useless at the best, and in a little time

a burden and nuisance to all about them. And ’tis very great pity that

they who are so apt to over-rate themselves in smaller Matters, shou’d,

where it most concerns them to know and stand upon their Value, be so

insensible of their own worth. The Cause therefore of the defects we

labour under is, if not wholly, yet at least in the first place, to be

ascribed to the mistakes of our Education, which like an Error in the

first Concoction, spreads its ill Influence through all our Lives.

The Soil is rich and would if well cultivated produce a noble Harvest,

if then the Unskilful Managers, not only permit, but incourage noxious

Weeds, tho’ we shall suffer by the Neglect, yet they ought not in

justice to blame any but themselves, if they reap the Fruit of this

their foolish Conduct. Women are from their very Infancy debar’d those

Advantages, with the want of which they are afterwards reproached, and

nursed up in those Vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them.

So partial are Men as to expect Brick where they afford no Straw; and

so abundantly civil as to take care we shou’d make good that obliging

Epithet of \_Ignorant\_, which out of an excess of good Manners, they

are pleas’d to bestow on us!

One would be apt to think indeed, that Parents shou’d take all possible

care of their Childrens Education, not only for \_their\_ sakes, but even

for their \_own\_. And tho’ the Son convey the Name to Posterity, yet

certainly a great Part of the Honour of their Families depends on their

Daughters. ’Tis the kindness of Education that binds our duty fastest

on us: For the being instrumental to the bringing us into the World,

is no matter of choice and therefore the less obliging; But to procure

that we may live wisely and happily in it, and be capable of endless

Joys hereafter, is a benefit we can never sufficiently acknowledge.

To introduce poor Children into the World and neglect to fence them

against the temptations of it, and so leave them expos’d to temporal

and eternal Miseries, is a wickedness for which I want a Name; ’tis

beneath Brutality; the Beasts are better natur’d, for they take care of

their offspring, till they are capable of caring for themselves. And if

Mothers had a due regard to their Posterity, how \_Great\_ soever they

are, they wou’d not think themselves too \_Good\_ to perform what Nature

requires, nor through Pride and Delicacy remit the poor little one to

the care of a Foster Parent. Or if necessity inforce them to depute

another to perform \_their\_ Duty, they wou’d be as choice at least, in

the Manners and Inclinations, as they are in the complections of their

Nurses, left with their Milk they transfuse their Vices, and form in

the Child such evil habits as will not easily be eradicated.

Nature as bad as it is and as much as it is complain’d of, is so far

improveable by the grace of GOD, upon our honest and hearty endeavours,

that if we are not wanting to our selves, we may all in \_some\_, tho’

not in an \_equal\_ measure, be instruments of his Glory, Blessings to

this World, and capable of Eternal Blessedness in that to come. But

if our Nature is spoil’d, instead of being improv’d at first; if from

our Infancy we are nurs’d up in Ignorance and Vanity; are taught to be

Proud and Petulant, Delicate and Fantastick, Humorous and Inconstant,

’tis not strange that the ill effects of this Conduct appear in all

the future Actions of our Lives. And seeing it is Ignorance, either

habitual or actual, which is the cause of all sin, how are they like

to escape \_this\_, who are bred up in \_that\_? That therefore Women are

unprofitable to most, and a plague and dishonour to some men is not

much to be regretted on account of the \_Men\_, because ’tis the product

of their own folly, in denying them the benefits of an ingenuous and

liberal Education, the most effectual means to direct them into, and

to secure their progress in the ways of Vertue.

For that Ignorance is the cause of most Feminine Vices, may be

instanc’d in that Pride and Vanity which is usually imputed to us,

and which I suppose if throughly sifted, will appear to be some way

or other, the rife and Original of all the rest. These, tho’ very

bad Weeds, are the product of a good Soil, they are nothing else but

Generosity degenerated and corrupted. A desire to advance and perfect

its Being, is planted by GOD in all Rational Natures, to excite them

hereby to every worthy and becoming Action; for certainly next to the

Grace of GOD, nothing does so powerfully restrain people from Evil

and stir them up to Good, as a generous Temper. And therefore to be

ambitious of perfections is no fault, tho’ to assume the Glory of our

Excellencies to our selves, or to Glory in such as we really have

not, are. And were Womens haughtiness express’d in disdaining to do

a mean and evil thing, wou’d they pride themselves in somewhat truly

perfective of a Rational nature, there were no hurt in it. But then

they ought not to be denied the means of examining and judging what is

so; they should not be impos’d on with tinsel ware. If by reason of a

false Light, or undue Medium, they chuse amiss, theirs is the loss,

but the Crime is the Deceivers. She who rightly understands wherein

the perfection of her Nature consists, will lay out her Thoughts and

Industry in the acquisition of such Perfections: But she who is kept

ignorant of the matter, will take up with such Objects as first offer

themselves, and bear any plausible resemblance to what she desires;

a shew of advantage being sufficient to render them agreeable baits

to her who wants Judgment and Skill to discern between reality and

pretence. From whence it easily follows, that she who has nothing else

to value her self upon, will be proud of her Beauty, or Money and what

that can purchase; and think her self mightily oblig’d to him, who

tells her she has those Perfections which she naturally longs for.

Her inbred self-esteem and desire of good, which are degenerated into

Pride and mistaken Self-love, will easily open her Ears to whatever

goes about to nourish and delight them; and when a cunning designing

Enemy from without, has drawn over to his Party these Traytors within,

he has the Poor unhappy Person, at his Mercy, who now very glibly

swallows down his Poyson, because ’tis Presented in a Golden Cup, and

credulously hearkens to the most disadvantageous Proposals, because

they come attended with a seeming esteem. She whose Vanity makes

her swallow praises by the wholesale, without examining whether

she deserves them, or from what hand they come, will reckon it but

gratitude to think well of him who values her so much, and think she

must needs be merciful to the poor despairing Lover whom her Charms

have reduc’d to die at her feet. Love and Honour are what every one

of us naturally esteem, they are excellent things in themselves and

very worthy our regard, and by how much the readier we are to embrace

what ever resembles them, by so much the more dangerous it is that

these venerable Names should be wretchedly abus’d and affixt to their

direct contraries, yet this is the Custom of the World: And how can she

possibly detect the fallacy, who has no better Notion of either than

what she derives from Plays and Romances? How can she be furnished with

any solid Principles whose very Instructors are Froth and emptiness?

Whereas Women were they rightly Educated, had they obtain’d a well

inform’d and discerning Mind, they would be proof against all those

Batteries, see through and scorn those little silly Artifices which

are us’d to ensnare and deceive them. Such an one would value her self

only on her Vertue, and consequently be most chary of what she esteems

so much. She would know, that not what others \_say\_, but what she her

self \_does\_, is the true Commendation and the only thing that exalts

her; the loudest Encomiums being not half so satisfactory, as the calm

and secret Plaudit of her own Mind, which moving on true Principles of

Honour and Vertue, wou’d not fail on a review of it self to anticipate

that delightful Eulogy she shall one day hear.

Whence is it but from ignorance, from a want of Understanding to

compare and judge of things, to chuse a right End, to proportion

the Means to the End, and to rate ev’ry thing according to its

proper value, that we quit the Substance for the Shadow, Reality for

Appearance, and embrace those very things which if we understood we

shou’d hate and fly, but now are reconcil’d to, merely because they

usurp the Name, tho’ they have nothing of the Nature of those venerable

Objects we desire and seek? Were it not for this delusion, is it

probable a Lady who passionately desires to be admir’d, shou’d ever

consent to such Actions as render her base and contemptible? Wou’d she

be so absurd as to think either to get love, or to keep it, by those

methods which occasion loathing and consequently end in hatred? Wou’d

she reckon it a piece of her Grandeur, or hope to gain esteem by such

excesses as really lessen her in the eyes of all considerate and

judicious persons? Wou’d she be so silly as to look big and think her

self the better person, because she has more Money to bestow profusely,

or the good luck to have a more ingenious Taylor or Milliner than her

Neighbour? Wou’d she, who by the regard she pays to Wit, seems to make

some pretences to it, undervalue her Judgment so much as to admit the

Scurrility and profane noisy Nonsense of men, whose Fore-heads are

better than their Brains, to pass under that Character? Wou’d she be

so weak as to imagine that a few airy Fancies joyn’d with a great

deal of Impudence and ill-nature (the right definition of modern Wit)

can bespeak him a Man of sense, who runs counter to all the sense and

reason that ever appear’d in the World? than which nothing can be an

Argument of greater shallowness, unless it be to regard and esteem him

for it. Wou’d a Woman, if she truly understood her self, be affected

either with the praises or calumnies of those worthless Persons, whose

Lives are a direct contradiction to Reason, a very sink of corruption,

by whom one wou’d blush to be commended, lest they shou’d be mistaken

for Partners in or Connivers at their Crimes? Will she who has a jot

of discernment think to satisfy her greedy desire of Pleasure, with

those promising nothings that have again and again deluded her? Or

will she to obtain such Bubbles, run the risque of forfeiting Joys

infinitely satisfying and eternal? In sum, did not ignorance impose

on us, we would never lavish out the greatest part of our Time and

Care, on the decoration of a Tenement, in which our Lease is so very

short, and which for all our industry, may lose its Beauty e’er that

Lease be out, and in the mean while neglect a more glorious and durable

Mansion! We wou’d never be so curious of the House and so careless of

the Inhabitant, whose beauty is capable of great improvement and will

endure for ever without diminution or decay!

Thus Ignorance and a narrow Education lay the Foundation of Vice,

and Imitation and Custom rear it up. Custom, that merciless torrent

that carries all before it, and which indeed can be stem’d by none

but such as have a great deal of Prudence and a rooted Vertue. For

’tis but Decorous that she who is not capable of giving better Rules,

shou’d follow those she sees before her, least she only change the

instance and retain the absurdity. ’Twou’d puzzle a considerate Person

to account for all that Sin and Folly that is in the World (which

certainly has nothing in it self to recommend it) did not Custom

help to solve the difficulty. For Vertue without question has on all

accounts the preeminence of Vice, ’tis abundantly more pleasant in

the \_Act\_, as well as more advantageous in the \_Consequences\_, as any

one who will but rightly use her reason, in a serious reflection on

her self and the nature of things, may easily perceive. ’Tis Custom

therefore, that Tyrant Custom, which is the grand motive to all those

irrational choices which we daily see made in the World, so very

contrary to our \_present\_ interest and pleasure, as well as to our

Future. We think it an unpardonable mistake not to do as our neighbours

do, and part with our Peace and Pleasure as well as our Innocence

and Vertue, meerly in complyance with an unreasonable Fashion. And

having inur’d our selves to Folly, we know not how to quit it; we go

on in Vice, not because we find satisfaction in it, but because we are

unacquainted with the Joys of Vertue.

Add to this the hurry and noise of the World, which does generally so

busy and pre-ingage us, that we have little time and less inclination

to stand still and reflect on our own Minds. Those impertinent

Amusements which have seiz’d us, keep their hold so well and so

constantly buz about our Ears, that we cannot attend to the Dictates

of our Reason, nor to the soft whispers and winning persuasives of the

divine Spirit, by whose assistance were we dispos’d to make use of it,

we might shake off these Follies and regain our Freedom. But alas! to

complete our misfortunes, by a continual application to Vanity and

Folly, we quite spoil the contexture and frame of our Minds, so loosen

and dissipate, that nothing solid and substantial will stay in them. By

an habitual inadvertency we render our selves incapable of any serious

and improveing thought, till our minds themselves become as light and

frothy as those things they are conversant about. To all which if

we further add the great industry that bad people use to corrupt the

good, and that unaccountable back wardness that appears in too many

good persons, to stand up for and propagate the Piety they profess; (so

strangely are things transposed, that Vertue puts on the blushes which

belong to Vice, and Vice insults with the authority of Vertue!) and we

have a pretty fair account of the Causes of our non-improvement.

When a poor Young Lady is taught to value her self on nothing but her

Cloaths, and to think she’s very fine when well accoutred; When she

hears say, that ’tis Wisdom enough for her to know how to dress her

self, that she may become amiable in his eyes, to whom it appertains to

be knowing and learned; who can blame her if she lay out her Industry

and Money on such Accomplishments, and sometimes extends it farther

than her misinformer desires she should? When she sees the vain and

the gay, making Parade in the World and attended with the Courtship

and admiration of the gazing herd, no wonder that her tender Eyes are

dazled with the Pageantry, and wanting Judgment to pass a due Estimate

on them and their Admirers, longs to be such a fine and celebrated

thing as they? What tho’ she be sometimes told of another World, she

has however a more lively perception of this, and may well think, that

if her Instructors were in earnest when they tell her of \_hereafter\_,

they would not be so busied and concerned about what happens \_here\_.

She is it may be, taught the Principles and Duties of Religion, but

not Acquainted with the Reasons and Grounds of them; being told ’tis

enough for her to believe, to examine why, and wherefore, belongs not

to her. And therefore, though her Piety may be tall and spreading,

yet because it wants foundation and Root, the first rude Temptation

overthrows and blasts it, or perhaps the short liv’d Gourd decays and

withers of its own accord. But why should she be blamed for setting

no great value on her Soul, whose noblest Faculty her Understanding

is render’d useless to her? Or censur’d for relinquishing a course of

Life, whole Prerogatives she was never acquainted with, and tho’ highly

reasonable in it self, was put upon the embracing it with as little

reason as she now forsakes it? For if her Religion it self be taken

up as the Mode of the Country, ’tis no strange thing that she lays it

down again in conformity to the Fashion. Whereas she whose Reason is

suffer’d to display it self, to inquire into the grounds and Motives

of Religion, to make a disquisition of its Graces and search out its

hidden Beauties; who is a Christian out of Choice, not in conformity

to those among whom she lives; and cleaves to Piety, because ’tis her

Wisdom, her Interest, her Joy, not because she has been accustom’d

to it; she who is not only eminently and unmoveably good, but able

to give a Reason \_why\_ she is so, is too firm and stable to be mov’d

by the pitiful Allurements of sin, too wise and too well bottom’d to

be undermin’d and supplanted by the strongest Efforts of Temptation.

Doubtless a truly Christian Life requires a clear Understanding as

well as regular Affections, that both together may move the Will to

a direct choice of Good and a stedfast adherence to it. For tho’ the

heart may be honest, it is but by chance that the Will is right if

the Understanding be ignorant and Cloudy. And what’s the reason that

we sometimes see persons unhappily falling off from their Piety, but

because ’twas their Affections, not their Judgment, that inclin’d

them to be Religious? Reason and Truth are firm and immutable, she

who bottoms on them is on sure ground, Humour and Inclination are

sandy Foundations, and she who is sway’d by her Affections more than

by her Judgment, owes the happiness of her Soul in a great measure

to the temper of her Body; her Piety may perhaps blaze high but

will not last long. For the Affections are various and changeable

mov’d by every Object, and the last comer easily undoes whatever its

Predecessor had done before. Such Persons are always in extreams, they

are either violently good or quite cold and indifferent; a perpetual

trouble to themselves and others, by indecent Raptures, or unnecessary

Scruples; there is no Beauty and order in their lives, all is rapid and

unaccountable; they are now very furious in such a course, but they

cannot well tell why, and anon as violent in the other extream. Having

more \_Heat\_ than \_Light\_, their Zeal out-runs their Knowledge, and

instead of representing Piety as it is in it self, the most lovely and

inviting thing imaginable, they expose it to the contempt and ridicule

of the censorious World. Their Devotion becomes ricketed, starv’d

and contracted in some of its vital parts, and disproportioned and

over-grown in less material instances; whilst one Duty is \_over-done\_

to commute for the neglect of another, and the mistaken person thinks

the being often on her knees, attones for all the miscarriages of her

Conversation: Not considering that ’tis in vain to petition for those

Graces which we take no care to practise, and a mockery to adore those

Perfections we run counter to, and that the true end of all our Prayers

and external Observances is to work our minds into a truly Christian

temper, to obtain for us the Empire of our Passions, and to reduce

all irregular Inclinations, that so we may be as like GOD in Purity,

Charity, and all his imitable excellencies, as is consistent with the

imperfection of a Creature.

And now having discovered the Disease and its cause, ’tis proper to

apply a Remedy; single Medicines are too weak to cure such complicated

Distempers, they require a full Dispensatory; and what wou’d a good

Woman refuse to do, could she hope by that to advantage the greatest

part of the World, and improve her Sex in Knowledge and true Religion?

I doubt not, Ladies, but that the Age, as bad as it is, affords very

many of you who will readily embrace whatever has a true tendency

to the Glory of GOD and your mutual Edification, to revive the

ancient Spirit of Piety in the World and to transmit it to succeeding

Generations. I know there are many of you who so ardently love God, as

to think no time too much to spend in his service, nor any thing too

difficult to do for his sake; and bear such a hearty good-will to your

Neighbours, as to grudge no Prayers or Pains to reclaim and improve

them. I have therefore no more to do but to make the Proposal, to prove

that it will answer these great and good Ends, and then ’twill be easy

to obviate the Objections that Persons of more Wit than Vertue may

happen to raise against it.

Now as to the Proposal, it is to erect a \_Monastery\_, or if you will

(to avoid giving offence to the scrupulous and injudicious, by names

which tho’ innocent in themselves, have been abus’d by superstitious

Practices,) we will call it a \_Religious Retirement\_, and such as

shall have a double aspect, being not only a Retreat from the World

for those who desire that advantage, but likewise, an Institution

and previous discipline, to fit us to do the greatest good in it;

such an Institution as this (if I do not mightily deceive my self)

would be the most probable method to amend the present and improve

the future Age. For here those who are convinc’d of the emptiness

of earthly Enjoyments, who are sick of the vanity of the world

and its impertinencies, may find more substantial and satisfying

entertainments, and need not be confin’d to what they justly loath.

Those who are desirous to know and fortify their weak side, first do

good to themselves, that hereafter they may be capable of doing more

good to others; or for their greater security are willing to avoid

\_temptation\_, may get out of that danger which a continual stay in

view of the Enemy, and the familiarity and unwearied application of

the Temptation may expose them to; and gain an opportunity to look

into themselves to be acquainted at home and no longer the greatest

strangers to their own hearts. Such as are willing in a more peculiar

and undisturb’d manner, to attend the great business they came into the

world about, the service of GOD and improvement of their own Minds, may

find a convenient and blissful recess from the noise and hurry of the

world. A world so cumbersom, so infectious, that altho’ thro’ the grace

of GOD and their own strict watchfulness, they are kept from sinking

down into its corruptions, ’twill however damp their flight to heav’n,

hinder them from attaining any eminent pitch of Vertue.

You are therefore Ladies, invited into a place, where you shall suffer

no other confinement, but to be kept out of the road of sin: You shall

not be depriv’d of your grandeur, but only exchange the vain Pomps

and Pageantry of the world, empty Titles and Forms of State, for the

true and solid Greatness of being able to despise them. You will only

quit the Chat of insignificant people for an ingenious Conversation;

the froth of flashy Wit for real Wisdom; idle tales for instructive

discourses. The deceitful Flatteries of those who under pretence of

loving and admiring you, really served their \_own\_ base ends for the

seasonable Reproofs and wholesome Counsels of your hearty well-wishers

and affectionate Friends, which will procure you those perfections

your feigned lovers pretended you had, and kept you from obtaining. No

uneasy task will be enjoyn’d you, all your labour being only to prepare

for the highest degrees of that Glory, the very lowest of which is

more than at present you are able to conceive, and the prospect of it

sufficient to out-weigh all the Pains of Religion, were there any in

it, as really there are none. All that is requir’d of you, is only to

be as Happy as possibly you can, and to make sure of a Felicity that

will fill all the capacities of your Souls! A happiness, which when

once you have tasted, you’ll be fully convinc’d you cou’d never do

too much to obtain it, nor be too solicitous to adorn your Souls with

such tempers and dispositions, as will at present make you in some

measure, such holy and Heavenly Creatures as you one day hope to be in

a more perfect manner; without which Qualifications you can neither

reasonably \_expect\_, nor are \_capable\_ of enjoying the Happiness of

the Life to come. Happy Retreat! which will be the introducing you

into such a \_Paradise\_ as your Mother \_Eve\_ forfeited, where you shall

feast on Pleasures, that do not like those of the World, disappoint

your expectations, pall your Appetites, and by the disgust they give

you put you on the fruitless search after new Delights, which when

obtain’d are as empty as the former; but such as will make you \_truly\_

happy \_now\_, and prepare you to be \_perfectly\_ so hereafter. Here are

no Serpents to deceive you, whilst you entertain your selves in these

delicious Gardens. No Provocations will be given in this Amicable

Society, but to Love and to good Works, which will afford such an

entertaining employment, that you’ll have as little inclination as

leisure to pursue those Follies, which in the time of your ignorance

pass’d with you under the name of love, altho’ there is not in nature

two more different things, than \_true Love\_ and that \_brutish Passion\_

which pretends to ape it. Here will be no Rivalling but for the Love

of GOD, no Ambition but to procure his Favour, to which nothing will

more effectually recommend you, than a great and dear affection to each

other. Envy that Canker, will not here disturb your Breasts; for how

can she repine at anothers well-fare, who reckons it the greatest part

of her own? No Covetousness will gain admittance in this blest abode,

but to amass huge Treasures of good Works, and to procure one of the

brightest Crowns of Glory. You will not be solicitous to encrease your

Fortunes, but to enlarge your Minds, esteeming no Grandeur like being

conformable to the meek and humble JESUS. So that you only withdraw

from the noise and trouble, the folly and temptation of the world,

that you may more peaceably enjoy your selves, and all the innocent

Pleasures it is able to afford you, and particularly that which is

worth all the rest, a Noble, Vertuous and Disinteress’d Friendship. And

to compleat all, that \_Acme\_ of delight which the devout Seraphic Soul

enjoys, when dead to the World, she devotes her self entirely to the

Contemplation and fruition of her Beloved; when having disengag’d her

self from all those Lets which hindred her from without, she moves in

a direct and vigorous motion towards her true and only Good, whom now

she embraces and acquiesces in with such an unspeakable pleasure, as is

only intelligible to those who have tried and felt it, which we can no

more describe to the dark and sensual part of Mankind, than we can the

beauty of Colours and harmony of Sounds to the Blind and Deaf. In fine,

the place to which you are invited is a Type and Antepast of Heav’n,

where your Employment will be as there, to magnify GOD, to love one

another, and to communicate that useful \_knowledge\_, which by the due

improvement of your time in Study and Contemplation you will obtain,

and which when obtain’d, will afford you a much sweeter and more

durable delight, than all those pitiful diversions, those revellings

and amusements, which now thro your ignorance of better, appear the

only grateful and relishing Entertainments.

But because we were not made for our selves, nor can by any means so

effectually glorify GOD and do good to our own Souls, as by doing

Offices of Charity and Beneficence to others; and to the intent that

every Vertue, and the highest degrees of every Vertue may be exercis’d

and promoted the most that may be; your Retreat shall be so manag’d as

not to exclude the good Works of an \_Active\_, from the pleasure and

serenity of a \_Contemplative\_ Life, but by a due mixture of both retain

all the advantages and avoid the inconveniencies that attend either. It

shall not so cut you off from the world as to hinder you from bettering

and improving it, but rather qualify you to do it the greatest Good,

and be a Seminary to stock the Kingdom with pious and prudent Ladies,

whose good Example it is to be hop’d, will so influence the rest of

their Sex, that Women may no longer pass for those little useless and

impertinent Animals, which the ill conduct of too many has caus’d ’em

to be mistaken for.

[Sidenote: Mr. \_Nor. Conduct of Hum. Life\_.]

We have hitherto consider’d our Retirement only in relation to

Religion, which is indeed its \_main\_, I may say its \_only\_ design;

nor can this be thought too contracting a word, since Religion is the

adequate business of our lives, and largely consider’d, takes in all

we have to do, nothing being a fit employment for a rational Creature,

which has not either a \_direct\_ or \_remote\_ tendency to this great and

\_only\_ end. But because, as we have all along observ’d, Religion never

appears in its true Beauty, but when it is accompanied with Wisdom

and Discretion; and that without a good Understanding, we can scarce

be \_truly\_, but never \_eminently\_ Good; being liable to a thousand

seductions and mistakes (for even the men themselves, if they have not

a competent degree of Knowledge, are carried about with every wind

of Doctrine) Therefore, one great end of this Institution shall be,

to expel that cloud of Ignorance which Custom has involv’d us in, to

furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful Knowledge, that

the Souls of Women may no longer be the only unadorn’d and neglected

things. It is not intended that our \_Religious\_ shou’d waste their

time, and trouble their heads about such unconcerning matters, as

the vogue of the world has turn’d up for Learning, the impertinency

of which has been excellently expos’d by an ingenious Pen, but busy

themselves in a serious enquiry after \_necessary\_ and \_perfective\_

truths, something which it \_concerns\_ them to know, and which tends

to their real interest and perfection, and what that is the excellent

Author just now mention’d will sufficiently inform them. Such a course

of Study will neither be too troublesome nor out of the reach of a

Female Virtuoso; for it is not intended she shou’d spend her hours in

learning \_words\_ but \_things\_, and therefore no more Languages than are

necessary to acquaint her with useful Authors. Nor need she trouble

her self in turning over a great number of Books, but take care to

understand and digest a few well-chosen and good ones. Let her but

obtain right Ideas, and be truly acquainted with the nature of those

Objects that present themselves to her mind, and then no matter whether

or no she be able to tell what fanciful people have said about them:

And throughly to understand Christianity as profess’d by the \_Church\_

of \_England\_, will be sufficient to confirm her in the truth, tho’

she have not a Catalogue of those particular errors which oppose it.

Indeed a Learned Education of the Women will appear so unfashionable,

that I began to startle at the singularity of the proposition, but was

extremely pleas’d when I found a late ingenious Author (whose Book I

met with since the writing of this) agree with me in my Opinion. For

speaking of the Repute that Learning was in about 150 years ago, \_It

was so very modish\_ (says he) \_that the fair Sex seem’d to believe

that\_ Greek \_and\_ Latin \_added to their Charms; and\_ Plato \_and\_

Aristotle \_untranslated, were frequent Ornaments of their Closets. One

wou’d think by the effects, that it was a proper way of Educating them,

since there are no accounts in History of so many great Women in any

one Age, as are to be found between the years 15 and 1600.\_

[Sidenote: Mr. \_Wotton’s Reflect. on Ant. and Mod. Learn. p. 349, 350\_.]

For since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why

should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us

the faculty of Thinking, why shou’d we not (at least in gratitude to

him) employ our Thoughts on himself their noblest Object, and not

unworthily bestow them on Trifles and Gaities and secular Affairs?

Being the Soul was created for the contemplation of Truth as well as

for the fruition of Good, is it not as cruel and unjust to preclude

Women from the knowledge of the one as from the enjoyment of the

other? Especially since the Will is blind, and cannot chuse but by

the direction of the Understanding; or to speak more properly, since

the Soul always \_Wills\_ according as she \_Understands\_, so that if

she Understands amiss, she Wills amiss. And as Exercise enlarges

& exalts any Faculty, so thro’ want of using it becomes crampt &

lessened; if therefore we make little or no use of our Understandings,

we shall shortly have none to use; and the more contracted and

unemploy’d the deliberating and directive Power is, the more liable

is the elective to unworthy and mischievous options. What is it but

the want of an ingenious Education, that renders the generality of

Feminine Conversations so insipid and foolish and their solitude so

insupportable? Learning is therefore necessary to render them more

agreeable and useful in company, and to furnish them with becoming

entertainments when alone, that so they may not be driven to those

miserable shifts, which too many make use of to put off their Time,

that precious Talent that never lies on the hands of a judicious

Person. And since our Happiness in the next World, depends so far on

those dispositions which we carry along with us out of this, that

without a right habitude and temper of mind we are not capable of

Felicity; and seeing our Beatitude consists in the contemplation

of the divine Truth and Beauty, as well as in the fruition of his

Goodness, can Ignorance be a fit preparative for Heaven? Is’t likely

that she whose Understanding has been busied about nothing but froth

and trifles, shou’d be capable of delighting her self in noble and

sublime Truths? Let such therefore as deny us the improvement of our

Intellectuals, either take up \_his\_ Paradox, who said \_that Women have

no Souls\_, which at this time a day, when they are allow’d to Brutes,

wou’d be as unphilosophical as it is unmannerly, or else let them

permit us to cultivate and improve them. There is a sort of Learning

indeed which is worse than the greatest Ignorance: A Woman may study

Plays and Romances all her days, and be a great deal more knowing

but never a jot the wiser. Such a knowledge as this serves only to

instruct and put her forward in the practice of the greatest Follies,

yet how can they justly blame her who forbid, or at least won’t afford

opportunity of better? A rational mind \_will\_ be employ’d, it will

never be satisfy’d in doing nothing, and if you neglect to furnish it

with good materials, ’tis like to take up with such as come to hand.

We pretend not that Women shou’d teach in the Church, or usurp

Authority where it is not allow’d them; permit us only to understand

our \_own\_ duty, and not be forc’d to take it upon trust from others; to

be at least so far learned, as to be able to form in our minds a true

Idea of Christianity, it being so very necessary to fence us against

the danger of these \_last\_ and \_perilous days\_, in which Deceivers

a part of whose Character is to \_lead captive silly Women\_, need

not \_creep into Houses\_ since they have Authority to proclaim their

Errors on the \_House top\_. And let us also acquire a true Practical

Knowledge such as will convince us of the absolute necessity of \_Holy

Living\_ as well as of \_Right Believing\_, and that no Heresy is more

dangerous than that of an ungodly and wicked Life. And since the

\_French Tongue\_ is understood by most Ladies, methinks they may much

better improve it by the study of Philosophy (as I hear the \_French

Ladies\_ do) \_Des Cartes\_, \_Malebranche\_ and others, than by reading

idle \_Novels\_ and \_Romances\_. ’Tis strange we shou’d be so forward to

imitate their Fashions and Fopperies, and have no regard to what really

deserves our Imitation! And why shall it not be thought as genteel to

understand \_French Philosophy\_, as to be accoutred in a \_French Mode\_?

Let therefore the famous Madam \_D’acier\_, \_Scudery\_, &c. and our own

incomparable \_Orinda\_, excite the Emulation of the English Ladies.

The Ladies, I’m sure, have no reason to dislike this Proposal, but I

know not how the Men will resent it to have their enclosure broke down,

and Women invited to tast of that Tree of Knowledge they have so long

unjustly \_Monopoliz’d\_. But they must excuse me, if I be as partial

to my own Sex as they are to theirs, and think Women as capable of

Learning as Men are, and that it becomes them as well. For I cannot

imagine wherein the hurt lies, if instead of doing mischief to one

another, by an uncharitable and vain Conversation, Women be enabled to

inform and instruct those of their own Sex at least; the Holy Ghost

having left it on record, that \_Priscilla\_ as well as her Husband,

catechiz’d the eloquent \_Apollos\_ and the great Apostle found no fault

with her. It will therefore be very proper for our Ladies to spend part

of their time in this Retirement, in adorning their minds with useful

Knowledge.

To enter into the detail of the particulars concerning the Government

of the \_Religious\_, their Offices of Devotion, Employments, Work, \_&c.\_

is not now necessary. Suffice it at present to signify, that they will

be more than ordinarily careful to redeem their Time, spending no

more of it on the Body than the necessities of Nature require, but by

a judicious choice of their Employment and a constant industry about

it, so improve this invaluable Treasure, that it may neither be buried

in Idleness, nor lavish’d out in unprofitable concerns. For a stated

portion of it being daily paid to GOD in Prayers and Praises, the

rest shall be employ’d in innocent, charitable, and useful Business;

either in study in learning themselves or instructing others, for

it is design’d that part of their Employment be the Education of

those of their own Sex; or else in spiritual and corporal Works of

Mercy, relieving the Poor, healing the Sick, mingling Charity to the

Soul with that they express to the Body, instructing the Ignorant,

counselling the Doubtful, comforting the Afflicted, and correcting

those that err and do amiss.

And as it will be the business of their lives, their meat and drink

to \_know\_ and \_do\_ the Will of their Heavenly Father, so will they

pay a strict conformity to all the Precepts of their holy Mother the

\_Church\_, whose sacred Injunctions are too much neglected, even by

those who pretend the greatest zeal for her. For besides the daily

performance of the Publick Offices after the Cathedral manner, in the

most affecting and elevating way, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist

every Lords Day and Holy-day, and a course of solid instructive

Preaching and Catechizing; our \_Religious\_, considering that the holy

JESUS punctually observ’d the innocent usages of the \_Jewish\_ Church,

and tho’ in many instances the \_reason\_ of the Command ceas’d as to

him, yet he wou’d obey the \_letter\_ to avoid giving offence and to

set us an admirable pattern of Obedience; therefore, tho’ it may be

thought such pious Souls have little occasion for the severities of

fasting and mortification, yet they will consider it as a special part

of their Duty to observe all the Fasts of the Church, \_viz. Lent\_,

\_Ember\_, and \_Rogation-days\_, \_Fridays\_ and \_Vigils\_; times so little

heeded by the most, that one wou’d scarce believe them set apart for

Religious Purposes, did we not find them in the antiquated Rubricks.

And as their Devotion will be regular, so shall it likewise be solid

and substantial. They will not rest in the mere out-side of Duty, nor

fansie the performance of their Fasts and Offices will procure them

license to indulge a darling Vice: But having long since laid the

Ax to the root of sin, and destroy’d the whole body of it, they will

look upon these holy times of recollection and extraordinary Devotion

(without which Fasting signifies little) as excellent means to keep it

down, and to pluck up every the least Fibre that may happen to remain

in them. But we intend not by this to impose any intolerable burden

on tender Constitutions, knowing that our Lord has taught us, that

Mercy is to be prefer’d before Sacrifice: and that Bodily Exercise

profiteth but a little, the chief business being to obtain a a divine

and God-like temper of Mind.

And as this institution will strictly enjoyn all pious and profitable

Employments, so does it not only permit but recommend harmless and

ingenious Diversions, Musick particularly and such as may refresh the

Body without enervating the Mind. They do a disservice to Religion

who make it an enemy to innocent Nature, and injure the Almighty when

they represent him as imposing burdens that are not to be born. Neither

GOD nor Wise men will like us the better for an affected severity and

waspish sourness. Nature and Grace will never disagree, provided we

mistake not the one, nor indulge the petulancy of the other; there

being no Displacencies in Religion, but what we our selves have

unhappily made. For true Piety is the most sweet and engaging thing

imaginable, as it is most obliging to others, so most easie to our

selves. ’Tis in truth the highest \_Epicurism\_, exalting our Pleasures

by refining them; keeping our Appetites in that due regularity which

not only Grace, but even Nature and Reason require, in the breach

of which tho’ there may be a Transport, there can be no true and

substantial delight.

As to \_Lodging\_, \_Habit\_ and \_Diet\_, they may be quickly resolv’d on

by the Ladies who shall subscribe; who I doubt not will make choice

of what is most plain and decent, what Nature not Luxury requires.

And since neither Meat nor Cloaths commend us unto GOD, they’ll

content themselves with such things as are fit and convenient, without

occasioning scruple to themselves or giving any trouble or offence

to others. She who considers to how much better account that Money

will turn which is bestow’d on the Poor, than that which is laid out

in unnecessary Expences on her self, needs no Admonitions against

superfluities. She who truly loves her self, will never waste that

Money on a decaying Carkass, which if prudently disburs’d wou’d procure

her an eternal Mansion. She will never think her self so fine, as when

the backs of the Poor do bless her; and never feast so luxuriously

as when she treats an hungry person. No perfume will be thought so

grateful as the Odour of Good Works, nor any Wash so beautifying as her

own tears. For her Heroick Soul is too great to ambition any Empire

but that of her own Breast, or to regard any other Conquest than the

rescuing poor unhappy Souls from the slavery of Sin and Satan, those

only unsupportable Tyrants; and therefore what Decays she observes in

her face will be very unconcerning, but she will with greatest speed

and accuracy rectify the least Spot that may prejudice the beauty of

her lovely Soul.

In a word, this happy Society will be but one Body, whose Soul is

love, animating and informing it, and perpetually breathing forth it

self in flames of holy desires after GOD and acts of Benevolence to

each other. Envy and Uncharitableness are the Vices only of little and

narrow hearts, and therefore ’tis suppos’d, they will not enter here

amongst persons whole Dispositions as well as their Births are to be

Generous. Censure will refine into Friendly Admonition, all Scoffing

and offensive Railleries will be abominated and banish’d hence,

where not only the Words and Actions; but even the very Thoughts and

Desires of the \_Religious\_ tend to promote the most endearing Love and

universal Good-will. Thus these innocent and holy Souls shou’d run

their Race, measuring their hours by their Devotions, and their days by

the charitable Works they do. Thus wou’d they live the life of Heaven

whilst on Earth, and receive an Earnest of its Joys in their hearts.

And now, what remains for them to do at Night, but to review the

Actions of the Day? to examine what Passions have been stirring? How

their Devotions were perform’d? in what temper their Hearts are? what

good they have done? what progress they’ve made towards Heaven? and

with the plaudit of a satisfied Conscience sweetly to sleep in peace

and safety, Angels pitching their Tents round about them, and he that

neither slumbers nor sleeps rejoycing over them to do them good.

And to the end that these great designs may be the better pursu’d and

effectually obtain’d, care shall be taken that our \_Religious\_ be

under the tuition of persons of irreproachable Lives, of a consummate

Prudence, sincere Piety and unaffected Gravity. No Novices in Religion,

but such as have spent the greatest part of their lives in the study

and practice of Christianity; who have lived \_much\_, whatever the time

of their abode in the world has been. Whose Understandings are clear

and comprehensive, as well as their Passions at command and Affections

regular, and their Knowledge able to govern their Zeal. Whose scrutiny

into their own hearts has been so exact, that they fully understand the

weaknesses of humane Nature, are able to bear with its defects, and by

the most prudent methods procure its Amendment. Plentifully furnish’d

with instructions for the Ignorant and comfort for the disconsolate;

who know how to quicken the slothful, to awaken the secure, & to dispel

the doubts of the Scrupulous. Who are not ignorant when to use the Spur

and when the Rein, but duly qualified to minister to all the spiritual

wants of their Charge; Watching over their Souls with tenderness and

prudence; applying fitting Medicines with sweetness and affability.

Sagacious in discovering the very approaches of a fault, wise in

preventing, and charitable in bearing with all pityable Infirmities.

The sweetness of whole Nature is commensurate to all the rest of

their good Qualities, and all conspire together to make them lov’d

and reverenc’d. Who have the perfect government of themselves, and

therefore rule according to Reason not Humour, consulting the good of

the Society, not their own arbitrary sway. Yet know how to assert their

Authority when there is just occasion for it, and will not prejudice

their Charge by an indiscreet remissness and loosening the Reins of

discipline. But what occasion will there be for rigour, when the

design is to represent Vertue in all her Charms and native Loveliness,

which must needs attract the eyes and enamour the hearts of all who

behold her? To joyn the sweetness of Humanity to the strictness of

Philosophy, that both together being improv’d and heighten’d by grace,

may make up an accomplish’d \_Christian\_, for she who is truly so, is

certainly the best-bred and best-natur’d person in the world, adorn’d

with a thousand Charms, most happy in her self and most agreeable and

beneficial to all She converses with? And that every one who comes

under this holy Roof may be such an amiable, such a charming Creature,

what faults they bring with them shall be corrected by sweetness not

severity; by friendly Admonitions, not magisterial Reproofs; Piety

shall not be roughly impos’d, but wisely insinuated, by a perpetual

Display of the Beauties of Religion in an exemplary Conversation,

the continual and most powerful Sermon of an holy Life. And since

Inclination can’t be forc’d, and nothing makes people more uneasy than

the fettering themselves with unnecessary Bonds, there shall be no Vows

or irrevocable Obligations, not so much as the fear of Reproach to

keep our Ladies here any longer than they desire. No: Ev’ry act of our

\_Religious\_ Votary shall be voluntary and free, and no other tye but

the Pleasure, the Glory and Advantage of this blessed Retirement to

confine her to it.

And now I suppose, you’ll save me the labour of proving, that this

Institution will very much serve the ends of Piety and Charity; it is

methinks self-evident, and the very Proposal sufficient proof. But if

it will not promote these great ends, I shall think my self mightily

oblig’d to him who will shew me what will; for provided the good of

my Neighbour be advanc’d, ’tis very indifferent to me whether it be

by my method or by anothers. Here will be no impertinent Visits,

no foolish Amours, no idle Amusements to distract our Thoughts and

waste our precious time; a very little of which is spent in Dressing,

that grand devourer and its concomitants, and no more than necessity

requires in sleep and eating; so that here’s a vast Treasure gain’d,

which for ought I know may purchase an happy Eternity. But we need not

rest in generals, a cursory view of some particulars will sufficiently

demonstrate the great usefulness of such a Retirement; which will

appear by observing first a few of those inconveniencies to which

Ladies are expos’d by living in the World, and in the next place the

positive advantages of a Retreat.

And first, as to the inconveniences of living in the World; no very

small one is that strong \_Idea\_ and warm perception it gives us of its

Vanities; since these are ever at hand, constantly thronging about

us, they must necessarily push aside all other Objects, and the Mind

being prepossess’d and gratefully entertain’d with those pleasing

Perceptions which external Objects occasion, takes up with them as

its only Good, is not at leisure to tast those delights which arise

from a Reflection on it self, nor to receive the \_Ideas\_ which such a

Reflection conveys, and consequently forms all its Notions by such

\_Ideas\_ only as it derives from sensation, being unacquainted with

those more excellent ones which arise from its own operations and a

serious reflection on them, and which are necessary to correct the

mistakes and supply the defects of the other. From whence arises a very

partial knowledge of things, nay, almost a perfect ignorance in things

of the greatest moment. For tho’ we are acquainted with the Sound of

some certain words, \_viz. God\_, \_Religion\_, \_Pleasure\_ and \_Pain\_,

\_Honour\_ and \_Dishonour\_, and the like; yet having no other \_Ideas\_ but

what are convey’d to us by those Trifles we converse with, we frame to

our selves strange and awkward notions of them, conformable only to

those \_Ideas\_ sensation has furnish’d us with, which sometimes grow so

strong and fixt, that ’tis scarce possible to introduce a new Scheme of

Thoughts and so to disabuse us, especially whilst these Objects are

thick in our way.

Thus she who sees her self and others respected in proportion to that

Pomp and Bustle they make in the world, will form her Idea of Honour

accordingly. She who has relish’d no Pleasures but such as arise at

the presence of outward Objects, will seek no higher than her Senses

for her Gratification. And thus we may account for that strange

insensibility, that appears in some people when you speak to them of

any serious Religious matter. They are then so dull you’ll have much

ado to make them understand the clearest Truth: Whereas if you rally

the same persons, or chat with them of some Mode or Foppery, they’ll

appear very quick, expert, and ingenious. I have sometimes smil’d

betwixt scorn and pity, to hear Women talk as gravely and concernedly

about some trifling disappointment from their Milliner or Taylor,

as if it had related to the weightiest concerns of their Souls, nay,

perhaps more seriously than others who wou’d pass for Good, do about

their eternal Interest; but turn the talk that way, and they grow as

heavy and cold as they were warm and sensible before. And whence is

this, but because their heads are full of the one, and quite destitute

of such Ideas as might give them a competent notion of the other, and

therefore to discourse of such matters, is as little to the purpose as

to make Mathematical Demonstrations to one who knows not what an Angle

or Triangle means. Hence by the way, will appear the great usefulness

of judicious Catechizing, which is necessary to form clear Ideas in

the mind, without which it can receive but little benefit from the

Discourses of the Pulpit, and perhaps the neglect of the former, is

the reason that the great plenty of the latter has no better effect.

By all which it appears, that if we wou’d not be impos’d on by false

Representations and Impostures, if we wou’d obtain a due knowledge of

the most important things, we must remove the little Toys and Vanities

of the world from us, or our selves from them; enlarge our Ideas, seek

out new Fields of knowledge, whereby to rectify our first mistakes.

From the same Original, \_viz.\_ the constant flattery of external

Objects, arises that querulousness and delicacy observable in most

Persons of fortune, and which, betrays them to many inconveniencies.

For besides that it renders them altogether unfit to bear a change,

which considering the great uncertainty and swift vicissitudes of

worldly things, the Greatest and most established ought not to be

unprepar’d for; it likewise makes them perpetually uneasy, abates the

delight of their enjoyments, for such persons will very rarely find

all things to their mind, and then some little disorder which others

wou’d take no notice of, like an aching Tooth or Toe, spoils the

relish of their Joys. And tho’ many great Ladies affect this temper,

mistaking it for a piece of Grandeur, ’tis so far from that, that it

gives evidence of a poor weak Mind, a very childish Humour, that must

be cocker’d and fed with Toys and Baubles to still its frowardness, and

is like the crazy stomach of a sick Person, which no body has reason to

be fond of or desire.

This also disposes them to Inconstancy, for she who is continually

supply’d with variety knows not where to fix; a Vice which some Women

seem to be proud of, and yet nothing in the world so reproachful and

degrading, because nothing is a stronger indication of a weak and

injudicious mind. For it supposes us either so ignorant as to make a

wrong Choice at first, or else so silly as not to know and stick to it,

when we have made a right one. It bespeaks an unthinking inconsiderate

Mind, one that lives at Random, without any design or end; who wanting

judgment to discern where to fix, or to know when she’s well, is ever

fluctuating and uncertain, undoing to day what she had done yesterday,

which is the worst Character that can be given of ones Understanding.

A constant Scene of Temptations and the infection of ill company, is

another great danger which conversing in the world exposes to. ’Tis a

dangerous thing to have all the opportunities of sinning in our power,

and the danger is increas’d by the ill Precedents we daily see of those

who take them. \_Liberty\_ (as some body says) \_will corrupt an Angel\_,

and tho’ it is indeed more glorious to conquer than to fly, yet since

our Vertue is so visibly weakened in other instances, we have no

reason to presume on’t in this. ’Tis become no easy matter to secure

our Innocence in our necessary Civilities and daily Conversations,

in which if we have the good luck to avoid such as bring a necessity

on us, either of seeming rude to them, or of being really so to GOD

Almighty, whilst we tamely hear him, our best Friend and Benefactor

affronted and swallow it, at the same time, that we wou’d reckon’t

a very pitiful Spirit to hear an Acquaintance traduc’d and hold our

Tongue; yet if we avoid this Trial, our Charity is however in continual

danger, Censoriousness being grown so modish, that we can scarce avoid

being active or passive in it; so that she who has not her pert jest

ready to pass upon others, shall as soon as her back is turn’d, become

a Jest her self for want of Wit.

In consequence of all this, we are insensibly betray’d to a great loss

of time, a Treasure whose value we are too often quite ignorant of

till it be lost past redemption. And yet considering the shortness and

uncertainty of Life, the great work we have to do, and what advantages

accrew to us by a due management of our time, we cannot reconcile it

with prudence to suffer the least minute to escape us. But besides our

own lavish Expences concerning which one may ask as \_Solomon\_ does of

Labour, \_What Fruit have we of all that Sport and Pastime we have taken

under the Sun?\_ so unreasonable is the humour of the World, that those

who wou’d reckon it a rudeness to make so bold with out Money, never

scruple to waste and rob us of this infinitely more precious Treasure.

In the last place, by reason of this loss of time and the continual

hurry we are in, we can find no opportunities for thoughtfulness and

recollection; we are so busied with what passes abroad, that we have

no leisure to look at home, nor to rectifie the disorders there.

And such an unthinking mechanical way of living, when like Machines

we are condemn’d every day to repeat the impertinencies of the day

before, shortens our Views, contracts our Minds, exposes to a thousand

practical Errors, and renders Improvement impossible, because it will

not permit us to consider and recollect, which is the only means to

attain it. So much for the inconveniences of living in the World; if we

enquire concerning Retirement, we shall find it does not only remove

all these, but brings considerable advantages of its own.

For first, it helps us to mate Custom and delivers us from its Tyranny,

which is the most considerable thing we have to do, it being nothing

else but the habituating our selves to Folly that can reconcile us

to it. But how hard is it to quit an old road? What courage as well

as prudence does it require? How clear a Judgment to overlook the

Prejudices of Education and Example and to discern what is best, and

how strong a Resolution notwithstanding all the Scoffs and Noises of

the world to adhere to it? For Custom has usurpt such an unaccountable

Authority, that she who would endeavour to put a stop to its Arbitrary

Sway and reduce it to Reason, is in a fair way to render her self the

\_Butt\_ for all the Fops in Town to shoot their impertinent Censures

at. And tho’ a wise Woman will not value their Censure, yet she cares

not to be the subject of their Discourse. The only way then is to

retire from the World, as the \_Israelites\_ did out of \_Ægypt\_, lest the

Sacrifice we must make of its Follies shou’d provoke its Spleen.

This also puts us out of the road of Temptation, and very much redeems

our Time, cutting off those extravagancies on which so much of it

was squandered away before, and furnishing us constantly with good

employment, secures us from being seduc’d into bad. Great are the

Benefits of holy Conversation which will be here enjoy’d; As Vice \_is\_,

so Vertue \_may\_ be catching; and to what heights of Piety will not she

advance, who is plac’d where the sole business is to be Good, where

there is no pleasure but in Religion, no contention but to excel in

what is truly commendable; where her Soul is not defil’d nor her Zeal

provok’d, by the sight or relation of those Villanies the World abounds

with?

And by that Learning which will be here afforded, and that leisure we

have to enquire after it, and to know and reflect on our own minds, we

shall rescue our selves out of that woful incogitancy we have slipt

into, awaken our sleeping Powers and make use of that reason which GOD

has given us. We shall then begin to wonder at our Folly, that amongst

all the pleasures we formerly pursued, we never attended to that most

noble and delicious one which is to be found in the chase of truth;

and bless our selves at last, that our eyes are open’d to discern, how

much more pleasantly we may be entertain’d by our own Thoughts, than

by all the Diversions which the world affords us. By this means we

are fitted to receive the influences of the holy Spirit and are put

in a due frame of Devotion. No doubt but He has often knock’d at the

door of our hearts, when the croud and noise of our Vanities would

not suffer us to regard or hear him, and could find no admittance

when our house was so fill’d with other company. Here therefore is

the fittest place for his Entertainment, for being freed from outward

disturbances, we are entirely at leisure to attend so divine a Guest.

Our Devotions will be perform’d with due attention, those Objects that

used to distract being now remov’d from us; simplicity of desire will

beget simplicity of thought, and that will make our mind most intense

and elevated, when we come to address our selves to the Throne of

Grace. Being dead to the things of this world, we shall with greatest

fervour petition for those of another; and living always in a lively

and awful sense of the divine Majesty, our hearts will ever be dispos’d

to approach him in the most solemn, serious and reverent manner. ’Tis

a very unseemly thing to jump from our Diversions to our Prayers; as

if when we have been entertaining our selves and others with Vanity,

we were instantly prepar’d to appear in the sacred presence of GOD.

But a Religious Retirement and holy Conversation, will procure us a

more serious Temper, a graver Spirit, and so both make us habitually

fit to approach, and likewise stir us up to be more careful in our

actual preparations when we do. For besides all other improvements of

Knowledge, we shall hereby obtain truer Notions of GOD than we were

capable of before, which is of very great consequence, since the want

of right apprehensions concerning him, is the general cause of Mistakes

in Religion, of Errors in Speculation, and Indecorums in Practice; for

as GOD is the noblest Object of our Understanding, so nothing is more

necessary or of such consequence to us as to busie our thoughts about

him. And did we rightly consider his Nature, we shou’d neither dare to

forget him, nor draw near to him with unclean hands and unholy hearts.

From this sacred Mountain where the world will be plac’d at our feet,

at such a distance from us, that the steams of its corruptions shall

not obscure our eye-sight, we shall have a right prospect of it and

clearly discern that all its Allurements, all those Gaities and

Pageantries which at present we admire so much, are no better than

insignificant Toys, which have no value but what our perverse Opinion

imposes on them. Things which contribute so very little to our real

Good, that even at \_present\_, which is their only season, we may live

much happier without than with them; and which are so far from being

necessary to our Felicity, that they shall vanish and be no more when

that is consummate and perfect. Many are the Topic’s from whence we

might declaim against the vanity of the world, but methinks Experience

is so convincing that it supersedes all the rest, and wou’d certainly

reclaim us from the immoderate love of earthly enjoyments, did we

but seriously hearken to it. For tell me, Ladies, if your greatest

Pleasures are not attended with a greater sting; when you think to

grasp them, do they not either vanish into Air, or gall your fingers?

To want or to enjoy them, is equally tormenting; the one produces in

you the Pain of Hunger the other of Loathing. For in reality, there

is no good in them, nothing but the Shadow and Appearance; if there

were, you cou’d not so easily loath your old Delights and be so fond

of variety, what is truly desirable never ending in disgust. They are

not therefore Pleasures but Amusements which you now pursue, and which,

through your ignorance of better Joys pretend to fill their place,

toll you on with fair pretences and repay your Labour with defeated

Hopes. Joys not near so lasting as the slightest toy you wear, the

most capricious Humorist among you is more constant far than they.

Come hither therefore and take a true view of ’em, that you may no

longer deceive your selves with that which profits not, but spurning

away these empty nothings, secure a portion in such a Bliss as will

not fail, as cannot disappoint you! A Felicity which depending on GOD

only and your own Minds, is out of Fortunes reach, will place you

above the Batteries of the world, above its Terrors and Allurements,

and enable you at once to triumph over and despise it. And what can

be more glorious, than to have a mind unshaken by the blandishments

of Prosperity, or the rough shocks of Adversity; that passes thro’

both with the same indifferency and integrity, is not to be tempted by

either to a mean unworthy and indecent Action?

Farther yet, besides that holy emulation which a continual view of

the brightest and most exemplary Lives will excite in us, we shall

have opportunity of contracting the purest and noblest Friendship;

a Blessing, the purchase of which were richly worth all the World

besides! For she who possesses a worthy Person, has certainly obtain’d

the richest Treasure. A Blessing that Monarchs may envy, and she who

enjoys is happier than she who fills a Throne! A Blessing, which next

to the love of GOD, is the choicest Jewel in our Celestial Diadem;

which, were it duly practis’d wou’d both fit us for Heav’n and bring it

down into our hearts whilst we tarry here. For Friendship is a vertue

which comprehends all the rest; none being fit for this, who is not

adorn’d with every other Vertue. Probably one considerable cause of the

degeneracy of the present Age, is the little true Friendship that is to

be found in it; or perhaps you will rather say that this is the effect

of our corruption. The cause and the effect are indeed reciprocal; for

were the World better there wou’d be more Friendship, and were there

more Friendship we shou’d have a better World. But because \_Iniquity

abounds\_, therefore the \_love of many\_ is not only \_waxen cold\_, but

quite benumb’d and perish’d. But if we have such narrow hearts, be so

full of mistaken Self-love, so unreasonably fond of our selves, that

we cannot spare a Hearty Good-will to one or two choice Persons, how

can it ever be thought, that we shou’d well acquit our selves of that

Charity which is due to all Mankind? For Friendship is nothing else

but Charity contracted; it is (in the words of an admired Author)

a kind of revenging our selves on the narrowness of our Faculties,

by exemplifying that extraordinary Charity on one or two, which we

are willing, but not able to exercise towards all. And therefore

’tis without doubt the best Instructor to teach us our duty to our

Neighbour, and a most excellent Monitor to excite us to make payment

as far as our power will reach. It has a special force to dilate our

hearts, to deliver them from that vicious \_selfishness\_ and the rest of

those sordid Passions which express a narrow illiberal temper, and are

of such pernicious consequence to Mankind. That institution therefore

must needs be highly beneficial, which both disposes us to be Friends

our selves and helps to find them. But by Friendship I do not mean any

thing like those intimacies that are abroad in the World, which are

often combinations in evil and at best but insignificant dearnesses, as

little resembling true Friendship, as modern Practice does Primitive

Christianity. But I intend by it the greatest usefulness, the most

refin’d and disinteress’d Benevolence, a love that thinks nothing

within the bounds of Power and Duty, too much to do or suffer for its

Beloved; And makes no distinction betwixt its Friend and its self,

except that in Temporals it prefers her interest. But tho’ it be very

desirable to obtain such a Treasure, such a Medicine of Life as the

wise man speaks, yet the danger is great least being deceiv’d in our

choice, we suck in Poyson where we expected Health. And considering

how apt we are to disguise our selves, how hard it is to know our

own hearts much less anothers, it is not advisable to be too hasty

in contracting so important a Relation; before that be done, it were

well if we could look into the very Soul of the beloved Person, to

discover what resemblance it bears to our own, and in this Society we

shall have the best opportunities of doing so. There are no Interests

here to serve, no contrivances for another to be a stale to; the Souls

of all the \_Religious\_ will be open and free, and those particular

Friendships must be no prejudice to the general Amity. But yet, as in

Heav’n that region of perfect Love, the happy Souls (as some are of

opinion) now and then step aside from more general Conversations, to

entertain themselves with a peculiar Friend; so, in this little emblem

of that blessed place, what shou’d hinder, but that two Persons of a

sympathizing disposition, the \_make\_ and \_frame\_ of whose Souls bears

an exact conformity to each other, and therefore one wou’d think were

purposely design’d by Heaven to unite and mix; what shou’d hinder them

from entering into an holy combination to watch over each other for

Good, to advise, encourage and direct, and to observe the minutest

fault in order to its amendment. The truest effect of love being to

endeavour the bettering the beloved Person. And therefore nothing

is more likely to improve us in Vertue, and advance us to the very

highest pitch of Goodness than unfeigned Friendship, which is the most

beneficial, as well as the most pleasant thing in the world.

But to hasten; such an Institution will much confirm us in Vertue and

help us to persevere to the end, and by that substantial Piety and

solid Knowledge we shall here acquire, fit us to propagate Religion

when we return into the World. An habitual Practice of Piety for some

years will so root and establish us in it, that Religion will become

a second Nature, and we must do strange violences to our selves, if

after that we dare venture to oppose it. For besides all the other

Advantages that Vertue has over Vice, this will disarm it of \_Custom\_,

the only thing that recommends it, bravely win its strongest Fort and

turn its own Cannon against it self. How almost impossible wou’d it

be for her to sin, whose \_Understanding\_ being clearly illuminated

with the knowledge of the Truth, is too wise to be impos’d on by those

false \_Representations\_ that sin wou’d deceive it with; whose \_Will\_

has found out and united it self to its true \_Centre\_; and having

been long habituated to move in a \_right\_ line, has no temptation

to decline to an \_Oblique\_. Whose \_Affections\_ have daily regaled

on those delicious Fruits of Paradise which Religion presents them

with, and are therefore too sublime and refin’d to relish the muddy

Pleasures of sensual Delights. It must certainly be a Miracle if such

an one relinquish her Glory and Joy; she must be as bad as \_Lucifer\_

himself, who after such Enjoyments can forsake her Heaven. ’Tis too

unreasonable to imagine such an Apostacy, the supposition is monstrous

and therefore we may conclude will never, or very rarely happen. And

then what a blessed World shou’d we have, shining with so many stars

of \_Vertue\_, who not content to be happy themselves alone, for that’s

a narrowness of mind too much beneath their God-like temper, would

like the glorious Lights of Heaven, or rather like him who made them,

diffuse their benign Influences where-ever they come. Having gain’d an

entrance into Paradise themselves, they wou’d both shew the way, and

invite others to partake of their felicity. Instead of that Froth and

Impertinence, that Censure and Pragmaticalness, with which Feminine

Conversations so much abound, we should hear their tongues employ’d

in making Proselytes to heaven, in running down Vice, in establishing

Vertue and proclaiming their Makers Glory. ’Twou’d be more genteel to

give and take instructions about the ornaments of the Mind, than to

enquire after the Mode; and a Lecture on the Fashions wou’d become as

disagreeable as at present any serious discourse is. Not the Follies

of the Town, but the Beauties and the Love of JESUS wou’d be the most

polite and delicious Entertainments. ’Twould be thought as rude and

barbarous to send our Visitors away uninstructed, as our foolishness at

present reckons it to introduce a pertinent and useful Conversation.

Ladies of Quality wou’d be able to distinguish themselves from their

Inferiors, by the blessings they communicated and the good they did.

For this is their grand Prerogative, their \_distinguishing Character\_,

that they are plac’d in a condition which makes that which is every

ones \_Chief\_ business, to be their \_Only\_ employ. They have nothing to

do but to glorifie GOD, and to benefit their Neighbours, and she who

does not thus improve her Talent, is more vile and despicable than the

meanest Creature that attends her.

And if after so many Spiritual Advantages, it be convenient to mention

Temporals, here Heiresses and Persons of Fortune may be kept secure

from the rude attempts of designing Men; And she who has more Money

than Discretion, need not curse her Stars for being expos’d a prey

to bold importunate and rapacious Vultures. She will not here be

inveigled and impos’d on, will neither be bought nor sold, nor be

forc’d to marry for her own quiet, when she has no inclination to it,

but what the being tir’d out with a restless importunity occasions.

Or if she be dispos’d to marry, here she may remain in safety till

a convenient Match be offer’d by her Friends, and be freed from the

danger of a dishonourable one. Modesty requiring that a Woman should

not love before Marriage, but only make choice of one whom she can love

hereafter; She who has none but innocent affections, being easily able

to fix them where Duty requires.

And though at first I propos’d to my self to speak nothing in

particular of the employment of the \_Religious\_, yet to give a Specimen

how useful they will be to the World, I am now inclin’d to declare,

that it is design’d a part of their business shall be to give the

best Education to the Children of Persons of Quality, who shall be

attended and instructed in lesser Matters by meaner Persons deputed to

that Office, but the forming of their minds shall be the particular

care of those of their own Rank, who cannot have a more pleasant and

useful employment than to exercise and encrease their own knowledge, by

instilling it into these young ones, who are most like to profit under

such Tutors. For how can their little Pupils forbear to credit them,

since they do not decry the World (as others may be thought to do)

because they cou’d not enjoy it, but when they had it in their power,

were courted and caress’d by it, for very good Reasons and on mature

deliberation, thought fit to relinquish and despise its offers for a

better choice? Nor are mercenary people on other accounts capable of

doing so much good to young Persons; because having often but short

views of things themselves, sordid and low Spirits, they are not like

to form a generous temper in the minds of the Educated. Doubtless ’twas

well consider’d of him, who wou’d not trust the breeding of his Son to

a Slave, because nothing great or excellent could be expected from a

person of that condition.

And when by the increase of their Revenue, the \_Religious\_ are enabled

to do such a work of Charity, the Education they design to bestow

on the Daughters of Gentlemen who are fallen into decay will be no

inconsiderable advantage to the Nation. For hereby many Souls will

be preserv’d from great Dishonours and put in a comfortable way of

subsisting, being either receiv’d into the House if they incline to

it, or otherwise dispos’d of. It being suppos’d that prudent Men will

reckon the endowments they here acquire a sufficient \_Dowry\_, and that

a discreet and vertuous Gentlewoman will make a better Wife than she

whose mind is empty tho’ her Purse be full.

But some will say, May not People be good without this confinement? may

they not live at large in the World, and yet serve GOD as acceptably

as here? ’Tis allow’d they may; truly wise and vertuous Souls will do

it by the assistance of GOD’s Grace in despite of all temptations;

and I heartily wish that all Women were of this temper. But it is

to be consider’d, that there are \_tender\_ Vertues who need to be

screened from the ill Airs of the World: many Persons who had \_begun\_

well might have gone to the Grave in peace and innocence, had it not

been their misfortune to be violently tempted. For those who have

honest Hearts have not always the strongest Heads; and sometimes the

enticements of the World and the subtil insinuations of such as lie in

wait to deceive, may make their Heads giddy, stagger their Resolutions,

and overthrow all the fine hopes of a promising beginning. ’Tis fit

therefore, such tender \_Cyons\_ shou’d be transplanted, that they may be

supported by the prop of Vertuous Friendship, and confirm’d in Goodness

by holy Examples, which alas! they will not often meet with in the

World. And, such is the weakness of humane Nature, bad People are not

so apt to be better’d by the Society of the Good, as the Good are to be

corrupted by theirs. Since therefore we daily pray against temptation,

it cannot be amiss if we take all prudent care to avoid it, and not

out of a vain presumption face the danger which GOD may justly permit

to overcome us for a due correction of our Pride. It is not impossible

for a man to live in an infected House or Town and escape with Life and

Health, yet if he have a place in the Country to retire to, he will

not make slight of that advantage; and surely the Health of our Souls

is of greater consideration than the health of our Bodies. Besides,

she has need of an establish’d Vertue and consummated Prudence, who

so well understands the great end for which she came into the World,

and so faithfully pursues it, that not content to be wise and good her

self alone, she endeavours to propagate Wisdom and Piety to all within

her Sphere; But neither this Prudence nor heroic Goodness are easily

attainable amidst the noise and hurry of the world, we must therefore

retire a while from its clamour and importunity, if we generously

design to do it good, and having calmly and sedately observ’d and

rectify’d what is amiss in our selves, we shall be fitter to promote a

Reformation in others. A devout Retirement will not only strengthen and

confirm our Souls, that they be not infected by the worlds Corruptions,

but likewise so purify and refine them, that they will become Antidotes

to expel the Poyson in others, and spread a salutary Air on ev’ry Side.

If any object against a Learned Education, that it will make Women

vain and assuming, and instead of correcting encrease their Pride: I

grant that a smattering in Learning may, for it has this effect on

the Men, none so Dogmatical and so forward to shew their Parts as

your little \_Pretenders\_ to Science. But I wou’d not have the Ladies

content themselves with the \_shew\_, my desire is, that they shou’d

not rest till they obtain the \_Substance\_. And then, she who is most

knowing will be forward to own with the wise \_Socrates\_ that she knows

nothing: nothing that is matter of Pride and Ostentation; nothing but

what is attended with so much ignorance and imperfection, that it

cannot reasonably elate and puff her up. The more she knows, she will

be the less subject to talkativeness and its sister Vices, because she

discerns, that the most difficult piece of Learning is to know when to

use and when to hold ones Tongue, and never to speak but to the purpose.

But the men if they rightly understand their own interest, have no

reason to oppose the ingenious Education of the Women, since ’twou’d go

a great way towards reclaiming the men, great is the influence we have

over them in their Childhood, in which time if a Mother be discreet and

knowing as well as devout, she has many opportunities of giving such a

\_Form\_ and \_Season\_ to the tender Mind of the Child, as will shew its

good effects thro’ all the stages of his Life. But tho’ you should not

allow her capable of doing \_good\_, ’tis certain she may do \_hurt\_: If

she do not \_make\_ the Child, she has power to \_marr\_ him, by suffering

her fondness to get the better of discreet affection. But besides this,

a good and prudent Wife wou’d wonderfully work on an ill man; he must

be a Brute indeed, who cou’d hold out against all those innocent Arts,

those gentle persuasives and obliging methods she wou’d use to reclaim

him. Piety is often offensive when it is accompanied with indiscretion;

but she who is as Wise as Good, possesses such Charms as can hardly

fail of prevailing. Doubtless her Husband is a much happier Man and

more likely to abandon all his ill Courses, than he who has none to

come home to, but an ignorant, froward and fantastick Creature. An

ingenious Conversation will make his life comfortable, and he who

can be so well entertain’d at home, needs not run into Temptations

in search of Diversions abroad. The only danger is that the Wife be

more knowing than the Husband; but if she be ’tis his own fault, since

he wants no opportunities of improvement; unless he be a natural

\_Block-head\_, and then such an one will need a wise Woman to govern

him, whose prudence will conceal it from publick Observation, and at

once both cover and supply his defects. Give me leave therefore to

hope, that no Gentleman who has honourable designs, will hence-forward

decry Knowledge and Ingenuity in her he would pretend to Honour; If he

does, it may serve for a Test to distinguish the feigned and unworthy

from the real Lover.

Now who that has a spark of Piety will go about to oppose so Religious

a design? What generous Spirit that has a due regard to the good of

Mankind, will not be forward to advance and perfect it? Who will think

500 pounds too much to lay out for the purchase of so much Wisdom and

Happiness? Certainly we shou’d not think them too dearly paid for by

a much greater Sum, did not our pitiful and sordid Spirits set a much

higher value on Money than it deserves. But granting so much of that

dear Idol were given away, a person thus bred, will easily make it

up by her Frugality & other Vertues; if she bring less, she will not

waste so much as others do in superfluous and vain Expences. Nor can I

think of any expedient so useful as this to Persons of Quality who are

over-stock’d with Children, for thus they may honourably dispose of

them without impairing their Estates. Five or six hundred pounds may be

easily spar’d with a Daughter, when so many thousands would go deep;

and yet as the world goes be a very inconsiderable Fortune for Ladies

of their Birth, neither maintain them in that \_Port\_ which Custom makes

almost necessary, nor procure them an equal Match, those of their own

Rank (contrary to the generous custom of the \_Germans\_) chusing rather

to fill their Coffers than to preserve the purity of their Blood, and

therefore think a weighty Bag the best Gentility, preferring a wealthy

Upstart before the best Descended and best Qualified Lady; their own

Extravagancies perhaps having made it necessary, that they may keep up

an empty shadow of Greatness, which is all that remains to shew what

their Ancestors have been.

Does any think their Money lost to their Families when ’tis put in

here? I will only ask what course they can take to save it, and at

once to preserve their Money, their Honour and their Daughters too?

Were they sure the Ladies wou’d die unmarried, I shou’d commend their

Thrift, but Experience has too often shewn us the vanity of this

expectation. For the poor Lady having past the prime of her Years in

Gaity and Company, in running the Circle of all the Vanities of the

Town, having spread all her Nets and us’d all her Arts for Conquest,

and finding that the Bait fails where she wou’d have it take; and

having all this while been so over-careful of her Body, that she had no

time to improve her Mind, which therefore affords her no safe retreat,

now she meets with Disappointments abroad, and growing every day more

and more sensible, that the respect which us’d to be paid her decays

as fast as her Beauty; quite terrified with the dreadful Name of \_Old

Maid\_, which yet none but Fools will reproach her with, nor any wise

Woman be afraid of; to avoid this terrible \_Mormo\_, and the scoffs that

are thrown on superannuated Virgins, she flies to some dishonourable

Match as her last, tho’ much mistaken Refuge, to the disgrace of her

Family and her own irreparable Ruin. And now let any Person of Honour

tell me, if it were not richly worth some thousand Pounds, to prevent

all this mischief, and the having an idle Fellow, and perhaps a race of

beggarly Children to hang on him and to provide for?

Cou’d I think of any other Objection I wou’d consider it; there’s

nothing indeed which witty Persons may not argue \_for\_ and \_against\_,

but they who duly weigh the Arguments on both sides, unless they be

extreamly prejudiced, will easily discern the great usefulness of

this Institution. The \_Beaux\_ perhaps, and topping Sparks of the

Town will ridicule and laugh at it. For Vertue her self as bright

as she is, can’t escape the lash of scurrilous Tongues; the comfort

is, whilst they impotently endeavour to throw dirt on her, they are

unable to soil her Beauty, and only defile and render themselves the

more contemptible. They may therefore if they please, hug themselves

in their own dear folly, and enjoy the diversion of their own insipid

Jests. She has but little Wisdom and less Vertue, who is to be frighted

from what she judges reasonable, by the scoffs and insignificant noises

of ludicrous Wits and pert Buffoons. And no wonder that such as they

who have nothing to shew for their pretences to Wit, but some scraps

of Plays and blustring Non-sense; who fansie a well adjusted Peruke

is able to supply their want of Brains, and that to talk \_much\_ is a

sign of Ingenuity, tho’t be never so little to the purpose, no wonder

that they object against our \_Proposal\_: ’Twou’d indeed spoil the Trade

of the gay fluttering Fops, who wou’d be at a loss, had they no body

as impertinent as themselves to talk with. The Criticism of their

Dress wou’d be useless, and the labour of their \_Valet de Chambre\_

lost, unless they cou’d peaceably lay aside their Rivalling, and one

Ass be content to complement and admire another. For the Ladies wou’d

have more discernment than to esteem a Man for such Follies as shou’d

rather incline them to scorn and despise him. They wou’d never be so

sottish as to imagine, that he who regards nothing but his own brutish

Appetite, shou’d have any real affection for them, nor ever expect

Fidelity from one who is unfaithful to GOD and his own Soul. They

wou’d not be so absurd as to suppose, that Man can esteem them who

neglects his Maker; for what are all those fine Idolatries, by which

he wou’d recommend himself to his pretended Goddess, but mockery and

delusion from him who forgets and affronts the true Deity? They wou’d

not value themselves on account of the Admiration of such incompetent

Judges, nor consequently make use of those little trifling Arts that

are necessary to recommend them to such Admirers; Neither wou’d they

give them opportunity to profess themselves their Slaves so long till

at last they become their Masters.

What now remains, but to reduce to Practice that which tends so very

much to our advantage. Is Charity so dead in the world that none will

contribute to the saving their own and their neighbours Souls? Shall

we freely expend our Money to purchase Vanity, and often times both

present and future Ruin, and find none for such an eminent good Work,

which will make the Ages to come arise and call us Blessed? I wou’d

fain persuade my self better things, and that I shall one day see this

\_Religious Retirement\_ happily setled, and its great designs wisely and

vigorously pursu’d; and methinks I have already a Vision of that lustre

and glory our Ladies cast far and near; Let me therefore intreat the

rest of our Sex, who tho’ at liberty in the world, are the miserable

Slaves of their own vile affections, let me intreat them to lay aside

their Prejudices and whatever borders on Envy and Malice, and with

impartial eyes to behold the Beauties of our \_Religious\_. The native

innocency and unaffectedness of whose Charms, and the unblameable

Integrity of their Lives, are abundantly more taking than all the

curious Artifices and studied Arts the other can invent to recommend

them, even bad men themselves being Judges, who often betray a secret

Veneration for that vertue they wou’d seem to despise and endeavour

to corrupt. As there is not any thing, no not the least shadow of

a motive to recommend Vice but its fashionableness and the being

accustom’d to it, so there is nothing at all forbidden in Vertue but

her uncouthness. Acquaint your selves with her a little, and you’ll

wonder how you cou’d be so foolish as to delight in any thing besides!

For you’ll find her Conversation most sweet and obliging; her Precepts

most easy and beneficial; her very tasks Joys and her Injunctions the

highest Pleasures. She will not rob you of any innocent delight, not

engage you to any thing beneath your Birth and Breeding; but will put a

new and more grateful relish into all your Enjoyments, and make them

more delicious with her Sweetness. She’ll preserve and augment your

Honour, by allying you to the King of Heaven; secure your Grandeur

by fixing it on a firm bottom, such as the caprice of Fortune cannot

shake or overthrow; she’ll enlarge your Souls, raise them above the

common level, and encourage that allowable Pride of Scorning to do a

base unworthy action; Make you truly amiable in the eyes of GOD and

Man, preserve even the Beauty of your Bodies as long as ’tis possible

for such a brittle thing to last, and when it must of necessity decay,

impress such a loveliness on your Minds, as will shine thro’ and

brighten your very Countenances; enriching you with such a stock of

Charms, that Time which devours every other thing, shall never be able

to decay: In a word, ’tis Vertue only which can make you truly happy in

\_this\_ world as well as in the next.

There is a sort of Bravery and Greatness of Soul, which does more

truly ennoble us than the highest Title, and it consists in living

up to the dignity of our Natures, being so sensible of our own worth

as to think our selves too great to do a degenerate and unbecoming

thing; in passing indifferently thro’ Good and Evil Fortune, without

being corrupted by the one or deprest by the other. For she that can

do so, gives evidence that her Happiness depends not on so mutable a

thing as this World; but, in a due subserviency to the Almighty, is

bottom’d only on her own great Mind. This is the richest Ornament,

and renders a Woman glorious in the lowest Fortune. So shining is

real worth, that like a Diamond it loses not its lustre tho’ cast on

a Dunghill. Whereas, she who is advanc’d to some eminent Station and

wants this natural and solid Greatness, is no better than Fortunes

\_May-game\_, rendered more conspicuous that she may appear the more

contemptible. Let those therefore who value themselves only on

external accomplishments, consider how liable they are to decay, and

how soon they may be depriv’d of them, and that supposing they shou’d

continue, they are but sandy Foundations to build Esteem upon. What

a disappointment will it be to a Ladies Admirer as well as to her

self, that her Conversation shou’d lose or endanger the Victory her

eyes had gain’d! For when the Passion of a Lover is Exchang’d for

the Indifference of a Husband, and a frequent review has lessen’d

the wonder which her Charms at first had rais’d, she’ll retain no

more than such a formal respect as decency and good breeding will

require, and perhaps hardly that, but unless he be a very good Man

(and indeed the world is not over full of ’em) her worthlesness has

made a forfeit of his Affections, which are seldom fixt by any other

thing than Veneration and Esteem. Whereas a wise and good Woman is

useful and valuable in all Ages and Conditions: she who chiefly attends

the \_one thing needful\_, the \_good part which shall not be taken from

her\_, lives a cheerful and pleasant Life, innocent and sedate, calm

and tranquill, and makes a glorious Exit; being translated from the

most happy life on Earth, to unspeakable happiness in Heaven; a fresh

and fragrant Name embalming her Dust, and extending its Perfume to

succeeding Ages. Whilst the Fools, and the worst sort of them the

wicked, \_live\_ as well as \_die\_ in Misery, go out in a snuff, leaving

nothing but stench and putrefaction behind them.

To close all, if this \_Proposal\_ which is but a rough draught and rude

Essay, and which might be made much more beautiful by a better Pen,

give occasion to wiser heads to improve and perfect it, I have my end.

For imperfect as it is, it seems so desirable, that she who drew the

Scheme is full of hopes, it will not want kind hands to perform and

compleat it. But if it miss of that, it is but a few hours thrown away,

and a little labour in vain, which yet will not be lost, if what is

here offer’d may serve to express her hearty Good-will, and how much

she desires your Improvement, who is

LADIES,

\_Your very humble Servant\_.

\_FINIS.\_

Letters concerning the Love of GOD, between the Author of the Proposal

to the Ladies, and Mr. \_John Norris\_; wherein his late Discourse,

shewing that it ought to be intire and Exclusive of all other Loves, is

farther clear’d and Justified, 8\_vo.\_

Printed for \_Richard Wilkin\_.

A Serious

PROPOSAL

TO THE

LADIES,

PART II:

Wherein a Method is offer’d

for the Improvement

of their Minds.

\_LONDON\_:

Printed for \_Richard Wilkin\_ at

the \_King’s Head\_ in St. \_Paul\_’s

Church-yard, 1697.

To her Royal Highness

THE

Princess \_ANN\_ of Denmark.

MADAM,

\_What was at first address’d to the Ladies in\_ General, \_as

seeming not considerable enough to appear in your Royal Highnesses

Presence, not being ill receiv’d by them, and having got the Addition

of a Second Part, now presumes on a more\_ Particular \_Application to

Her who is the Principal of them, and whose Countenance and Example

may reduce to Practice, what it can only Advise and Wish.\_

\_And when I consider you Madam as a Princess who is sensible that the

Chief Prerogative of the Great is the Power they have of doing more

Good than those in an Inferior Station can, I see no cause to fear

that your Royal Highness will deny Encouragement to that which has

no other Design than the Bettering of the World, especially the most

neglected part of it as to all Real Improvement, the Ladies. It is by

the Exercise of this Power that Princes become truly Godlike, they

are never so Illustrious as when they shine as Lights in the World by

an Eminent and Heroic Vertue. A Vertue as much above Commendation as

it is above Detraction, which fits equally Silent and Compos’d when

Opprest with Praises or Pursu’d with Calumnys, is neither hurt by

these nor better’d by the other; for the Service of\_ GOD, \_and

the Resembling Him, being its only Aim, His Approbation in a soft and

inward Whisper, is more than the loud\_ Huzza’s \_and Plaudits of

ten thousand Worlds.\_

\_I shall not therefore offend your Royal Ear with the nauseous strain

of Dedications; for what can one say, when by how much the more any

Person deserves Panegyric, by so much the less they endure it? That

your Royal Highness may be All that is truly Great and Good, and have

a Confluence of Temporal, Sanctify’d and Crown’d with Spiritual and

Eternal Blessings, is the unfeigned and constant desire of\_

MADAM,

Your Royal Highnesses

Most Humble and most

Obedient Servant.

THE

Introduction,

Containing a farther

PERSWASIVE

TO THE

LADIES

To endeavour the

Improvement of their Minds.

The favourable reception which the graver and wiser part of the World

were pleas’d t’afford to a former Essay towards th’improvement of the

Ladies, has encouraged her who made it to prosecute that design a

little further, and to try if she can reduce to Practice what appears

so well in Notion and Speculation. For how customary soever it be

for Writers to mind no more than their own Reputation, to be content

if they can make a handsom flourish, get a Name among the Authors,

come off with but a little Censure and some Commendations; or if there

are a few generous Souls who’re got above either the Hope or Fear of

vulgar Breath, who do not matter much what is dispens’d more commonly

by fancy or passion than by Judgment, they rest satisfied however in

a Good Intention, and comfort themselves that they’ve endeavour’d

the Reformation of the Age, let those look to’t who will not follow

their Advices: Yet give her leave to profess that she desires the Good

of the World rather than its Applauses, and cou’d with much greater

pleasure have found her Project condemn’d as foolish and impertinent,

than see it entertain’d with delight and approbation, and yet no

body endeavouring to put it in Practice; since the former wou’d only

have reproach’d her own Understanding, but the latter is a shame to

Mankind, as being a plain indication that tho they discern and commend

what is Good, they have not the Vertue and Courage to Act accordingly.

Were’t altogether impossible t’improve her Sex, were Women irremediably

condemn’d to folly and impertinence, how much soever she desires their

amendment, she wou’d make a Vertue of Necessity and endeavour to be

content without it, but it will give her the greatest uneasiness to’ve

found out a Method which every one judges so much to their advantage,

if she can’t persuade them to make use of it.

And can you Ladies deny her so cheap a Reward for all the Good-will she

bears you, as the Pleasure of seeing you Wise and Happy? Can you envy

her the Joy of assisting at \_Your\_ Triumphs; for why does she contend

for Laurels but to lay ’em all at the Ladies feet? Why won’t you begin

to think, and no longer dream away your Time in a wretched incogitancy?

Why does not a generous Emulation fire your hearts and inspire you

with Noble and becoming Resentments? The Men of Equity are so just as

to confess the errors which the Proud and inconsiderate had imbib’d

to your prejudice, and if you still allow them the preference in

Ingenuity, they’re convinc’d it is not because you \_must\_, but because

you \_will\_. Can you be in Love with servitude and folly? Can you dote

on a mean, ignorant and ignoble Life? Shall an Ingenious Woman be

star’d on as a Prodigy, since you have it in your power to inform the

World, that you can every one of you be so, if you please your selves?

It is not enough to wish and to would it, or t’afford a faint Encomium

upon what you pretend is beyond your Power; Imitation is the heartiest

Praise you can give, and is a Debt which Justice requires to be paid to

every worthy Action. What Sentiments were fit to be rais’d in you to

day ought to remain to morrow, and the best Commendation you can bestow

on a Book is immediately to put it in Practice; otherwise you become

self-condemn’d, your Judgment reproaches your Actions, and you live a

contradiction to your selves. If you \_approve\_, Why don’t you \_follow\_?

And if you \_Wish\_, Why shou’d you not \_Endeavour\_? especially since

that wou’d reduce your Wishes to Act, and make you of Well-wishers to

Vertue and Good sense, become glorious Examples of them.

And pray what is’t that hinders you? The singularity of the Matter? Are

you afraid of being out of the ordinary way and therefore admir’d and

gaz’d at? Admiration does not use to be uneasy to our Sex, a great

many Vanities might be spar’d if we consulted only our own conveniency

and not other peoples Eyes and Sentiments: And why shou’d that which

usually recommends a trifling Dress, deter us from a real Ornament?

Is’t not as fine to be first in this as well as any other Fashion?

Singularity is indeed to be avoided except in matters of importance,

in such a case Why shou’d not we assert our Liberty, and not suffer

every Trifler to impose a Yoke of Impertinent Customs on us? She who

forsakes the Path to which Reason directs is much to blame, but she

shall never do any thing Praise-worthy and excellent who is not got

above unjust Censures, and too steady and well resolv’d to be sham’d

from her Duty by the empty Laughter of such as have nothing but airy

Noise and Confidence to recommend them. Firmness and strength of Mind

will carry us thro all these little persecutions, which may create us

some uneasiness for a while, but will afterwards end in our Glory and

Triumph.

Is it the difficulty of attaining the Bravery of the Mind, the Labour

and Cost that keeps you from making a purchase of it? Certainly they

who spare neither Money nor Pains t’obtain a gay outside and make a

splendid appearance, who can get over so many difficulties, rack their

brains, lay out their time and thoughts in contriving, stretch their

Relations Purses in procuring, nay and rob the very Poor, to whom the

Overplus of a full Estate, after the owners Necessaries and decent

Conveniencies according to her Quality are supplied, is certainly due,

they who can surmount so many difficulties, cannot have the face to

pretend any here. Labour is sweet when there’s hope of success, and

the thing labour’d after is Beautiful and Desireable: And if Wisdom

be not so I know not what is; if it is not worth while to procure

such a temper of mind as will make us happy in all Conditions, there’s

nothing worth our Thoughts and Care, ’tis best to fold our hands with

\_Solomon\_’s Sluggard and sleep away the remainder of a useless and

wretched Life.

And that success will not be wanting to our Endeavours if we heartily

use them, was design’d to be evinc’d in the former Essay, and I

hope I have not lost my Point, but that the Theory is sufficiently

establish’d; and were there but a General Attempt, the Practice wou’d

be so visible that I suppose there wou’d remain no more place to

dispute it. But this is your Province Ladies: For tho I desire your

improvement never so passionately, tho I shou’d have prov’d it feasible

with the clearest Demonstration, and most proper for you to set about;

yet if you \_will\_ believe it impossible, and upon that or any other

prejudice forbear t’attempt it, I’me like to go without my Wishes; my

Arguments what ever they may be in themselves, are weak and impertinent

to you, because you make them useless and defeat them of the End they

aim at. But I hope better things of you; I dare say you understand your

own interest too well to neglect it so grosly and have a greater share

of sense, whatever some Men affirm, than to be content to be kept any

longer under their Tyranny in Ignorance and Folly, since it is in your

Power to regain your Freedom, if you please but t’endeavour it. I’me

unwilling to believe there are any among you who are obstinately bent

against what is praise-worthy in themselves, and Envy or Detract from

it in others; who won’t allow any of their Sex a capacity to write

Sense, because they want it, or exert their Spleen where they ought

to shew their Kindness or Generous Emulation; who sicken at their

Neighbours Vertues, or think anothers Praises a lessening of their

Character; or meanly satisfie ill-nature by a dull Malicious Jest at

what deserves to be approv’d and imitated. No Ladies, Your Souls are

certainly of a better Make and Nobler temper, your Industry is never

exerted to pull down others but to rise above them, the only Resentment

that arises at your Neighbours Commendations is a harmless blush for

your own Idleness in letting them so far outstrip you, and a generous

Resolution to repair your former neglects by future diligence; One need

not fear offending you by commending an other Lady in your Presence,

or that it shou’d be thought an affront or defect in good breeding to

give them their lawful Eulogies: You have too just a Sentiment of your

own Merit to envy or detract from others, for no Body’s addicted to

these little Vices but they who are diffident of their own worth; You

know very well ’tis infinitely better to \_be\_ good than to \_seem\_ so,

and that true Vertue has Beauty enough in her self t’attract our hearts

and engage us in her service, tho she were neglected and despis’d

by all the World. ’Tis this therefore you endeavour after, ’tis the

approbation of GOD and your own Consciences you mainly esteem, which

you find most ascertain’d by an humble Charity, and that you never

merit Praise so much, because you never make so great a progress in

what is truly praise-worthy, as when your own defects are often in your

eyes t’excite you to watch against and amend them, and other peoples

Vertues continually represented before you in their brightest lustre,

to the end you may aspire to equal or surpass them.

I suppose then that you’re fill’d with a laudable Ambition to brighten

and enlarge your Souls, that the Beauty of your Bodies is but a

secondary care, your Dress grows unconcerning, and your Glass is

ne’er consulted but in such little intervals of time as hang loose

between those hours that are destin’d to nobler Employments; you now

begin to throw off your old Prejudices and smile on ’em as antiquated

Garbs; false Reasoning won’t down with you, and glittering Non-sense

tho address’d to your selves in the specious appearance of Respect

and Kindness, has lost its \_haut goust\_; Wisdom is thought a better

recommendation than Wit, and Piety than a \_Bon-mien\_; you esteem a

Man only as he is an admirer of Vertue, and not barely for that he

is yours; Books are now become the finest Ornaments of your Closets,

and Contemplation the most agreeable Entertainment of your leisure

hours; your Friendships are not cemented by Intrigues nor spent in

vain Diversions, but in the search of Knowledge, and acquisition of

Vertuous Habits, a mutual Love to which was the Origin of ’em; nor

are any Friends so acceptable as those who tell you faithfully of your

faults and take the properest method to amend ’em. How much better are

you entertain’d now your Conversations are pertinent and ingenious,

and that Wisdom never fails to make one in your Visits? Solitude is

no more insupportable; you’ve conquered that silly dread of being

afraid to be alone, since Innocence is the safest Guard, and no Company

can be so desirable as GOD’s and his holy Angels conversing with an

upright mind; your Devotion is a Rational service, not the repetition

of a Set of good words at a certain season; you read and you delight

in it, because it informs your Judgments, and furnishes Materials for

your thoughts to work on; and you love your Religion and make it your

Choice because you understand it; the only Conquest you now design

and lay out your care to obtain is over Vice and Prophaneness; you

study to engage men in the love of true Piety and Goodness, and no

farther to be Lovers of your selves than as you are the most amiable

and illustrious examples of ’em; you find your Wit has lost nothing

of its salt and agreeableness by being employ’d about its proper

business, the exposing Folly; your Raillery is not a whit less pleasant

for being more Charitable, and you can render Vice as ridiculous as

you please, without exposing those unhappy Persons who’re guilty of

it; your Humour abates not of its innocent gaity now that it is more

upon the Guard, for you know very well that true Joy is a sedate and

solid thing, a tranquility of mind, not a boisterous and empty flash;

Instead of Creditors your doors are fill’d with indigent Petitioners

who don’t so often go without your Bounty as the other us’d to do

without their just demands; nor are you unjust to some under colour

of being Charitable to others, and when you give Liberally, give no

more than what is lawfully your own. You disdain the base ungenerous

Practice of pretending Kindness where you really mean none; and of

making a poor Country Lady less instructed in the formalities of the

Town than your selves, pay sufficiently for your seeming Civility and

kind Entertainment by becoming the Subject of your mirth and diversion

as soon as she is gone; but one may now pretty securely relie on your

Sincerity, for when this lower sort of Treachery is abhorr’d, there

can certainly be no place for that more abominable one of betraying

and seducing unwary Innocence. I do not question Ladies but that this

is the Practice of the greatest number of you, and would be of all

the rest were it not for some little discouragments they meet with,

which really are not so great as their own modesty and diffidence of

themselves represent ’em. They think they’ve been bred up in Idleness

and Impertinence, and study will be irksome to them, who have never

employ’d their mind to any good purpose, and now when they wou’d they

want the method of doing it; they know not how to look into their

Souls, or if they do, they find so many disorders to be rectified, so

many wants to be supplied, that frighted with the difficulty of the

work they lay aside the thoughts of undertaking it. They have been

barbarously us’d, their Education and greatest Concerns neglected,

whilst their imprudent Parents and Guardians were busied in managing

their Fortunes and regulating their Mien; who so their Purse was

full and their outside plausible, matter’d not much the poverty and

narrowness of their minds, have taught them perhaps to repeat their

Catechism and a few good Sentences, to read a Chapter and \_say\_

their Prayers, tho perhaps with as little Understanding as a Parrot,

and fancied that this was Charm enough to secure them against the

temptations of the Present world and to waft them to a better; and

so thro want of use and by misapplying their Thoughts to trifles and

impertinencies, they’ve perhaps almost lost those excellent Capacities

which probably were afforded them by nature for the highest things.

For such as these I’ve a a world of Kindness and Compassion, I regret

their misfortune as much as they can themselves, and suppose they’re

willing to repair it and very desirous to inform themselves were’t not

for the shame of confessing their Ignorance. But let me intreat them

to consider that there’s no Ignorance so shameful, no Folly so absurd

as that which refuses Instruction, be it upon what account it may. All

good Persons will pity not upbraid their former unhappiness, as not

being their own but other Peoples fault; whereas they themselves are

responsible if they continue it, since that’s an Evidence that they

are silly and despicable, not because they \_cou’d\_ not, but because

they \_wou’d\_ not be better Informed. But where is the shame of being

taught? for who is there that does not need it? Alas, Human Knowledge

is at best defective, and always progressive, so that she who knows the

most has only this advantage, that she has made a little more speed

than her Neighbours. And what’s the Natural Inference from hence? Not

to give out, but to double our diligence; perhaps we may out-strip

’em, as the Penitent often does him who needs no Repentance. The worst

that can be is the perishing in a glorious attempt, and tho we shou’d

happen to prove succesless, ’tis yet worth our while to’ve had such a

noble design. But there’s no fear of ill success if we are not wanting

to our selves, an honest and laborious mind may perform all things.

Indeed an affected Ignorance, a humorous delicacy and niceness which

will not speculate a notion for fear of spoiling a look, nor think

a serious thought lest she shou’d damp the gaity of her humour; she

who is so top full of her outward excellencies, so careful that every

look, every motion, every thing about her shou’d appear in Form, as

she employs her Thoughts to a very pitiful use, so is she almost past

hopes of recovery, at least so long as she continues this humour, and

does not grow a little less concern’d for her Body that she may attend

her Mind. Our directions are thrown away upon such a temper, ’tis to no

purpose to harp to an Ass, or to chant forth our Charms in the Ears of

a deaf Adder; but I hope there are none so utterly lost in folly and

impertinence: If there are, we can only afford them our Pity for our

Advice will do no good.

As for those who are desirous to improve and only want to be assisted

and put into the best method of doing it, somewhat was attempted in

order to do them that service in the former Essay, in which they may

please to remember that having remov’d that groundless prejudice

against an ingenious Education of the Women, which is founded upon

supposition of the impossibility or uselessness of it, and having

assign’d the reasons why they are so little improv’d, since they are

so capable of improvement, and since ’tis so necessary that others

as well as themselves shou’d endeavour it; which reasons are chiefly

Ill-nurture, Custom, loss of Time, the want of Retirement, or of

knowing how to use it, so that by the disuse of our Faculties we seem

to have lost them if we ever had any; are sunk into an Animal life

wholly taken up with sensible objects; either have no Ideas of the

most necessary things or very \_false\_ ones; and run into all those

mischiefs which are the natural Consequences of such mismanagement; we

then proceeded to propose a Remedy for these Evils, which we affirm’d

cou’d hardly be rectified but by erecting a Seminary where Ladies

might be duly Educated, and we hope our Proposition was such that all

impartial Readers are convinc’d it wou’d answer the Design, that is,

tend very much to the real advantage and improvement of the Ladies.

In order to which it was in general propos’d to acquaint them with

Judicious Authors, give them opportunity of Retirement and Recollection

and put them in a way of Ingenious Conversation, whereby they might

enlarge their prospect, rectify their false Ideas, form in their Minds

adequate conceptions of the End and Dignity of their Natures, not only

have the Name and common Principles of Religion floating in their Heads

and sometimes running out at their Mouths, but understand the design

and meaning of it, and have a just apprehension, a lively sentiment

of its Beauties and Excellencies; know wherein the Nature of a true

Christian consists; and not only feel Passions, but be able to direct

and regulate their Motions; have a true Notion of the Nothingness of

Material things and of the reality and substantialness of immaterial,

and consequently contemn this present World as it deserves, fixing

all their Hopes upon and exerting all their Endeavours to obtain the

Glories of the next. But because this was only propos’d in general, and

the particular method of effecting it left to the Discretion of those

who shou’d Govern and Manage the Seminary, without which we are still

of Opinion that the Interest of the Ladies can’t be duly serv’d, in the

mean time till that can be erected and that nothing in our power may be

wanting to do them service, we shall attempt to lay down in this second

part some more minute Directions, and such as we hope if attended to

may be of use to them.

THE

Second Part

OF THE

PROPOSAL

TO THE

LADIES.

CHAP. I.

\_Of the Mutual Relation between Ignorance and Vice, and Knowledge

and Purity.\_

[Sidenote: Part I. page 22, \_&c.\_]

What are Ignorance and Vice but Diseases of the Mind contracted in its

two principal Faculties the Understanding and Will? And such too as

like many Bodily distempers do mutually foment each other. Ignorance

disposes to Vice, and Wickedness reciprocally keeps us Ignorant, so

that we cannot be free from the one unless we cure the other; the

former part of this Proposition has been already shewn, and the latter

may easily be made apparent; for as every Plant does Naturally draw

such juices towards it as serve for its Nutrition, as every Creature

has an aptness to take such courses as tend to its preservation; so

Vice that spawn of the Devil, that \_Ignis fatuus\_ which can’t subsist

but in the dark night of Ignorance, casts forth Vapours and Mists to

darken the Soul and eclipse the clear light of Knowledge from her

View. And tho a Wicked Man may pretend to Wit, tho he have never so

much Acumen and Facetiousness of Humour, yet his Impiety proclaims

his Folly; he may have a lively Fancy, an Intriguing Cunning and

Contrivance, and so may an Ape or a Fox, who probably if they had but

Speech, tho destitute of Reason, wou’d outdo him in his own way; but

he wants the Ingenuity of a Man, he’s a Fool to all Rational Intents

and Purposes. She then who desires a clear Head must have a pure Heart;

and she who has the first in any Measure will never allow her self to

be deficient in the other. But you will say what degrees of Purity are

requisite in order to Knowledge, and how much must we Know to the end

we may heartily endeavour to Purify?

Now in Order to satisfie this demand I consider, That there are certain

Notices which we may call the Rudiments of Knowledge, which none who

are Rational are without however they came by them. It may happen

indeed that a habit of Vice or a long disuse has so obscur’d them that

they seem to be extinguish’d, but it does only \_seem\_ so, for were

they really extinguish’d the person wou’d be no longer Rational, and

no better than the Shade and Picture of a Man. Because as Irrational

Creatures act only by the Will of him who made them, and according to

the Power of that Mechanisme by which they are form’d, so every one

who pretends to Reason, who is a Voluntary Agent and therefore Worthy

of Praise or Blame, Reward or Punishment, must \_Chuse\_ his Actions and

determine his Will to that Choice by some Reasonings or Principles

either true or false, and in proportion to his Principles and the

Consequences he deduces from them he is to be accounted, if they are

Right and Conclusive a Wise Man, if Evil, Rash and Injudicious a Fool.

If then it be the property of Rational Creatures, and Essential to

their very Natures to Chuse their Actions, and to determine their

Wills to that Choice by such Principles and Reasonings as their

Understandings are furnish’d with, they who are desirous to be rank’d

in that Order of Beings must conduct their Lives by these Measures,

begin with their Intellectuals, inform themselves what are the plain

and first Principles of Action and Act accordingly.

By which it appears that there are some degrees of Knowledge necessary

before there can be \_any\_ Human Acts, for till we are capable of

Chusing our own Actions and directing them by some Principle, tho we

Move and Speak and do many such like things, we live not the Life of a

Rational Creature but only of an Animal. If it be farther demanded what

these Principles are? Not to dispute the Number of ’em here, no body I

suppose will deny us one, which is, \_That we ought as much as we can

to endeavour the Perfecting of our Beings, and that we be as happy

as possibly we may\_. For this we see is Natural to every Creature of

what sort soever, which endeavours to be in as good Condition as its

Nature and Circumstances will permit. And now we have got a Principle

which one would think were sufficient for the Conduct of our Actions

thro the whole Course of our Lives; and so indeed it were, cou’d we as

easily discern wherein our Happiness consists as ’tis natural to wish

and desire it. But herein lies our great mistake and misfortune, for

altho we all pursue the same end, yet the means we take to obtain it

are Indefinite: There needs no other Proof of this than the looking

abroad into the World, which will convince us of the Truth and raise

our Wonder at the absurdity, that Creatures of the same Make shou’d

take not only so many different, but even contrary Ways to accomplish

the same End! We all agree that its fit to be as Happy as we can, and

we need no Instructor to teach us this Knowlege, ’tis born with us, and

is inseparable from our Being, but we very much need to be Inform’d

what is the true Way to Happiness. When the Will comes to ask the

Understanding this Question, What must I do to fill up my Vacuities, to

accomplish my Nature? Our Reason is at first too weak, and afterwards

too often too much sophisticated to return a proper Answer, tho it

be the most important concern of our Lives, for according as the

Understanding replies to it so is the Moral Conduct of the Will, pure

and right if the first be well Inform’d, irregular and vitious if the

other be weak and deluded. Indeed our power of Willing exerts it self

much sooner than that Rational Faculty which is to Govern it, and

therefore ’twill either be left to its own range, or to the Reason of

another to direct it; whence it comes that we generally take that

Course in our search after Happiness, which Education, Example or

Custom puts us in, and, tho not always, yet most commonly, we tast of

our first seasoning; which shou’d teach us to take all the care we can

that it be Good, and likewise that how Good soever it appear, we be not

too much Wedded to and biass’d by it. Well then, the first light of our

Understanding must be borrow’d, we must take it on trust till we’re

furnish’d with a Stock of our own, which we cannot long be without if

we do but employ what was lent us in the purifying of our Will, for as

this grows more regular the other will enlarge, if it clear up, that

will brighten and shine forth with diffusive Rays.

Indeed if we search to the bottom I believe we shall find, that the

Corruption of the Heart contributes \_more\_ to the Cloudiness of the

Head, than the Clearness of our Light does to the regularity of our

Affections, and ’tis oftner seen that our vitious Inclinations keep

us Ignorant, than that our Knowlege makes us Good, For it must be

confess’d that Purity is not \_always\_ the product of Knowlege; tho

the Understanding be appointed by the Author of Nature to direct and

Govern the Will, yet many times its head-strong and Rebellious Subject

rushes on precipitately, without, its directions. When a Truth comes

thwart our Passions, when it dares contradict our mistaken Pleasures

and supposed Interests, let the Light shine never so clear we shut our

Eyes against it, will not be convinc’d, not because there’s any want

of Evidence, but because we’re \_unwilling\_ to Obey. This is the Rise

of all that Infidelity that appears in the World; it is not the Head

but the Heart that is the Seat of Atheism. No Man without a brow of

Brass, and an Impudence as strong as his Arguments are weak, cou’d

demur to the convincing Proofs of Christianity, had not he contracted

such diseases in his Passions as make him believe ’tis his Interest to

oppose \_those\_ that he may gratify \_these\_. Yet this is no Objection

against what we have been proving, it rather confirms what was said

concerning the mutual Relation between the Understanding and the Will,

and shews how necessary it is to take care of both, if we wou’d improve

and advance either.

\* \* \* \* \*

[Sidenote: \_Where we must begin.\_]

The result of all then, and what gives a satisfactory Answer to the

Question where we must begin is this; that some Clearness of Head,

some lower degrees of Knowledge, so much at least as will put us on

endeavouring after more, is necessary to th’obtaining Purity of Heart,

for tho some Persons whom we vulgarly call Ignorant may be honest

and Vertuous, yet they are not so in these particulars in which they

are Ignorant, but their Integrity in Practising what they know, tho

it be but little, causes us to overlook that wherein they Ignorantly

transgress. But then any eminent degree of Knowlege, especially of

Moral and Divine Knowlege, which is most excellent because most

necessary and useful, can never be obtain’d without considerable

degrees of Purity: And afterwards when we have procur’d a competent

measure of both, they mutually assist each other; the more Pure we are

the clearer will our Knowlege be, and the more we Know the more we

shall Purify. Accordingly therefore we shall first apply our selves

to the Understanding, endeavouring to inform and put it right, and in

the next place address to the Will, when we have touch’d upon a few

Preliminaries, and endeavour’d to remove some Obstructions that are

prejudicial to both.

CHAP. II.

\_Containing some Preliminaries, As\_ I. \_The removing of Sloth

and stupid Indifferency\_. II. \_Prejudices arising.\_ (1.) \_From

Authority, Education and Custom.\_ (2.) \_From Irregular Self-Love,

and Pride. How to cure our Prejudices. Some Remarks upon Change

of Opinions, Novelty and the Authority of the Church.\_ III. \_To

arm our selves with Courage and Patient Perseverance against\_

(1.) \_The Censures of ill People, and\_ (2.) \_our own Indocility\_.

IV. \_To propose a Right End.\_

[Sidenote: §. I.]

The first thing I shall advise against is Sloth, and what may be

joyn’d with it a stupid Indifference to any thing that is excellent;

shall I call it Contentedness with our Condition how low and imperfect

soever it be? I will not abuse the Word so much, ’tis rather an

ungenerous inglorious Laziness, we doze on in a Circle with our

Neighbours, and so we get but Company and Idleness enough, we consider

not for what we were made, and what the Condition of our present State

requires. And we think our selves good humble Creatures for this, who

busy not our Heads with what’s out of our Sphere and was never design’d

for us, but acquiesce honestly and contentedly in such Employments

as the generality of Women have in all Ages been engaged in; for why

shou’d we think so well of our selves as to fancy we can be wiser and

better than those who have gone before? They went to Heav’n no doubt,

and we hope that by treading in their steps we likewise in due time

may come there, And why should we give our selves any farther trouble?

The lowest degree of Bliss in that happy place is more than we deserve,

and truly we have too much Humility and Modesty to be Ambitious of a

higher.

Thus we hide our faults under the borrowed name of Vertue; an old

device taught us by the Enemy of our Souls, and by which he has often

deceiv’d us. But ’tis all mistake and nonsense to hope to get to

Heaven, if we stint our Endeavours and care for no more but just to

get there. For what’s at the bottom of this pretended humble temper?

No real Love to GOD and longing to enjoy him, no appetite for Heaven,

but since we must go thither or to Hell when we quit this dear beloved

World, a taking up with that as the more tolerable place. Had we

indeed any true Idea of the Life to come, did we but fix our Eyes

and Thoughts in the Contemplation of that unconceivable Blessedness,

’twou’d be impossible not to desire it with the warmest vigor, not

to be Ambitious of all we are able to attain. For pray wherein do

the Joys of Heaven consist, but in the Fruition of GOD the Only and

All satisfying Good? and how can we Enjoy Him but by Loving him? And

is it not the property of that Passion to think it can never Enjoy

enough but still to thirst for more? How then can we Love GOD if we

do not Long and Labour for the \_fullest\_ Enjoyment of him? And if we

do not Love Him how are we like to Enjoy Him in \_any\_ the \_least\_

Degree? He needs neither our Services nor our Company, He loses nothing

of His Happiness, tho we will not fit our selves to receive those

Communications of it He is desirous t’impart to us; and therefore we’ve

no reason to think He will force His Bliss upon us, render those

Faculties He has given us needless, and make us Happy how unfit soever

we are for Beatitude. What did we come into the World for? To Eat and

to Drink and to pursue the little Impertinencies of this Life? Surely

no, our Wise Creator has Nobler Ends whatever we have; He lent us

hither to pass our Probation, to Prepare our selves and be Candidates

for Eternal Happiness in a better. And how shall this be done but by

Labour and Industry? A Labour indeed, but such as carries its Reward

with it, besides what it is entituled to hereafter.

The Truth is, that the Condition of our Present State is such, that

we can’t do \_any\_ thing, much less what’s Great and Excellent without

some Pain and Weariness of the Flesh; even our very Pleasures are

accompanied with Pain, nor wou’d they relish without it, this is the

Sauce that recommends them. And why then shall we be averse to the

taking a little Pains in that Case only in which ’twill be worth our

while? A Title, an Estate, or Place, can neither be got nor kept

without some difficulty and trouble; an Amour, nay even a paltry Dress

can’t be manag’d without some Thought and Concern, and are our Minds

the only thing that do not need, or not deserve them? Has our Bountiful

Lord set no limits to our Happiness but the Capacity of our Nature, and

shall we set less, and not strive to extend our Capacities to their

utmost reach? Has the obliging Son of GOD thought · no difficulties too

mighty, no Pain too great to undergo for the Love of us, and shall we

be so disingenuous and ungrateful as to think a few hours Solitude, a

little Meditation and Watchfulness too much to return to his Love? No

certainly, we cannot have such narrow groveling hearts; no we are all

on Fire, and only want to know wherein to employ our Activity, and how

to manage it to the best advantage, which if we wou’d do we must in the

next place.

§. II. Disengage our selves from all our former Prejudices, from our

Opinion of Names, Authorities, Customs and the like, not give credit to

any thing any longer because we have once believ’d it, but because it

carries clear and uncontested Evidence along with it. I shou’d think

there needed no more to persuade us to this, than a consideration of

the mischiefs these Prejudices do us. These are the grand hindrance

in our search after Truth; these dispose us for the reception of

Error, and when we have imbib’d confirm us in it; Contract our Souls

and shorten our views, hinder the free range of our Thoughts and

confine them only to that particular track which these have taken;

and in a word, erect a Tyranny over our free born Souls, whilst they

suffer nothing to pass for True that has not been stampt at their own

Mint. But this is not all their mischief, they are really the root of

Scepticism; for when we have taken up an Opinion on weak Grounds and

stifly adher’d to it, coming afterwards by some chance or other to be

convinc’d of its falseness, the same disposition which induc’d us to

receive the Premises without Reason, now inclines us to draw as false a

Conclusion from them; and because we seem’d once well assur’d of what

now appears to have nothing in’t to make us so, therefore we fancy

there’s nothing certain, that all our Notions are but Probabilities,

which stand or fall according to the Ingenuity of their Managers, and

so from an unreasonable Obstinacy we pass on to as unreasonable a

Levity; so smooth is the transition from believing too easily and too

much, to the belief of just nothing at all.

But pray where’s the force of this Argument, "This is true because

such a Person or such a Number of Men have said it. Or, which commonly

weighs more, because I my self, the dear Idol of my own Heart have

sometimes embrac’d and perhaps very zealously maintain’d it?" Were we

to Poll for Truth, or were our own particular Opinions th’Infallible

Standard of it, there were reason to subscribe to the Sentiments of the

\_Many\_, or to be tenacious of our \_Own\_. But since Truth tho she is

bright and ready to reveal her self to all sincere Inquirers, is not

often found by the generality of those who pretend to seek after her,

Interest, Applause, or some other little sordid Passion, being really

the Mistress they court, whilst she (like Religion in another Case) is

made use of for a Stale to carry on the Design the better; since we’re

commonly too much under the power of Inordinate Affections to have our

Understandings always clear and our Judgments certain, are too rash,

too precipitate not to need the assistance of a calmer thought, a more

serious review; Reason wills that we shou’d think again, and not form

our Conclusions or fix our foot till we can honestly say, that we have

without Prejudice or Prepossession view’d the matter in Debate on all

sides, seen it in every light, have no bias to encline us either way,

but are only determin’d by Truth it self, shining brightly in our eyes,

and not permitting us to resist the force and Evidence it carries.

This I’me sure is what Rational Creatures ought to do, what’s then the

Reason that they do’t not?

Laziness and Idleness in the first place; Thinking is a pain to those

who have disus’d it, they will not be at the trouble of carrying on a

thought, of pursuing a Meditation till it leads them into the confines

of Truth, much less till it puts ’em in possession of her. ’Tis an

easier way to follow on in a beaten road, than to launch out into the

main Ocean, tho it be in order to the making of new Discoveries; they

therefore who would be thought knowing without taking too much pains to

be so, suppose ’tis enough to go on in their Fore-fathers steps, to say

as they say, and hope they shall get as much Reputation by it as those

who have gone before.

Again Self-love, an excellent Principle when true, but the worst and

most mischievous when mistaken, disposes us to be retentive of our

Prejudices and Errors, especially when it is joyn’d as most commonly

it is with Pride and Conceitedness. The Condition of our present State

(as was said before) in which we feel the force of our Passions e’re we

discern the strength of our Reason, necessitates us to take up with

such Principles and Reasonings to direct and determine these Passions

as we happen to meet with, tho probably they are far from being just

ones, and are such as Education or Accident not right Reason disposes

us to; and being inur’d and habituated to these, we at last take them

for our own, for parts of our dear beloved selves, and are as unwilling

to be divorced from them as we wou’d be to part with a Hand or an Eye

or any the most useful Member. Whoever talks contrary to these receiv’d

Notions seems to banter us, to persuade us out of our very Senses, and

does that which our Pride cannot bear, he supposes we’ve been all along

deceiv’d and must begin anew: We therefore instead of depositing our

old Errors, fish about for Arguments to defend ’em, and do not raise

Hypotheses on the Discoveries we have made of Truth, but search for

Probabilities to maintain our Hypotheses. And what’s the result of all

this? Having set out in a wrong way we’re resolv’d to persist in it, we

grope in the dark and quarrel with those who wou’d lead us out of it!

But is there no Remedy for this disorder, since we hope that All are

not irrecoverably lost, tho too many are so invellop’d in Prejudice

that there’s little probability of disengaging them? Why really the

best that I can think of at present is, to Resolve to be Industrious,

and to think no Pains too much to purchase Truth; to consider that our

Fore-fathers were Men of like Passions with us, and are therefore not

to be Credited on the score of Authority but of Reason; to remember

likewise our own Infirmity, the shortness of our Views, and the bias

which our Passions and secular Interests give us; generously to

disengage our selves from the deceptions of sense, from all sinister

and little Designs, and honestly to search after Truth for no other

End but the Glory of GOD, by the accomplishing of our Own and our

Neighbours Minds, and when we have humbly implor’d, as now we may very

well hope for the Divine Assistance, that the Father of Lights will

shine upon us, and that He who is \_the Way, the Truth and the Life\_

will lead us into all Truth; why then we shou’d do well to take notice,

That it is of no great consequence to us what our old Opinions are

any farther than as we persist in ’em; that there’s no necessity that

they shou’d be true, but ’tis highly necessary we shou’d fix on what

is so; therefore these also must be made to pass the Scrutiny, and be

cashier’d if they stand not the Test of a severe Examination and sound

Reason.

’Tis a great mistake to fancy it a reproach to change our Sentiments,

the infamy lies on their side who wilfully and unreasonably adhere to

’em. Not but that it is mean and shameful to be ever on the tip-toe,

and indeed to change in any Case where pure and disinteress’d Reason

does not oblige us to it. To be once willing to alter our sentiments

if there be just occasion for’t, wou’d for ever after secure us from

Changing, to which the Precipitate and Obstinate are most liable;

whereas such as suspend their Judgments till after a sufficient

Examination and Weighing of all things they see cause to fix them,

do seldom Change, because they can hardly meet with any Reason to do

so; and indeed whatever may be the Character of a Wit, Stay’dness and

Deliberation is that of a Wise Person.

But as there is an extream on one hand in being too resolutely bent on

our Old Opinions, so is there on the other in inordinately thirsting

after Novelty. An Opinion is neither better nor worse for being Old

or New, the Truth of it is the only thing considerable; tho properly

speaking all Truth is Antient, as being from Eternity in the Divine

Ideas, ’tis only New in respect of our Discoveries. If we go about

to assign a Reason for this insatiable desire of Novelty, I know not

how to find a better than our Credulity and easy assent to things

inevident. Truth being the proper Object of the Understanding it does

naturally search after it, and tho this search will never wholly cease,

because our Understandings are more capacious than our Discoveries,

and the view of one Truth is but a Preparative to look farther; yet

had we clear and certain Evidence for our Conclusions, tho that wou’d

not end our Inquiries, it wou’d however satisfie us, so far at least

as they had gone. Whereas on the contrary your hunters after Novelty

are commonly never satisfied, they pull down to day what they had built

up yesterday, and Why? But because they concluded too soon? and their

Novel Hypothesis is founded on Fancy or Passion, or any thing rather

than Right Reason.

But when I speak of the little deference that is to be given to Names,

Authorities, and receiv’d Opinions, I extend it no farther than to

matters purely Philosophical to mere Humane Truths, and do not design

any Prejudice to the Authority of the Church which is of different

consideration. For tho it be necessary even in this Case, to deposite

whatever may look like a Prejudice, arising from that particular way

of Worship, whereby that Communion in which we’ve been Educated is

distinguish’d from all other Christians, yet as to the Substantials

of Faith and Practice, tho every one be allow’d to Examine, for they

will bear the Test, yet it is not fit that he shou’d draw Conclusions,

contrary to what has been already determin’d by the Catholick Church,

or even by that particular Church of which he is a Member, unless where

it does plainly and evidently contradict that sense of Holy Scripture

which has been receiv’d by the Church Universal. Nor is this a giving

up our selves to Authority barely as such, ’tis only a modest deference

to Truth. Philosophical Truths are not open to every Inquirer, an

elevated Genius and great application of Mind is requir’d to find them

out, nor are they of that importance but that Men may give Scope to

their Thoughts, and very often think, tho indeed unreasonably, that

they’re oblig’d in point of Honour to defend their own Hypotheses.

But the Articles of our Faith and the great Principles of Christian

Morality are of another Nature, GOD \_wou’d have all Men to be sav’d and

to come to the Knowlege of\_ these \_Truths\_, tho he did not design ’em

all for Philosophers, and therefore they carry a Proof and Evidence

suited to the very Vulgar, which he who runs may read, which every one

ought to acquiesce in, tho according to their leisure and capacity ’tis

fit they inquire why. And being a matter of the highest concern such

as our Eternal Happiness or Misery depends on, it may reasonably be

suppos’d (tho to the shame of our Folly we sometimes find the contrary)

that Men won’t play fast and loose in a Business of so vast importance,

but that all Christians have as they are oblig’d seriously and fully

consider’d it, and especially those who are more peculiarly set apart

by the Divine Appointment for the study of Sacred Truths. So that to

acquiesce in the Authority of the Church, so far as it is here pleaded

for is no more than this, The calling in to our assistance the Judgment

and Advice of those whom GOD hath set over us, and consequently whom he

assists in a more especial manner, to discharge that Function to which

he has call’d them; and, in such disputable points as we’re not able

to determine for our selves, a quiet submission to the Voice of our

Guides, whom Modesty will incline us to think have greater Abilities

and Assistances, as well as more Time and Opportunity to find out the

Truth than we.

As Prejudice fetters the Understanding so does Custom manacle the Will,

which scarce knows how to divert from a Track which the generality

around it take, and to which it has it self been habituated. It wou’d

be too large a digression, to examin throughly a Subject so fit to be

consider’d, being it is the root of very much Evil, the last refuge of

Vice where it fortifies it self when driven from all other retreats.

We shall therefore forbear to enquire from what mistakes it draws its

force, what Considerations are proper to disarm it of its power, and

what else might be of use to deliver us from its Slavery, and only

remark; That tho great deference is to be paid to the Ways and Usages

of the Wise and Good, yet considering that these are the least number

of Mankind, ’tis the Croud who will make the Mode, and consequently

it will be as absurd as they are: Therefore Custom cannot Authorise a

Practice if Reason Condemns it, the following a Multitude is no excuse

for the doing of Evil. None but the Weak and Inconsiderable swim down

with the Torrent, brave Spirits delight to stem the Tide, they know

no Conquest so Glorious, because none so difficult, as that which is

obtain’d over foolish and ill-grounded Maxims and sinful Customs; What

wou’d they not do to restore Mankind to their Lawful Liberty, and to

pull down this worst of Tyrannies, because it enslaves the very Souls

of Men?

§ III. But a Generous Resolution and Courageous Industry are not only

necessary to enable us to throw off Sloth and to Conquer the Prejudices

of Education, Authority and Custom, the same Resolution and Courage

which help’d us to this Victory, must secure and continue to us the

Fruits of it. We shall have need of Patience and constant Perseverance

thro the whole course of our Lives if we mean to prosecute the noble

Design we have begun; we must not think the Business is over when we

have smooth’d the entrance; there will still be Difficulties, tho no

insuperable ones, but such as will wear off by degrees, the greatest

uneasiness being in the first effort. And tho our Progress shou’d

not happen to be answerable to our Desires, there’s no reason to be

discourag’d, we shou’d rather be animated by such noble Desires to

greater Industry. Where’s the Glory of an easy Victory? ’Tis Labour

and Cost that inhanses the value of every thing. And to the end we

may not be discourag’d, ’tis fit that we arm our selves against all

Accidents by considering them before hand. We have the Malice and

Industry of many Cunning and Powerful Adversaries, as well as our

own indocility to contend with. The grand Enemy of Mankind is very

unwilling that they shou’d arrive at that State of Innocence and

Perfection from which he fell, and of all the Artifices he makes use of

to hinder it, scarce any’s more effectual than the mischief he excites

us to do one another. What are they employ’d in but his Service who

will neither do any thing that’s excellent themselves, nor if they

could hinder, suffer it to be done by others? Who employ all their

little Wit and Pains in Scoffing at such who they say in derision

wou’d be wiser then their Neighbours? We must be content to suffer

a scornful fleer, a parcel of hard Names and a little ridiculing,

if we’re Resolv’d to do such things as do not deserve ’em. Dogs will

bark at the Moon, and perhaps for no other reason but because she is

out of their reach, elevated above them. But the Author of our Nature

to whom all the Inconveniencies we are liable to in this Earthly

Pilgrimage are fully known, has endow’d us with Principles sufficient

to carry us safely thro them all, if we will but observe and make use

of ’em. One of these is \_Generosity\_, which (so long as we keep it

from degenerating into Pride) is of admirable advantage to us in this

matter. It was not fit that Creatures capable of and made for Society,

shou’d be wholly Independent, or Indifferent to each others Esteem

and Commendation; nor was it convenient considering how seldom these

are justly distributed, that they shou’d too much regard and depend

on them. It was requisite therefore that a desire of our Neighbours

Good Opinion shou’d be implanted in our Natures to the end we might be

excited to do such things as deserve it, and yet withall a Generous

neglect of it, if they unjustly withheld it where it was due. There’s

so little reason that we shou’d be discourag’d from what is truly

excellent and becoming on account of being Scoft and Laugh’d at for

it, that on the contrary this is a new accession to our Glory, we

never shine so Illustriously as when we break thro these little Clouds

and Oppositions which impotently attempted to obscure our Rays. To be

Reproach’d for Weldoing is a higher Encomium, than the loftiest Praises

when we do not deserve them: So that let the World think as it list,

whilst we are in the pursuit of true Wisdom, our Reputation is secur’d,

our Crown is furbishing and tho it do not shine out in this Envious and

Ill-natur’d World, it will however, which is infinitely more desirable

appear in all its Lustre and Splendor in a better.

And as we disregard the Censures of ill People, so are we patiently to

bear with our own backwardness and indocility. There goes a good deal

of Time and Pains, of Thought and Watchfulness to the rooting out of

Ill-habits, to the fortifying our Minds against foolish Customs, and

to the making that easie and pleasant which us’d to be irksom to us.

But we ought not to be disheartn’d, since ’tis necessary to be done,

and we cannot reasonably say ’tis Impossible, till we’ve attempted and

fail’d in’t. But then let’s attempt it in the most prudent Method, use

the properest Means, allow sufficient Time for their Operation and to

make the essay: Let’s not set about it by fits, or in one or two good

Moods, nor expect it will be done on a sudden, but by degrees and in a

proper season, making it our main Design and Business, and then I dare

confidently affirm the success will answer the Pains we have spent

about it.

§. IV. But one thing more, and then I shall go on as well as I can,

to lay down what seems to me the best Method for Improvement. Whoever

wou’d Act to purpose must propose some End to themselves, and keep it

still in their Eye thro’out their whole progress. Life without this

is a disproportionate unseemly thing, a confused huddle of broken,

contradictory Actions, such as afford us nothing but the being asham’d

of ’em. But do we need to be taught our End? One wou’d rather think

there were no occasion to mention it, did not Experience daily convince

us how many there are who neglect it. What End can Creatures have but

their Creators Glory? And did they truly understand their own Happiness

’tis certain they wou’d have no other, since this is the only way of

procuring their own Felicity. But it is not enough to have barely an

implicit and languid desire of it, ’twere much better to hold it ever

in view, and that all our Actions had in their proportion a warm and

immediate tendency thither. This wou’d stamp the impression of Holiness

upon the most indifferent Action, and without this what is Materially

and to all outward appearance very good, is really and truly no better

than a specious folly. We are not made for our selves, nor was it

ever design’d we shou’d be ador’d and idoliz’d by one another. Our

Faculties were given us for Use not Ostentation, not to make a noise in

the World, but to be serviceable in it, to declare the Wisdom, Power

and Goodness, of that All-Perfect Being from whom we derive \_All\_ our

Excellencies, and in whose Service they ought \_Wholly\_ to be employ’d.

Did our Knowlege serve no other purpose than the exalting us in our

own Opinion, or in that of our Fellow Creatures, the furnishing us with

Materials for a quaint Discourse, an agreeable Conversation, ’twere

scarce worth while to be at the trouble of attaining it. But when

it enlarges the Capacity of our Minds, gives us nobler Ideas of the

Majesty, the Grandeur and Glorious Attributes of our adorable Creator,

Regulates our Wills and makes us more capable of Imitating and Enjoying

him, ’tis then a truly sublime thing, a worthy Object of our Industry:

And she who does not make this the End of her Study, spends her Time

and Pains to no purpose or to an ill one.

We have no better way of finding out the true End of any thing, than by

observing to what Use it is most adapted. Now the Art of \_Well-Living\_,

the Study of the Divine Will and Law, that so we may be Conformable to

it in all things, is what we’re peculiarly fitted for and destin’d

to, what ever has not such a Tendency, either Directly or at least

Remotely, is besides the purpose. Rational Studies therefore next to

GOD’s Word bid fairest for our Choice, because they best answer the

Design above mention’d. Truths merely Speculative and which have no

influence upon Practice, which neither contribute to the good of Soul

or Body, are but idle Amusements, an impertinent and criminal wast

of Time. To be able to speak many Languages, to give an Historical

Account of all Ages Opinions and Authors, to make a florid Harangue, or

defend right or wrong the Argument I’ve undertaken, may give me higher

thoughts of my Self but not of GOD, this is the \_Knowlege that pufeth

up\_, in the Words of the Apostle, and seldom leads us to that \_Charity

which Edifieth\_.

And as the Understanding so the Will must be duly directed to its End

and Object. Morality is so consonant to the Nature of Man, so adapted

to his Happiness, that had not his Understanding been darkn’d by the

Fall, and his whole Frame disorder’d and weakened, he wou’d Naturally

have practis’d it. And according as he recovers himself, and casts

off those Clouds which Eclipse his Reason, so proportionably are his

Actions more agreeable to Moral Precepts, and tho we suppose him

ignorant of any higher end, he will however do such things as they

enjoyn him, to th’intent he may be easy, obtain a good Reputation, and

enjoy himself and this World the better. Now were we sure that Reason

wou’d always maintain its ground against Passion and Appetite, such an

one might be allow’d to be a good Neighbour, a Just Ruler, a plausible

Friend or the like, and wou’d well enough discharge the Relative Duties

of Society, and do nothing misbecoming the dignity of Human Nature.

But considering how weak our Reason is, how unable to maintain its

Authority and oppose the incursions of sense, without the assistance

of an inward and Spiritual Sensation to strengthen it, ’tis highly

necessary that we use due endeavours to procure a lively relish of our

true Good, a Sentiment that will not only Ballance, but if attended to

and improv’d, very much out-weigh the Pleasures of our Animal Nature.

Now this is no otherwise to be obtain’d than by directing the Will in

an elicit Act to GOD as its only Good, so that the sole End of all its

movements, may be to draw near, to acquiesce in and be united to him.

For as all Natural Motions are easie and pleasant, so this being the

only Natural Motion of the Will must needs be unspeakably delightful

to it. Besides that peculiar delectation, which this Fountain of Joy

bestows as a Donative, on all who thus sincerly address themselves to

him. So that it is not enough to be Morally Good because ’tis most

Reputable and Easie, and most for our Pleasure and Interest in the

present World, as this will never secure our Duty, so is it too low an

End for a Creature Capable of Immortality to propose, nothing less than

an intire devoting of our selves to the End for which we were made, the

Service and Enjoyment of the most amiable and only Good, can keep us

Constantly and Uniformly in our Duty, or is a Design that’s worthy of

us.

CHAP. III.

\_Concerning the Improvement of the Understanding.\_ I. \_Of the

Capacity of the Humane Mind in General.\_ II. \_Of Particular

Capacities.\_ III. \_The most common Infirmities incident to

the Understanding and their Cure.\_ IV. \_A Natural Logic, And\_

V. \_Rhetoric propos’d.\_ VI. \_The Application and Use of our

Knowlege.\_

The perfection of the Understanding consisting in the Clearness and

Largness of its view, it improves proportionably as its Ideas become

Clearer and more Extensive. But this is not so to be understood as if

all sorts of Notices contributed to our Improvement, there are some

things which make us no wiser when we know ’em, others which ’tis

best to be ignorant of. But that Understanding seems to me the most

exalted, which has the Clearest and most Extensive view of such Truths

as are suitable to its Capacity, and Necessary or Convenient to be

Known in this Present State. For being that we are but Creatures, our

Understanding in its greatest Perfection has only a limited excellency.

It has indeed a vast extent, and it were not amiss if we tarried a

little in the Contemplation of its Powers and Capacities, provided

that the Prospect did not make us giddy, that we remember from whom

we have receiv’d them, and ballance those lofty Thoughts which a view

of our Intellectuals may occasion, with the depressing ones which the

irregularity of our Morals will suggest, and that we learn from this

inspection, how indecorous it is to busy this bright side of us in mean

things, seeing it is capable of such noble ones.

Human Nature is indeed a wonderful Composure admirable in its outward

structure, but much more excellent in the Beauties of its Inward, and

she who considers in whose Image her Soul was Created, and whose Blood

was shed to Redeem it, cannot prize it too much, nor forget to pay

it her utmost regard. There’s nothing in this Material World to be

compar’d to’t, all the gay things we dote on, and for which we many

times expose our Souls to ruin, are of no consideration in respect of

it. They are not the good of the Soul, its happiness depends not on

’em, but they often deceive and withdraw it from its true Good. It was

made for the Contemplation and Enjoyment of its GOD, and all Souls are

capable of this tho in a different degree and by measures somewhat

different, as we hope will appear from that which follows.

§. I. Truth in general is the Object of the Understanding, but all

Truths are not equally Evident, because of the Limitation of the Humane

Mind, which tho’ it can gradually take in many Truths, yet cannot

any more than our sight attend to many things at once: And likewise,

because GOD has not thought fit to communicate such Ideas to us, as are

necessary to the disquisition of some particular Truths. For knowing

nothing without us but by the Idea we have of it, and Judging only

according to the Relation we find between two or more Ideas, when we

cannot discover the Truth we search after by Intuition or the immediate

companion of two Ideas, ’tis necessary that we shou’d have a third by

which to compare them. But if this middle Idea be wanting, though we

have sufficient Evidence of those two which we wou’d compare, because

we have a Clear and Distinct Conception of them, yet we are Ignorant

of those Truths which wou’d arise from their Comparison, because we

want a third by which to compare them.

To give an instance of this in a point of great consequence, and of

late very much controverted tho to little purpose, because we take

a wrong method, and wou’d make that the Object of Science which is

properly the Object of Faith, the Doctrin of the Trinity. Revelation

which is but an exaltation and improvement of Reason has told us, That

the Father is GOD, the Son is GOD, and the Holy Ghost is GOD, and our

Idea of the Godhead of any one of these Persons, is as clear as our

Idea of any of the other. Both Reason and Revelation assure us that

GOD is One Simple Essence, Undivided, and Infinite in all Perfection,

this is the Natural Idea which we have of GOD. How then can the Father

be GOD, the Son GOD, and the Holy Ghost GOD, when yet there is but

One GOD? That these two Propositions are true we are certain, both

because GOD who cannot lie has Reveal’d ’em, and because we have as

clear an Idea of ’em as it is possible a Finite Mind shou’d have of

an Infinite Nature. But we cannot find out how this should be, by the

bare Comparison of these two Ideas without the help of a third by which

to compare them. This GOD has not thought fit to impart to us, the

Prospect it wou’d have given us wou’d have been too dazling, too bright

for Mortality to bear, and we ought to acquiesce in the Divine Will. So

then, we are well assur’d that these two Propositions are true, \_There

is but one GOD\_; And, \_There are three Persons in the Godhead\_: but we

know not the \_Manner\_ how these things are. Nor can our acquiescence be

thought Unreasonable, nor the Doctrin we subscribe to be run down as

absurd and contradictory by every little warm Disputer and Pretender

to Reason, whose Life is perhaps a continual contradiction to it, and

he knows little of it besides the Name. For we ought not to think it

strange that GOD has folded up his own Nature, not in Darkness, but

in an adorable and inaccessible Light, since his Wisdom sees it fit

to keep us ignorant of our own. We know and feel the Union between

our Soul and Body, but who amongst us sees so clearly, as to find out

with Certitude and Exactness, the secret ties which unite two such

different Substances, or how they are able to act upon each other? We

are conscious of our own Liberty, who ever denies it denies that he

is capable of Rewards and Punishments, degrades his Nature and makes

himself but a more curious piece of Mechanism; and none but Atheists

will call in question the Providence of GOD, or deny that he Governs

\_All\_, even the most Free of all his Creatures. But who can reconcile

me these? Or adjust the limits between GOD’s Prescience and Mans

Free-will? Our Understandings are sufficiently illuminated to lead us

to the Fountain of Life and Light, we do or may know enough to fill

our Souls with the noblest Conceptions, the humblest Adoration, and

the intirest Love of the Author of our Being, and what can we desire

farther? If we make so ill a Use of that Knowledge which we have, as

to be so far puffed up with it, as to turn it against him who gave it,

how dangerous would it be for us to have more Knowledge, in a State

in which we have so little Humility! But if vain Man will pretend to

Wisdom, let him first learn to know the length of his own line.

Tho the Human Intellect has a large extent, yet being limited as we

have already said, this Limitation is the Cause of those different

Modes of Thinking, which for distinction sake we call Faith, Science

and Opinion. For in this present and imperfect State in which we know

not any thing by Intuition, or immediate except a few first Principles

which we call Self-evident, the most of our Knowlege is acquir’d by

Reasoning and Deduction: And these three Modes of Understanding,

Faith, Science and Opinion are no otherwise distinguish’d, than by the

different degrees of Clearness and Evidence in the Premises from whence

the Conclusion is drawn.

Knowlege in a proper and restricted Sense and as appropriated to

Science, signifies that clear Perception which is follow’d by a firm

assent to Conclusions rightly drawn from Premises of which we have

clear and distinct Ideas. Which Premises or Principles must be so clear

and Evident, that supposing us reasonable Creatures, and free from

Prejudices and Passions, (which for the time they predominate as good

as deprive us of our Reason) we cannot withhold our assent from them

without manifest violence to our Reason.

But if the Nature of the thing be such as that it admits of no

undoubted Premises to argue from, or at least we don’t at present

know of any, or that the Conclusion does not so necessarily follow as

to give a perfect satisfaction to the Mind and to free it from all

hesitation, that which we think of it is then call’d Opinion.

Again, If the Medium we make use of to prove the Proposition be

Authority, the Conclusion which we draw from it is said to be Believ’d;

This is what we call Faith, and when the Authority is GOD’s a Divine

Faith.

Moral Certainty is a Species of Knowlege whose Proofs are of a

compounded Nature, in part resembling those which belong to Science,

and partly those of Faith. We do not make the whole Process our

selves, but depend on another for the \_immediate\_ Proof, but we our

selves deduce the \_Mediate\_ from Circumstances and Principles as

Certain and almost as Evident as those of Science, and which lead us

to the immediate Proofs and make it unreasonable to doubt of ’em.

Indeed we not seldom deceive our selves in this matter, by inclining

alternately to both extremes. Sometimes we reject Truths which are

Morally Certain as Conjectural and Probable only, because they have

not a Physical and Mathematical Certainty, which they are incapable

of. At another time we embrace the slightest Conjectures and any thing

that looks with Probability, as moral Certainties and real Verities,

if Fancy, Passion or Interest recommend them; so ready are we to be

determin’d by these rather than by solid Reason.

In this enumeration of the several ways of Knowing. I have not

reckon’d the Senses, in regard that we’re more properly said to be

\_Conscious\_ of than to \_Know\_ such things as we perceive by Sensation.

And also because that Light which we suppose to be let into our Ideas

by our Senses is indeed very dim and fallacious, and not to be relied

on till it has past the Test of Reason; neither do I think there’s any

Mode of Knowlege which mayn’t be reduc’d to those already mentioned.

Now tho there’s a great difference between Opinion and Science, true

Science being immutable but Opinion variable and uncertain, yet there

is not such a difference between Faith and Science as is usually

suppos’d. The difference consists not in the Certainty but in the

way of Proof; the Objects of Faith are as Rationally and as Firmly

Prov’d as the Objects of Science, tho by another way. As Science

Demonstrates things that are \_Seen\_, so Faith is the Evidence of such

as are \_Not Seen\_. And he who rejects the Evidence of Faith in such

things as belong to its Cognizance, is as unreasonable as he who denies

Propositions in Geometry that are prov’d with Mathematical exactness.

There’s nothing true which is not in it self demonstrable, or which

we should not pronounce to be true had we a Clear and Intuitive View

of it. But as was said above we see very few things by Intuition,

neither are we furnish’d with Mediums to make the Process our selves

in Demonstrating all Truths, and therefore there are some Truths which

we must either be totally ignorant of, or else receive them on the

Testimony of another Person, to whose Understanding they are clear and

manifest tho not to ours. And if this Person be one who can neither be

Deceiv’d nor Deceive, we’re as certain of those Conclusions which we

prove by his Authority, as we’re of those we demonstrate by our own

Reason; nay more Certain, by how much his Reason is more Comprehensive

and Infallible than our own.

Science is the following the Process our Selves upon Clear and Evident

Principles; Faith is a Dependance on the Credit of another, in such

matters as are out of our View. And when we have very good Reason to

submit to the Testimony of the Person we Believe, Faith is as Firm, and

those Truths it discovers to us as truly Intelligible, and as strongly

Prov’d in their kind as Science.

In a word, as every Sense so every Capacity of the Understanding has

its proper Object. The Objects of Science are things within our View,

of which we may have Clear and Distinct Ideas, and nothing shou’d be

determin’d here without Clearness and Evidence. To be able to repeat

any Persons \_Dogma\_ without forming a Distinct Idea of it our selves,

is not to Know but to Remember; and to have a Confuse Indeterminate

Idea is to Conjecture not to Understand.

The Objects of Faith are as Certain and as truly Intelligible in

themselves as those of Science, as has been said already, only we

become persuaded of the Truth of them by another Method, we do not

\_See\_ them so clearly and distinctly as to be unable to disbelieve

them. Faith has a mixture of the Will that it may be rewardable, for

who will thank us for giving our Assent where it was impossible to

withhold it? Faith then may be said to be a sort of Knowlege capable of

Reward, and Men are Infidels not for want of Conviction, but thro an

\_Unwillingness\_ to Believe.

But as it is a fault to Believe in matters of Science, where we

may expect Demonstration and Evidence, so it is a reproach to our

Understanding and a proof of our Disingenuity, to require that sort

of Process peculiar to Science, for the Confirmation of such Truths

as are not the proper Objects of it. It is as ridiculous as to reject

Musick, because we cannot Tast or Smell it, or to deny there is such a

thing as Beauty because we do not hear it. He who wou’d See with his

Ears and Hear with his Eyes may indeed set up in \_Bedlam\_ for a Man of

an extraordinary reach, a Sagacious Person who won’t be impos’d on, one

who must have more Authentick proofs than his dull Fore-fathers were

content with. But Men of dry Reason and a moderate Genius, I suppose

will think Nature has done very well in allotting to each Sense its

proper employment, and such as these will as readily acknowlege that

it is as Honourable for the Soul to Believe what is truly the Object

of Faith, as it is for her to Know what is really the Object of her

Knowlege. And were we not strangely perverse we shou’d not scruple

Divine Authority when we daily submit to Human. Whoever has not seen

\_Paris\_ has nothing but Human Authority to assure him there is such a

place, and yet he wou’d be laugh’d at as ridiculous who shou’d call it

in question, tho he may as well in this as in another Case pretend that

his Informers have designs to serve, intend to impose on him and mock

his Credulity. Nay how many of us daily make that a matter of Faith

which indeed belongs to Science, by adhering blindly to the Dictates of

some famous Philosopher in Physical Truths, the Principles of which we

have as much right to examine, and to make deductions from ’em as he

had?

To sum up all: We may know enough for all the purposes of Life, enough

to busie this active Faculty of Thinking, to employ and entertain the

spare Intervals of Time and to keep us from Rust and Idleness, but we

must not pretend to fathom all Depths with our short Line, we shou’d

be Wise unto Sobriety, and reckon that we know very little if we go

about to make our \_Own\_ Reason the Standard of all Truth. It is very

certain that nothing is True but what is conformable to Reason, that

is to the Divine Reason of which ours is but a short faint Ray, and

it is as certain that there are many Truths which Human Reason cannot

Comprehend. Therefore to be throughly sensible of the Capacity of the

Mind, to discern precisely its Bounds and Limits and to direct our

Studies and Inquiries accordingly, to Know what is to be Known, and

to Believe what is to be Believ’d is the property of a Wise Person.

To be content with too little Knowlege, or to aspire to over-much is

equally a fault, to make that use of our Understandings which GOD has

Fitted and Design’d them for is the Medium which we ought to take. For

the difference between a Plow-man and a Doctor does not seem to me

to consist in this, That the Business of the one is to search after

Knowlege, and that the other has nothing to do with it. No, whoever has

a Rational Soul ought surely to employ it about some Truth or other,

to procure for it right Ideas, that its Judgments may be true tho

its Knowlege be not very extensive. But herein lies the difference,

that tho Truth is the Object of every Individual Understanding, yet

all are not equally enlarg’d nor able to comprehend so much; and they

whose Capacities and Circumstances of Living do not fit ’em for it,

lie not under that obligation of extending their view which Persons of

a larger reach and greater leisure do. There is indeed often times a

mistake in this matter, People who are not fit will be puzling their

heads to little purpose, and those who are prove Slothful and decline

the trouble; and thus it will be if we do not throughly understand our

selves, but suffer Pride or Ease to make the estimate.

§. II. It is therefore very fit that after we have consider’d the

Capacity of the Understanding in general, we shou’d descend to the view

of our own particular, observing the bent and turn of our own Minds,

which way our Genius lies and to what it is most inclin’d. I see no

reason why there may not be as great a variety in Minds as there is

in Faces, that the Soul as well as the Body may not have something in

it to distinguish it, not only from all other Intelligent Natures but

even from those of its own kind. There are different proportions in

Faces which recommend them to some Eyes sooner than to others, and tho

\_All\_ Truth is amiable to a Reasonable Mind, and proper to employ it,

yet why may there not be some particular Truths, more agreeable to each

individual Understanding than others are? Variety gives Beauty to the

Material World and why not to the Intellectual? We can discern the

different Abilities which the Wise Author of all things has endow’d

us with, the different Circumstances in which he has plac’d us in

reference to this World and the Concerns of an Animal Life, that so

we may be mutually useful, and that since each single Person is too

limited and confin’d to attend to many, much less to all things, we

may receive from each other a reciprocal advantage, and why may we not

think he has done the like in respect of Truth? that since it is too

much for one, our united Strength shou’d be employ’d in the search of

her. Especially since the Divine Being who contains in himself all

Reality and Truth is Infinite in Perfection, and therefore shou’d be

Infinitely Ador’d and Lov’d; and If Creatures are by their being so

uncapable of rendering to their Incomprehensible Creator an Adoration

and Love that’s worthy of him, it is but decorous that they shou’d

however do as much as they can. All that variety of sublime Truths of

Beautiful and Wondrous Objects which surround us, are nothing else but

a various display of his unbounded Excellencies, and why shou’d any of

’em pass unobserv’d? Why shou’d not every individual Understanding be

in a more especial manner fitted for and employ’d in the disquisition

of some particular Truth and Beauty? ’Tis true after all our researches

we can no more sufficiently Know GOD than we can worthily Love him,

and are as much unable to find out all his Works as we are his Nature,

yet this shou’d only prompt us to exert \_All\_ our Powers and to do our

best, since even \_that\_ were too little cou’d we possibly do more. We

can never offer to him so much Praise as he deserves, and therefore it

is but fit that he shou’d have \_All\_ that Mankind can possibly render

him. He is indeed immutable in his own Nature, but those discoveries

we daily make of his Operations will always afford us somewhat New and

Surprizing, for this All-glorious Sun the Author of Life and Light is

as inexhaustible a Source of Truth as he is of Joy and Happiness.

If then we are convinc’d that there’s some peculiar Task allotted

us, our next business will be to enquire what it is. To know our own

Strength and neither to over not underrate our selves is one of the

most material points of Wisdom, and which indeed we are most commonly

ignorant of, else we shou’d not reach at all, how unable soever we are

to attain it, nor make so many successless attempts and be forc’d to

come off with that pitiful Apology, \_I was mistaken, I did not think

it\_. But we can scarce duly estimate our Understandings till we have

regulated our Wills, reform’d Self-love and a train of immortified

Passions, which it is not our Business to speak of here, we shall have

occasion to do’t hereafter. Let it suffice that we remark a frequent

Error which these engage us in, that is, an aptness to lessen the Human

Mind, to detract from its Grandeur and abridge its Powers when we

consider it in General, and as great a forwardness when we look on our

selves to extend our Abilities beyond their bounds. Are we conscious

of a Defect? the shallowness of Human Reason at large must bear the

blame, we Harangue very excellently on the Ignorance and Vanity of

Mankind, and it were well if we rested there, and wou’d forbear to

murmur even at our Creator himself for allowing us so scanty a Portion.

But if Reason has shone out, dispelling those Clouds which Eclips’d the

bright face of Truth, we arrogate all to our selves. \_My\_ Discovery,

\_My\_ Hypothesis, the Strength and Clearness of \_My\_ Reasonings, rather

than the Truth are what we wou’d expose to view; ’tis that we Idolize

our selves and wou’d have every one Admire and Celebrate. And yet all

this is no more perhaps than another has done before us, or at least

might have done with our Opportunities and Advantages. The reverse of

this procedure wou’d become us better, and it were more Glorious as

well as more Just to ascribe the Excellencies of the Mind to Human

Nature in the Lump and to take the Weaknesses to our selves. By this

we shou’d both avoid Sloth, (the best use we can make of our Ignorance

and Infirmity being first to be humbled for, and then sedulously to

endeavour their Amendment) and likewise secure our Industry from the

Mixtures of Pride and Envy. By looking on our own Acquisitions as a

general Treasure, in which the Whole have a Right, we shou’d pretend

to no more than a share; and considering our selves as Parts of the

same Whole, we should expect to find our own account in th’ Improvement

of every part of it, which wou’d restrain us from being puft up with

the Contemplation of our Own, and from repining at our Neighbours

Excellencies. For let Reason shine forth where it may, as we can’t

engross, so neither can we be excluded from sharing in the Benefit,

unless we wilfully exclude our selves; every one being the better for

True Worth and Good Sense, except the little Soul’d Enviers of ’em.

To help us to the Knowledge of our own Capacities the Informations

of our Friends, nay even of our Enemies may be useful. The former if

Wise and True will direct us to the same Course to which our Genius

Points, and the latter will industriously endeavour to divert us from

it, and we can’t be too careful that these don’t disguise themselves

under the specious appearance of the former, to do us an ill-turn the

more effectually. For it is not seldom seen that such as pretend great

Concern for us, will press us on to such Studies or Ways of Living as

inwardly they know we are unfit for, thereby to gratify their Secret

Envy, by diverting us from that to which our Genius disposes, and in

which therefore they have reason to suppose we wou’d be Excellent. But

tho we may make use of the Opinions of both, yet if we will be Sincere

and Ingenuous we cannot have a more faithful Director than our own

heart. He who gave us these Dispositions will excite us to the Use and

Improvement of ’em; and unless we drive him from us by our Impurity,

or thro negligence and want of Attention let slip his secret Whispers,

this Master within us will lay most in our view such Lessons as he

wou’d have us take. Our care then must be to open our Eyes to that Beam

of Light which does in a more especial manner break in upon us, to fix

them steadily, and to examine accurately those notices which are most

vividly represented to us, and to lay out our Thoughts and Time in the

Cultivation of ’em. It may be our Humor won’t be gratified, nor our

Interest serv’d by such a Method. Other Business or Amusements put on

a finer Garb, and come attended with more Charms and Grandeur, these

recommend us to the World make us Belov’d and Illustrious in it: Whilst

the followers of Truth are despis’d and look’d askew on, as fantastick

Speculatists, unsociable Thinkers, who pretend to see farther than

their Neighbours, to rectifie what Custom has establish’d, and are so

Unmannerly as to Think and Talk out of the Common way. He who speaks

Truth makes a Satyr on the greatest part of Mankind, and they are not

over apt to forgive him, he contradicts the vogue of the Times, is so

hardy as to lay open Mens darling Errors, to draw a lively Picture of

their most secret Corruptions, a Representation which they cannot bear.

Their Gall is touch’d proportionably as their Wounds are more deeply

search’d into, altho it be only in order to a Cure. They therefore who

Love Truth shall be Hated by the Most, who tho they openly pretend to

Honour, yet secretly Malign her, because she reproaches them. And as

a plausible Life is not often a very Religious one, which made the

best Judge pronounce a Wo on those whom all Men shall speak well of,

so neither is the most Just and Illuminated Understanding the most

admir’d and trusted to, but a plausible Speaker, as well as a plausible

Liver, commonly bears away the Bell. If then we consult our Passions

and Vanity we shall go near to determine amiss, and make that use of

our Intellectuals which Fancy or Interest pushes us on to, not which

Nature has fitted us for. Hence it is that those who might have done

very well in some Studies and Employments, make but bungling work when

they apply themselves to others. We go on apace when the Wind and Tide

are on our side, but it costs us much Labour, and we make little speed,

when we Row against both.

And as a due Consideration of our Particular Capacity wou’d put us

right in our own Studies, so wou’d it keep us from clashing with our

Neighbours, whom we many times Contend with not so much out of a Love

to Truth, as thro a humor of Contradiction, or because we think this

the best way to shew our Parts, and by this tryal of Skill to exalt

our selves above them. But is there no better way to discover our

Penetration, and to try our Strength, than by a Malicious and Litigious

Opposition? The field of Truth is large, and after all the Discoveries

that have been made by those who have gone before, there will still

be untroden Paths, which they who have the Courage and Skill may beat

out and beautify. If then instead of Jostling and Disputing with our

Fellow Travellers, of bending all the force of our Wit to Contradict

and Oppose those advances which they make, we wou’d well understand,

duly Employ and kindly Communicate our Peculiar Talent, how much more

Service might we do our Lord, how much more useful might we be to one

another? What vast Discoveries wou’d be made in the wide Ocean of

Truth? How many Moral Irregularities wou’d be observ’d and rectify’d?

We shou’d be restrain’d from aspiring to things above our reach, move

regularly in our own Sphere, not abuse those good Parts which were

given us for Common Benefit, to the Destruction of our selves and

others, be in a fair way to discern the Defects of our Mind and to

proceed to the Cure of ’em.

§. III. We have already exprest our thoughts concerning the Capacity

and Perfection of the Understanding, and what has been said if duly

consider’d, is sufficient to bring every particular Person acquainted

with their own defects. But because they who need Amendment most, are

commonly least dispos’d to make such reflections as are necessary to

procure it, we will spend a few Pages in considering for them, and in

observing the most usual defects of the Thinking Faculty.

If we are of their Opinion who say that the Understanding is only

Passive, and that Judgment belongs to the Will, I see not any Defect

the former can have, besides Narrowness and a disability to extend

it self to many things, which is indeed incident to all Creatures,

the brightest Intelligence in the highest Order of Angels is thus

defective, as well as the meanest Mortal, tho in a less degree. Nor

ought it to be complain’d of, since ’tis Natural and Necessary, we may

as well desire to be Gods as desire to Know all things. Some sort of

Ignorance therefore, or Non perception we cannot help; a Finite Mind,

suppose it as large as you please, can never extend it self to Infinite

Truths. But no doubt it is in our Power to remedy a great deal more

than we do, and probably a larger Range is allowed us than the most

Active and Enlightned Understanding has hitherto reach’d. Ignorance

then can’t be avoided but Error may, we cannot Judge of things of which

we have no Idea, but we can suspend our Judgment about those of which

we have, till clearness and evidence oblige us to pass it. Indeed in

strictness of Speech the Will and not the Understanding is blameable

when we Think amiss, since the latter opposes not the Ends for which

GOD made it, but readily extends it self as far as it can, receiving

such Impressions as are made on it; ’tis the former that directs it to

such Objects, that fills up its Capacity with such Ideas as are foreign

to its Business and of no use to it, or which does not at least oppose

the incursions of Material things, and deface as much as it is able

those impressions which Sensible Objects leave in the Imagination.

But since it is not material to the present Design, whether Judgment

belongs to the Understanding or Will, we shall not nicely distinguish

how each of ’em is employ’d in acquiring Knowledge, but treat of ’em

both together in this Chapter, allotted to the Service of the Studious,

who when they are put in the way may by their own Meditations and

Experience, rectifie the mistakes and supply the Omissions we happen to

be guilty of.

They who apply themselves to the Contemplation of Truth, will perhaps

at first find a Contraction or Emptiness of Thought, and that their

Mind offers nothing on the Subject they wou’d consider, is not ready

at unfolding, nor in representing correspondent Ideas to be compar’d

with it, is as it were asleep or in a Dream, and tho’ not empty of all

Thought, yet Thinks nothing clearly or to the purpose. The Primary

Cause of this is that Limitation which all Created Minds are Subject

to, which Limitation appears more visible in some than in others,

either because some Minds are endow’d by their Creator with a larger

Capacity than the rest, or if you are not inclin’d to think so, then

by reason of the Indisposition of the Bodily Organs, which cramps and

contracts the Operations of the Mind. And that Person whose Capacity

of receiving Ideas is very little, whose Ideas are disorder’d, and not

capable of being so dispos’d as that they may be compar’d in order to

the forming of a Judgment, is a Fool or little better. If we find this

to be our Case, and that after frequent tryals there appears no hopes

of Amendment, ’tis best to desist, we shall but lose our Labour, we

may do some Good in an Active Life and Employments that depend on the

Body, but we’re altogether unfit for Contemplation and the Exercises of

the Mind. Yet e’er we give out let’s see if it be thus with us in all

Cases: Can we Think and Argue Rationally about a Dress, an Intreague,

an Estate? Why then not upon better Subjects? The way of Considering

and Meditating justly is the same on all Occasions. ’Tis true, there

will fewest Ideas arise when we wou’d Meditate on such Subjects as

we’ve been least conversant about; but this is a fault which it is

in our power to remedy, first by Reading or Discoursing, and then by

frequent and serious Meditation, of which hereafter.

As those we have been speaking of are hindred in their search after

Truth, thro a want of Ideas out of which to deduce it, so there are

another sort who are not happy in their Enquiries, on account of

the multitude and Impetuosity of theirs. Volatileness of Thought,

very pernicious to true Science, is a fault which People of warm

Imaginations and Active Spirits are apt to fall into. Such a Temper is

readily dispos’d to receive Errors and very well qualified to propagate

them, especially if a volubility of Speech be join’d to it. These thro

an immoderate nimbleness of Thinking skip from one Idea to another,

without observing due Order and Connexion, they content themselves

with a superficial view, a random glance, and depending on the vigor

of their Imagination, are took with Appearances, never tarrying to

penetrate the Subject, or to find out Truth if she float not upon the

Surface. A multitude of Ideas not relating to the matter they design to

think of rush in upon them, and their easie Mind entertains all comers

how impertinent soever; instead of examining the Question in debate

they are got into the Clouds, numbring the Cities in the Moon and

building Airy Castles there. Nor is it easie to cure this Defect, since

it deceives others as well as those who have it with a shew of very

great Ingenuity. The vivacity of such Persons makes their Conversation

plausible, and taking with those who consider not much, tho not with

the Judicious; it procures for them the Character of Wit, but hinders

them from being Wise. For truth is not often found by such as won’t

take Time to examine her Counterfeits, to distinguish between Evidence

and Probability, Realities and Appearances, but who thro a conceit of

their own sharp-sightedness think they can pierce to the bottom with

the first glance.

To cure this Distemper perfectly perhaps it will be necessary to

apply to the Body as well as to the Mind: The Animal Spirits must be

lessen’d, or rendred more Calm and Manageable; at least they must not

be unnaturally and violently mov’d, by such a Diet, or such Passions,

Designs and Divertisments as are likely to put ’em in a ferment.

Contemplation requires a Governable Body, a sedate and steady Mind,

and the Body and the Mind do so reciprocally influence each other,

that we can scarce keep the one in tune if the other be out of it. We

can neither Observe the Errors of our Intellect, nor the Irregularity

of our Morals whilst we are darkned by Fumes, agitated with unruly

Passions, or carried away with eager Desires after Sensible things and

vanities. We must therefore withdraw our Minds from the World, from

adhering to the Senses, from the Love of Material Beings, of Pomps and

Gaieties; for ’tis these that usually Steal away the Heart, that seduce

the Mind to such unaccountable Wandrings, and so fill up its Capacity

that they leave no room for Truth, so distract its Attention that it

cannot enquire after her. For tho’ the Body does partly occasion this

fault, yet the Will no doubt may in good measure Remedy it, by using

its Authority to fix the Understanding on such Objects as it wou’d have

Contemplated; it has a Rein which will certainly curb this wandring,

if it can but be persuaded to make use of it. Indeed Attention and

deep Meditation is not so agreeable to our Animal Nature, does not

flatter our Pride so well as this agreeable \_Reverie\_, which gives us

a pretence to Knowledge without taking much Pains to acquire it, and

does not choak us with the humbling thoughts of our own Ignorance, with

which we must make such ado e’re it can be enlightened. Yet without

Attention and strict Examination we are liable to false Judgments on

every occasion, to Vanity and Arrogance, to Impertinent Prating of

things we don’t understand, are kept from making a Progress, because we

fancy our selves to be at the top already, and can never attain to true

Wisdom. If then we wou’d hereafter think to purpose, we must suffer our

selves to be convinc’d how oft we have already thought to none, suspect

our Quickness, and not give our desultory Imagination leave to ramble.

And in order to the restraining it we may consider, what a loss of

Time and Study such irregular and useless Thoughts occasion, what a

Reproach they are to our Reason, how they cheat us with a \_shew\_ of

Knowledge, which so long as we are under the power of this giddy Temper

will inevitably escape us. And if to this we add a serious perusal of

such Books as are not loosly writ, but require an Attent and Awakened

Mind to apprehend, and to take in the whole force of ’em, obliging

our selves to Understand them throughly, so as to be able to give a

just account of them to our Selves, or rather to some other Person

intelligent enough to take it and to correct our mistakes, it is to be

hop’d we shall obtain a due poise of Mind, and be able to direct our

Thoughts to the thorow discussion of such Subjects as we wou’d Examine.

Such Books I mean as are fuller of Matter than Words, which diffuse a

light through every part of their Subject, do not Skim, but Penetrate

it to the bottom, yet so as to leave somewhat to be wrought out by the

Reader’s own Meditation; such as are writ with Order and Connexion,

the Strength of whose Arguments can’t be sufficiently felt unless we

remember and compare the whole System. ’Tis impossible to prescribe

absolutely, and every one may easily find what Authors are most apt

to stay their Attention, and shou’d apply to them. But whenever they

Meditate, be it on what Object it may, let ’em fix their Minds stedily

on it, not removing till it be throughly Examin’d, at least not until

they have seen all that’s necessary to their present purpose.

Doing so we shall prevent Rashness and Precipitation in our Judgments,

which is occasion’d by that Volatileness we have been speaking

of, together with an over-weaning opinion of our Selves. All the

irregularities of our Will proceed from those false Judgments we

make, thro want of Consideration, or a partial Examination when we do

consider. For did we Consider with any manner of Attention, we cou’d

not be so absurd as to call Evil, Good, and Chuse it as such, or

prefer a less Good before a greater, a poor Momentary Trifle, before

the Purity and Perfection of our Mind, before an Eternal and Immutable

Crown of Glory! But we seek no farther than the first Appearances of

Truth and Good, here we Stop, allowing neither Time nor Thought to

search to the bottom, and to pull off those Disguises which impose on

us. This Precipitation is that which gives birth to all our Errors,

which are nothing else but a hasty and injudicious Sentence, a

mistaking one thing for another, supposing an Agreement or Disparity

amongst Ideas and their Relations where in reality there is none,

occasion’d by an imperfect and cursory view of ’em. And tho’ there are

other things which may be said to lead us into Error, yet they do it

only as they seduce us into Rash and Precipitate Judgments. We love

Grandeur and every thing that feeds our good Opinion of our Selves, and

therefore wou’d Judge off hand, supposing it a disparagement to our

Understandings to be long in Examining, so that we greedily embrace

whatever seems to carry Evidence enough for a speedy Determination,

how slight and superficial soever it be. Whereas did we calmly and

deliberately Examine our Evidence, and how far those Motives we are

acted by ought to Influence, we shou’d not be liable to this Seduction.

For hereby the Impetuosity of a warm Imagination wou’d be cool’d, and

the extravagancies of a Disorderly one Regulated; we shou’d not be

Deceiv’d by the Report of our Senses; the Prejudices of Education; our

own Private Interest, and readiness to receive the Opinions whether

True or False of those we Love, or wou’d appear to Love because we

think they will serve us in that Interest; our inordinate thirst

after a great Reputation, or the Power and Riches, the Grandeurs and

Pleasures of this World, these wou’d no longer dissipate our Thoughts

and distract our Attention, for then we shou’d be sensible how little

Concern is due to them. We shou’d neither mistake in the End and Object

by not employing our Understandings at All about such things as they

were chiefly made for, or not Enough, or by busying them with such as

are out of their reach, or beneath their Application; nor shou’d we be

out in the Method of our Meditation, by going a wrong or a round about

way. For the GOD of Truth is ready to lead us into all Truth, if we

Honestly and Attentively apply our selves to him.

In sum, whatever false Principle we embrace, whatever wrong Conclusion

we draw from true ones, is a disparagement to our Thinking Power, a

Weakness of Judgment proceeding from a Confuse and Imperfect view of

things, as that does from want of attention, and a hasty and partial

Examination. It were endless to reckon up all the false Maxims and

Reasonings we fall into, nor is it possible to give a List of them, for

there are innumerable Errors opposite to one single Truth. The General

Causes have been already mention’d, the Particulars are as many as

those several Compositions which arise from the various mixtures of

the Passions, Interests, Education, Conversation and Reading, \_&c.\_ of

particular Persons. And the best way that I can think of to Improve

the Understanding, and to guard it against all Errors proceed they

from what Cause they may, is to regulate the Will, whose Office it

is to determine the Understanding to such and such Ideas, and to

stay it in the Consideration of them so long as is necessary to the

Discovery of Truth; for if the Will be right the Understanding can’t

be guilty of any Culpable Error. Not to Judge of any thing which we

don’t Apprehend, to suspend our Assent till we see just Cause to give

it, and to determine nothing till the Strength and Clearness of the

Evidence oblige us to it. To withdraw our selves as much as may be from

Corporeal things, that pure Reason may be heard the better; to make

that use of our Senses for which they are design’d and fitted, the

preservation of the Body, but not to depend on their Testimony in our

Enquiries after Truth. Particularly to divest our selves of mistaken

Self-love, little Ends and mean Designs, and to keep our Inclinations

and Passions under Government. Not to engage our selves so far in any

Party or Opinion as to make it in a manner necessary that that shou’d

be Right, lest from wishing it were, we come at last to persuade our

selves it is so. But to be passionately in Love with Truth, as being

throughly sensible of her Excellency and Beauty. To embrace her how

opposite soever she may sometimes be to our Humours and Designs, to

bring these over to her, and never attempt to make her truckle to

them. To be so far from disliking a Truth because it touches us home,

and lances our tenderest and dearest Corruption, as on the contrary

to prize it the more, by how much the more plainly it shews us our

Errors and Miscarriages. For indeed it concerns us most to know such

Truths as these, it is not material to us what other Peoples Opinions

are, any farther than as the Knowlege of their Sentiments may correct

Our Mistakes. And the higher our Station is in the World, so much the

greater need have we to be curious in this particular.

The mean and inconsiderable often stumble on Truth when they seek not

after her, but she is commonly kept out of the way, and industriously

conceal’d from the Great and mighty; either out of Design or Envy, for

whoever wou’d make a Property of another must by all means conceal

the Truth from him; and they who Envy their Neighbours Preeminence in

other things, are willing themselves to excel in exactness of Judgment,

which they think and very truly, to be the greatest Excellency. And to

help forward this deception, the Great instead of being Industrious in

finding out the Truth, are generally very impatient when they meet with

her. She does not treat them so tenderly and fawningly, with so much

Ceremony and Complaisance as their Flatterers do. There’s in her that

which us’d to be the Character of our Nation, an honest Plainness and

Sincerity, Openness and blunt Familiarity: She cannot mould her self

into all Shapes to be rendred agreeable, but standing on her Native

Worth is regardless of Out-side and Varnish. But to return from this

Digression.

Above all things we must be throughly convinc’d of our entire

Dependance on GOD, for what we \_Know\_ as well as for what we Are, and

be warmly affected with the Sense of it, which will both Excite us to

Practise, and Enable us to Perform the rest. Tho’ we are Naturally

Dark and Ignorant, yet in \_his Light we may\_ hope to \_see Light\_,

if with the Son of \_Syrac\_ we Petition for \_Wisdom that sits by his

Throne\_ to \_labour with us\_, and Sigh with \_David\_ after his \_Light

and Truth\_. For then he who is \_The Light that Lightneth every one who

comes into the World\_, the Immutable Truth, and Uncreated Wisdom of

His Father, will \_Teach us in the way of Wisdom and lead us in right

Paths\_, he will instruct us infinitely better by the right use of our

own Faculties than the brightest Human Reason can. For in him are all

the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowlege which he Liberally dispences to

all who Humbly, Honestly and Heartily ask ’em of him. To close this

Head: Whatever the Notion That we see all things in GOD, may be as to

the Truth of it, ’tis certainly very commendable for its Piety, in that

it most effectually humbles the most dangerous sort of Pride, the being

Proud of our Knowlege, and yet does not slacken our Endeavours after

Knowlege but rather Excites them.

[Sidenote: \_Art of Thinking.\_]

§ IV. As to the \_Method\_ of Thinking, if it be proper for me to say

any thing of that, after those better Pens which have treated of it

already, it falls in with the Subject I’me now come to, which is, that

\_Natural Logic\_ I wou’d propose. I call it natural because I shall not

send you further than your Own Minds to learn it, you may if you please

take in the assistance of some well chosen Book, but a good Natural

Reason after all, is the best Director, without this you will scarce

Argue well, tho you had the Choicest Books and Tutors to Instruct you,

but with it you may, tho’ you happen to be destitute of the other. For

as a very Judicious Writer on this Subject (to whose Ingenious Remarks

and Rules I am much obliged) well observes, “These Operations [of the

Mind] proceed meerly from Nature, and that sometimes more perfectly

from those who are altogether ignorant of Logic, than from others who

have learn’d it.”

That which we propose in all our Meditations and Reasonings is, either

to deduce some Truth we are in search of, from such Principles as

we’re already acquainted with; or else, to dispose our Thoughts and

Reasonings in such a manner, as to be able to Convince others of those

Truths which we our selves are Convinc’d of. Other Designs indeed

Men may have, such as the Maintenance of their Own Opinions, Actions

and Parties without regard to the Truth and Justice of ’em, or the

Seduction of their unwary Neighbours, but these are Mean and Base ones,

beneath a Man, much more a Christian, who is or Ought to be endow’d

with greater Integrity and Ingenuity.

Now Reasoning being nothing else but a Comparison of Ideas, and a

deducing of Conclusions from Clear and Evident Principles, it is

in the first place requisite that our Ideas be Clear and Just, and

our Principles True, else all our Discourse will be Nonsense and

Absurdity, Falshood and Error. And that our Idea may be Right, we

have no more to do but to look attentively into our own Minds, having

as was said above, laid aside all Prejudices and whatever may give a

false tincture to our Light, there we shall find a Clear and Lively

Representation of what we seek for, unsophisticated with the Dross

of false Definitions and unintelligible Expressions. But we must not

imagine that a transient view will serve the turn, or that our Eye will

be Enlightened if it be not fix’d. For tho’ Truth be exceeding bright,

yet since our Prejudices and Passions have darkned our Eye-sight, it

requires no little Pains and Application of Mind to find her out,

the neglect of which Application is the Reason that we have so little

Truth, and that the little we have is almost lost in that Rubbish of

Error which is mingled with it. And since Truth is so near at hand,

since we are not oblig’d to tumble over many Authors, to hunt after

every celebrated Genius, but may have it for enquiring after in our

own Breasts, are we not inexcusable if we don’t obtain it? Are we not

unworthy of Compassion if we suffer our Understandings to be over-run

with Error? Indeed it seems to me most Reasonable and most agreeable

to the Wisdom and Equity of the Divine Operations, that every one

shou’d have a Teacher in their own Bosoms, who will if they seriously

apply themselves to him, immediately Enlighten them so far as that is

Necessary, and direct them to such Means as are sufficient for their

Instruction both in Humane and Divine Truths; for as to the latter,

Reason if it be Right and Solid, will not pretend to be our sole

Instructor, but will send us to Divine Revelation when it may be had.

GOD does nothing in vain, he gives no Power or Faculty which he has

not allotted to some proportionate use, if therefore he has given to

Mankind a Rational Mind, every individual Understanding ought to be

employ’d in somewhat worthy of it. The Meanest Person shou’d Think as

\_Justly\_, tho’ not as \_Capaciously\_, as the greatest Philosopher. And

if the Understanding be made for the Contemplation of Truth, and I know

not what else it can be made for, either there are many Understandings

who are never able to attain what they were design’d and fitted for,

which is contrary to the Supposition that GOD made nothing in Vain, or

else the very meanest must be put in a way of attaining it: Now how

can this be if all that which goes to the composition of a Knowing

Man in th’account of the World, be necessary to make one so? All have

not leisure to Learn Languages and pore on Books, nor Opportunity to

Converse with the Learned; but all may \_Think\_, may use their own

Faculties rightly, and consult the Master who is within them.

By Ideas we sometimes understand in general all that which is the

immediate Object of the Mind, whatever it Perceives; and in this large

Sense it may take in all Thought, all that we are any ways capable of

Discerning: So when we say we have no Idea of a thing, ’tis as much

as to say we know nothing of the matter. Again, it is more strictly

taken for that which represents to the Mind some Object distinct

from it, whether Clearly or Confusedly; when this is its import, our

Knowledge is said to be as Clear as our Ideas are. For that Idea which

represents a thing so Clearly, that by an Attent and Simple View we may

discern its Properties and Modifications, at least so far as they can

be Known, is never false; all our Certainty and Evidence depends on

it, if we Know not Truly what is thus represented to our Minds we know

nothing. Thus the Idea of Equality between 2 and 2 is so evident that

it is impossible to doubt of it, no Arguments could convince us of the

Contrary, nor be able to persuade us that the same may be found between

2 and 3.

And as such an Idea as this is never False, so neither can any Idea

be said to be so, if by False we mean that which has no Existence;

our Idea certainly Exists, tho’ there be not any thing in Nature

Correspondent to it. For tho’ there be no such thing as a Golden

Mountain, yet when I think of one, ’tis certain I have an Idea of it.

But our Ideas are then said to be False, or rather Wrong, when they

have no Conformity to the Real Nature of the Thing whose Name they

bear. So that properly Speaking it is not the Idea but the judgment

that is False; we err in supposing that our Idea is answerable to

something without us when it is not. In simple Perceptions we are

not often deceiv’d, but we frequently mistake in Compounding them,

by Uniting several things which have no Agreement, and Separating

others which are Essentially United. Indeed it may happen that our

Perceptions are faulty sometimes, thro the Indisposition of the Organs

or Faculties, thus a Man who has the \_Jaundice\_ sees every thing ting’d

with Yellow, yet even here the Error is not in the Simple Idea but in

the Compos’d one, for we do not mistake when we say the Object appears

Yellow to our Sight, tho’ we do, when we affirm that it does, or ought

to do so to others. So again, when the Mind does not sufficiently

Attend to her Ideas nor Examine them on all sides, ’tis very likely

she will Think amiss, but this also is a false Judgment, that which

is amiss in the Perception being rather the Inadequateness than the

Falshood. Thus in many Cases we enquire no farther than whether an

Action be not Directly Forbidden, and if we do not find it Absolutely

Unlawful, we think that sufficient to Authorize the Practise of it,

not considering it as we ought to do, Cloathed with the Circumstances

of Scandal, Temptation, \_&c.\_ which place it in the same Classes with

things unlawful, at least make it so to us.

Rational Creatures shou’d endeavour to have right Ideas of every thing

that comes under their Cognizance, but yet our Ideas of Morality, our

thoughts about Religion are those which we shou’d with greatest speed

and diligence rectifie, because they are of most importance, the Life

to come, as well as all the Occurrences of This, depending on them. We

shou’d search for Truth in our most abstracted Speculations, but it

concerns us nearly to follow her close in what relates to the Conduct

of our Lives. For the main thing we are to drive at in all our Studies,

and that which is the greatest Improvement of our Understandings is the

Art of Prudence, the being all of a Piece, managing all our Words and

Actions as it becomes Wise Persons and Good Christians.

Yet in this we are commonly most faulty; for besides the deceits of our

Passions, our Ideas of Particular Vertues and Vices, Goods and Evils,

being an assemblage of divers simple Perceptions, and including several

Judgments are therefore liable to mistake, and much more so considering

how we commonly come by them. We hear the Word that Stands for such

a Thing, suppose Honor, and then instead of enquiring what it is at

the Fountain-head the Oracles of GOD, and our own, or the Impartial

Reason of the Wisest and the Best, Custom and the Observations we

make on the Practice of such as Pretend to it forms our Idea, which

is seldom a Right one, the Opinions and Practices of the World being

very fallacious, and many times quite opposite to the Dictates of

Reason wou’d we but give ear to them. For what a strange distorted Idea

of Honor must they needs have, who can think it Honourable to break

a Vow that ought to be Kept, and Dishonourable to get loose from an

Engagement that ought to be Broken? Who cannot endure to be tax’d with

a Lye, and yet never think fit to keep their Word? What do they think

of Greatness who support their Pomp at the Expence of the Groans and

Tears of many Injur’d Families? What is their Idea of Heaven, who

profess to Believe such a thing, and yet never endeavour to Qualifie

themselves for the Enjoyment of it? Have they any Idea at all of these

things when they speak of ’em? Or, if they have, is it not a very false

one?

Now that we may avoid mistake the better, and because we usually join

Words to our Ideas even when we only Meditate, we shou’d free them from

all Equivocation, not make use of any Word, which has not a Distinct

Idea annex’d to it, and where Custom has join’d many Ideas to one

Word, carefully separate and distinguish them. For if our Words are

Equivocal, how can we by Pronouncing such and such, excite the same

Idea in another that is in our own Mind, which is the End of Speech,

and consequently how can we be Understood? And if sometimes we annex

one Idea to a Word, and sometimes another, we may for ever wrangle

with those who perhaps wou’d be found to agree with us if we Understood

each other, but can neither Convince them, nor clear up the Matter

to our own Mind. For Instance: Shou’d I dispute Whether Evil were

to be Chosen? Without defining what I mean by Evil, which is a Word

customarily apply’d to things of different Natures, and shou’d conclude

in the Affirmative, meaning at the same time the Evil of Pain, or any

Corporal Loss or Punishment, I were not mistaken, tho’ another Person

who annexes no other Idea but that of Sin to the word Evil, might

Justly contradict me and say that I was. Or if in the Process of my

Discourse, I shou’d without giving notice of it, substitute the Idea

of Sin instead of that of Pain, when I mention Evil, I shou’d argue

falsly. For it is a Maxim that we may Chuse a less Evil to avoid a

greater, if both of them be Corporal Evils, or if one of them be so,

and we chuse it to avoid a Sin, between which and the Evil of Pain

there is no Comparison: But if the two Evils propos’d to our Choice

be both of them Sinful, that Principle will not hold, we must Chuse

neither, whatever comes on’t, Sin being Eligible no manner of way.

Thus many times our Ideas are thought to be false when the fault is

really in our Language, we make use of Words without joyning any, or

only loose and indeterminate Ideas to them, Prating like Parrots who

can Modify Sounds, and Pronounce Syllables, and sometimes martial them

as a Man wou’d, tho without the use of Reason or understanding any

thing by them. So that after a long Discourse and many fine Words, our

Hearer may justly ask us what we have been saying? And what it is we

wou’d be at? And so a great part, of the Good Breeding of the World,

many Elegant Complements pass for nothing, they have no meaning, or

if they have, ’tis quite contrary to what the Words in other Cases

signifie.

From the Companion of two or more Ideas clearly Conceived arises

a Judgment, which we may lay down for a Principle, and as we have

occasion Argue from. Always observing that those Judgments which we

take for Axioms or Principles, be such as carry the highest Evidence

and Conviction, such as every one who will but in the least Attend may

Clearly see, and be fully convinced of, and which need not another

Idea for their Demonstration. Thus from the Agreement which we plainly

perceive between the Ideas of GOD and of Goodness singly consider’d,

we discern that they may be joyn’d together so as to form this

Proposition, \_That GOD is Good\_: And from the evident disparity that

is between GOD and Injustice, we learn to affirm this other, \_That

he is not Unjust\_. And so long as we Judge of Nothing but what we see

Clearly, we can’t be mistaken in our Judgments, we may indeed in those

Reasonings and Deductions we draw from them, if we are Ignorant of the

Laws of Argumentation, or Negligent in the Observation of them.

The First and Principal thing therefore to be observed in all the

Operations of the Mind is, That we determine nothing about those things

of which we have not a Clear Idea, and as Distinct as the Nature of

the Subject will permit, for we cannot properly be said to Know any

thing which does not Clearly and Evidently appear to us. Whatever we

see Distinctly we likewise see Clearly, Distinction always including

Clearness, tho this does not necessarily include that, there being many

Objects Clear to the view of the Mind, which yet can’t be said to be

Distinct.

[Sidenote: \_Les Princip. de la Philos. de M. Des Cartes.\_ Pt. I. §. 45.]

That (to use the Words of a Celebrated Author) may be said to be

“Clear which is Present and Manifest to an attentive Mind; so as

we say we see Objects Clearly, when being present to our Eyes they

sufficiently Act on ’em, and our Eyes are dispos’d to regard ’em. And

that Distinct, which is so Clear, Particular, and Different from all

other things, that it contains not any thing in it self which appears

not manifestly to him who considers it as he ought.” Thus we may have

a Clear, but not a Distinct and Perfect Idea of GOD and of our own

Souls; their Existence and some of their Properties and Attributes

may be Certainly and Indubitably Known, but we can’t Know the Nature

of our Souls Distinctly, for Reasons too long to be mentioned here,

and less that of GOD, because he is Infinite. Now where our Knowlege

is Distinct, we may boldly deny of a subject, all that which after a

careful Examination we find not in it: But where our Knowlege is only

Clear, and not Distinct, tho’ we may safely Affirm what we see, yet

we can’t without a hardy Presumption Deny of it what we see not. And

were it not very common to find People both Talking and Writing of

things of which they have no Notion, no Clear Idea; nay and determining

Dogmatically concerning the intire Nature of those of which they cannot

possibly have an Adequate and Distinct one, it might seem impertinent

to desire them to speak no farther than they Apprehend. They will tell

you Peremptorily of Contradictions and Absurdities in such matters as

they themselves must allow they cannot Comprehend, tho others as Sharp

sighted as themselves can see no such thing as they complain of.

As Judgments are form’d by the Comparing of Ideas, so Reasoning

or Discourse arises from the Companion or Combination of several

Judgments. Nature teaches us when we can’t find out what Relation one

Idea bears to another by a Simple view or bare Comparison, to seek for

a Common Measure or third Idea, which Relating to the other two, we may

by Comparing it with each of ’em, discern wherein they agree or differ.

Our Invention discovers it self in proposing readily apt Ideas for this

Middle Term, our Judgment in making Choice of such as are Clearest and

most to our purpose, and the excellency of our Reasoning consists in

our Skill and Dexterity in Applying them.

Invention indeed is the hardest part, when Proofs are found it is not

very difficult to manage them. And to know precisely wherein their

Nature consists, may help us somewhat in our enquiries after ’em. An

Intermediate Idea then which can make out an Agreement between other

Ideas, must be Equivalent to, and yet Distinct from those we compare by

it. Where Ideas agree it will not be hard to find such an Equivalent,

and if after diligent search we cannot meet with any, ’tis a pretty

sure Sign that they do not agree. It is not necessary indeed that our

Middle Idea be Equivalent in all respects, ’tis enough if it be in such

as make the Comparison: And when it is so to one of the Compar’d Ideas

but not to the other, that’s a Proof that they do not agree amongst

themselves.

All the Commerce and Intercourse of the World is manag’d by

Equivalents, Conversation as well as Traffick. Why do we Trust our

Friends but because their Truth and Honesty appears to us Equivalent

to the Confidence we repose in ’em? Why do we perform Good Offices to

others, but because there’s a proportion between them and the Merit

of the Person, or our own Circumstances? And as the way to know the

Worth of things is to Compare them one with another, so in like manner

we come to the Knowlege of the Truth of ’em by an Equal Ballancing.

But you will say, Tho I may learn the value of a \_Spanish\_ Coin by

Weighing, or Comparing it with some other Money whose Standard I

know, and so discern what proportion it bears to those Goods I wou’d

exchange; yet what Scales shall I find to weigh Ideas? What Hand so

even as to poize them Justly? Or if that might be done, yet where shall

I meet with an Equivalent Idea when I have occasion to use one?

In answer to this Demand I consider, that as Light is always visible

to us if we have an Organ to receive it, if we turn our Eyes towards

it, and that nothing interpose between it and us; so is Truth, we are

surrounded with it, and GOD has given us Faculties to receive it. If

it be ask’d, Why then do we so seldom find it? The Reason is, because

instead of making right use of our Faculties we employ them in keeping

it out; we either shut our Eyes, or if we vouchsafe to open them,

we are sure to view it thro such unsuitable Mediums as fail not to

misrepresent it to us. As for those few Noble Spirits, who open the

Windows of their Souls to let in Truth, and take the Films of Interest,

Passion and Prejudice from before their Eyes, they will certainly be

Enlighten’d, and cannot miss of obtaining as much Truth as they are

capable of Receiving. For, to go on with the Comparison, as we can See

no farther than our own Horizon, tho the Light shine never so bright

around us; and as we cannot discern every Object even within that

Compass Clearly, nor Any Distinctly but what we particularly apply

our selves to; So neither are our Capacities large enough to take in

\_All\_ Truth, as has been often said, nor are we capable of attaining

\_Any\_, without Attention and diligent Examination. But if we carefully

Consider those Ideas we already have and Attend to those Truths we

are acquainted with, we cannot want Mediums to discover more, if our

Enquiries be after that which is within our Reach. He who is the

Fountain of Truth is also a GOD of Order, and has so regularly connex’d

one Truth with another, that the discovery of one is a step towards a

further Progress; so that if we diligently Examine those Truths which,

we Know, they will clear the way to what we search after: For it seldom

happens but that the Question it self directs us to some Idea that will

serve for the Explanation or Proof of it.

There is no Object, no Accident of Life but affords us matter of

Instruction. GOD has so dispos’d all the Works of his Hands, all the

Actings of his Providence, that every one of ’em ministers to our

Improvement, if we will but Observe and Apply them. Indeed this Living

\_Ex Tempore\_ which most of us are guilty of, our making no Reflections,

our Gay and Volatile Humour which transports us in an Instant from one

thing to another, e’re we have with the Industrious Bee suck’d those

Sweets it wou’d afford us, frequently renders his gracious Bounty

ineffectual. For as the Diligent-hand maketh Rich, whil’st the Slothful

and Prodigal come to nothing, so the Use of our Powers improves and

Encreases them, and the most Observing and Considerate is the Wisest

Person: For she lays up in her Mind as in a Store-house, ready to

produce on all Occasions, a Clear and Simple Idea of every Object that

has at any time presented it self. And perhaps the difference between

one Womans Reason and anothers may consist only in this, that the one

has amass’d a greater number of such Ideas than the other, and dispos’d

them more Orderly in her Understanding, so that they are at hand, ready

to be apply’d to those Complex Ideas whose Agreement or Disagreement

cannot be found out but by the means of some of ’em.

But because Examples are more familiar than Precepts, as condescending

to shew us the very manner of Practising them, I shall endeavour to

make the matter in Hand as plain as I can by subjoining Instances to

the following Rules, which Rules as I have not taken wholly on Trust

from others, so neither do I pretend to be the Inventer of ’em.

We have heard already that a Medium is necessary when we can’t discern

the Relation that is between two or more Ideas by Intuition or a

simple View. Could this alone procure us what we seek after, the

addition of other Ideas wou’d be needless, since to make a shew of Wit

by tedious Arguings and unnecessary Flourishes, does only Perplex and

Incumber the Matter, Intuition being the Simplest, and on that account

the best way of Knowing.

\_Rule\_ I. And therefore we shou’d in the first place, \_Acquaint our

selves throughly with the State of the Question, have a Distinct Notion

of our Subject whatever it be, and of the Terms we make use of, knowing

precisely what it is we drive at\_: that so we may in the second.

\_Rule\_ II. \_Cut off all needless Ideas and whatever has not a necessary

Connexion to the matter under Consideration\_, which serve only to

fill up the Capacity of the Mind, and to Divide and Distract the

Attention. From the neglect of this comes those causless Digressions,

tedious Parentheses and Impertinent Remarques which we meet with in

some Authors. For, as when our Sight is diffus’d and extended to many

Objects at once we see none of them Distinctly; so when the Mind grasps

at every Idea that presents it self, or rambles after such as relate

not to its Present Business, it loses its hold and retains a very

feeble Apprehension of that which it shou’d Attend. Some have added

another Rule (\_viz.\_) \_That we Reason only on those things of which

we have Clear Ideas\_; but I take it to be a Consequence of the first,

and therefore do not make it a distinct one: For we can by no means

Understand our Subject, or be well acquainted with the State of the

Question, unless we have a Clear Idea of all its Terms.

\_Rule\_ III. Our Business being stated, the next Rule is \_To conduct our

Thoughts by Order, beginning with the most Simple and Easie Objects,

And ascending as by Degrees to the Knowlege of the more Compos’d\_. I

need not tell you, that Order makes every thing, Easie, Strong and

Beautiful, and that the Superstructure is neither like to Last or

Please unless the Foundation be duly laid, for this is obvious to the

most Superficial Reader. Nor are they likely to solve the Difficult,

who have neglected or slightly pass’d over the Easie Questions. Our

Knowledge is gradual, and by passing Regularly thro Plain things, we

arrive in due time at the more Abstruse.

\_Rule\_ IV. In this Method we are to practise the Fourth Rule which

is, \_Not to leave any part of our Subject unexamin’d\_, it being as

necessary to Consider All that can let in Light, as to shut out what’s

Foreign to it. We may stop short of Truth as well as over-run it; and

tho we look never so attentively on our proper Object, if we view but

half of it, we may be as much mistaken, as if we extended our Sight

beyond it. Some Objects agree very well when observ’d on one side,

which upon turning the other shew a great disparity. Thus the Right

Angle of a Triangle may be like to one part of a Square, but compare

the Whole, and you’l find ’em very different Figures. And a Moral

Action may in some Circumstance be not only Fit but Necessary, which in

others, where Time, Place, and the like have made an alteration, wou’d

be most Improper; so that if we venture to Act on the former Judgment,

we may easily do amiss, if we wou’d Act as we ought, we must view its

New Face, and see with what Aspect that looks on us.

To this Rule belongs that of \_Dividing the Subject of our Meditations

into as many Parts, as we can, and as shall be requisite to Understand

it perfectly\_. This is indeed most necessary in difficult Questions,

which will scarce be unravell’d but in this manner by Pieces: Ever

taking care to make Exact Reviews, and to Sum up our Evidence justly

e’re we pass Sentence and fix our Judgment.

\_Rule\_ V. To which purpose we must \_Always keep our Subject Directly

in our Eye, and Closely pursue it thro all our Progress\_; there being

no better Sign of a good Understanding than Thinking Closely and

Pertinently, and Reasoning dependently, so as to make the former part

of our Discourse a support to the Latter, and \_This\_ an Illustration

of \_That\_, carrying Light and Evidence in ev’ry step we take. The

neglect of this Rule is the Cause why our Discoveries of Truth are

seldom Exact, that so much is often said to so little purpose; and many

Intelligent and Industrious Readers when they have Read over a Book

are very little wiser than when they began it. And that the two last

Rules may be the better observ’d, ’twill be fit very often to look over

our Process so far as we have gone, that so by rendring our Subject

Familiar, we may the sooner arrive to an Exact Knowlege of it.

\_Rule\_ VI. All which being done we are in a fair way towards keeping

the last Rule, which is, \_To judge no further than we Perceive, and

not to take any thing for Truth which we do not evidently Know to be

so\_. Indeed in some Cases we are forc’d to content our selves with

Probability, but ’twere well if we did so only where ’tis plainly

Necessary. That is, when the Subject of our Meditation is such as

we cannot possibly have a Certain Knowlege of, because we are not

furnish’d with Proofs which have a Constant and Immutable Connexion

with the Ideas we apply them to, or because we can’t perceive it,

which is our Case in such Exigencies as oblige us to Act presently,

on a cursory view of the Arguments propos’d to us, when we want time

to trace them to the bottom, and to make use of such means as wou’d

discover Truth.

I cannot think we are often driven to such straits in any considerable

Affair, tho I believe that very many Subjects may be propos’d to us,

concerning which we cannot readily pass our Judgment, either because we

never consider’d them before, or because we are wanting in some Means

that lead to the Knowlege, of ’em. In which Case Reason wills that we

suspend our Judgment till we can be better Inform’d; nor wou’d it have

us remit our Search after Certainty, even in those very Cases in which

we may sometimes be forc’d to Act only on Probable Grounds. For Reason

can’t rest satisfy’d with Probabilities where Evidence is possible, our

Passions and Interest may, but \_That\_ does not incline us to leave

off Enquiring lest we happen to meet somewhat contrary to our Desires.

No, Reason requires us to continue our Enquiries with all the Industry

we can, till they’ve put us in Possession of Truth, and when we have

found, enjoyns us to follow her, how opposite soever she may cause our

Latter Actions to be to our Former. But by this we may learn (and so

we may by every thing that such weak and fallible Creatures as we are,

perform) to think Candidly of those whose Opinions and Actions differ

from our own. Because we do not know the necessity of their Affairs,

nor in what ill Circumstances they are plac’d in respect of Truth.

And now to Apply what has been said; The State of the Question being

Distinctly known, and certain Ideas fixt to the Terms we make use of,

we shall find sometimes that the Difference which was suppos’d to be

between the Things themselves, is only in words, in the divers ways we

make use of to express the same Idea.

For if upon looking into our selves we discern, that these different

Terms have but one and the same Idea, when we have corrected our

Expressions the Controversie is at an End, and we need enquire no

further. Thus, If we are ask’d \_Whether GOD is Infinitely Perfect\_?

There needs no Intermediate Idea to compare the Idea of GOD with that

of Infinite Perfection, since we may discern them on the very first

view to be one and the same Idea differently express’d, which to go

about to explain or prove were only to cumber with needless words,

and to make what is Clear, Obscure. For we Injure a Cause instead of

Defending it, by attempting an Explanation or Proof of things so Clear,

that as they do not need, so perhaps they are not Capable of any.

But if it be made a Question \_Whether there is a GOD, or a Being

Infinitely Perfect\_? We are then to Examin the Agreement between

our Idea of GOD and that of Existence. Now this may be discern’d by

Intuition, for upon a View of our Ideas we find that Existence is a

Perfection, and the Foundation of all other Perfections, since that

which has no Being cannot be suppos’d to have any Perfection. And tho

the Idea of Existence is not Adequate to that of Perfection, yet the

Idea of Perfection Includes that of Existence, and if \_That\_ Idea were

divided into parts, one part of it wou’d exactly agree with \_This\_. So

that if we will allow that \_Any\_ Being is Infinite in All Perfections,

we cannot deny that that Being Exists; Existence it self being one

Perfection, and such an one as all the rest are built upon.

If unreasonable Men will farther demand, \_Why is it necessary that All

Perfection shou’d be Centred in One Being, is’t not enough that it

be parcel’d out amongst many? And tho it be true that that Being who

has all Perfection must needs Exist, yet where’s the Necessity of an

All-Perfect Being?\_ We must then look about for Proofs and Intermediate

Ideas, and the Objection it self will furnish us with one. For those

\_Many\_ whose Particular Ideas it wou’d have joyn’d together to make a

Compound one of All-Perfection, are no other than Creatures, as will

appear if we consider our Idea of Particular Being and of Creature,

which are so far from having any thing to distinguish ’em, that in all

Points they resemble each other. Now this Idea naturally suggests to us

that of Creation, or a Power of giving Being to that which before the

exerting of that Power had none, which Idea if we use it as a Medium,

will serve to discover to us the necessity of an All-Perfect Being.

For in the first place, what ever has any Perfection or Excellency

(for that’s all we mean by Perfection here) must either have it of it

self, or derive it from some other Being. Now Creatures cannot have

their Perfections from themselves because they have not their Being,

for to suppose that they Made themselves is an Absurdity too ridiculous

to be seriously refuted, ’tis to suppose them to Be and not to Be at

the same time, and that when they were Nothing, they were able to do

the greatest Matter. Nor can they derive either Being or Perfection

from any other Creature. For tho some Particular Beings may seem to

be the Cause of the Perfections of others, as the Watch-maker may be

said to be the Cause of the Regular Motions of the Watch, yet trace it

a little farther, and you’l find this very Cause shall need another,

and so without End, till you come to the Foundation-head, to that

All-Perfect Being, who is the last resort of our Thoughts, and in

whom they Naturally and Necessarily rest and terminate. If to this it

be Objected that we as good as affirm that this All-Perfect Being is

his own Maker, by saying he is Self-Existent, and so we fall into the

same Absurdity which we imputed to that Opinion which supposes that

Creatures were their own Maker. The reply is easie, That we do not say

he Made himself, we only affirm that his Nature is such, that tho we

can’t sufficiently Explain because we can’t comprehend it, yet thus

much we can discern, that if he did not Exist of himself no other Being

could ever have Existed. So that either All must be swallow’d up in an

Infinite Nothing, if Nothing can properly have that Epithet, and we

must suppose, that neither we our selves, nor any of those Creatures

about us ever had, or ever can have a Being, which is too ridiculous to

imagine, or else we must needs have recourse to a Self-Existing Being,

who is the Maker and Lord of all things. And since Self Existence

must of necessity be plac’d somewhere, is it not much more Natural

and Reasonable to place it in Infinite Perfection, than amongst poor,

frail Creatures, whose Origin we may trace, and whose End we see daily

hastning?

To Sum up all: Since there are Innumerable Beings in the World, which

have each of them their several Excellencies or Perfections; Since

these can no more derive their Perfections than their Being from

themselves or from any other Creature; Since a Self-Existing Being is

the result of our Thoughts; the First and only True Cause, without

whom it is impossible that any thing should ever have Existed; since

Creatures with their Being receive all that depends on it from him

their Maker; Since none can give what he has not, and therefore he who

Communicates an innumerable variety of Perfections to his Creatures,

even all that they enjoy, must needs contain in himself all those

Beauties and Perfections he is pleas’d to Communicate to Inferior

Beings; nothing can be more Plain and Evident than that there is a GOD,

and that the Existence of an All-Perfect Being is Absolutely necessary.

Perhaps these Arguments are not in Form, I do not oblige my Self to

follow servilely the Rules of Art, nor know I what better Judges will

think of ’em, but they seem to me to be Clear, Rational and Concluding,

which is all I aim at. And I hope the Reader will receive from hence

more light into the way of Arguing, than she cou’d have gain’d had I

spent as many Pages in prescribing Rules and giving trifling Examples,

which when they are known, merit only to be forgot again. But if some

are better pleas’d with the usual way of Syllogism, and think an

Argument cannot be rightly managed without one, for their Satisfaction

we will add another Instance.

Suppose the Question were put \_Whether a Rich Man is Happy\_? By a Rich

Man understanding one who possesses the Wealth and Good things of this

World, and by Happy the Enjoyment of the Proper Good of Man. We compare

the two Terms Riches and Happiness together, to discern if they be so

much one and the same, that what is affirm’d of the one may be laid of

the other; but we find they are not. For if Riches and Happiness were

terms Convertible, then all who are Happy must be Rich, and all who are

Rich must be Happy, to affirm the last of which is to beg the Question,

and the contrary appears by the following Argument, which makes use of

\_Satisfaction with ones own Condition\_ for the middle Idea or Common

Measure.

He who is Happy is satisfied with his Condition and free from Anxious

Cares and Solicitude (for these proceeding from the want of Good, he

who enjoys his proper Good cannot be subject to them.) But Riches do

not free us from Anxieties and Solicitude, they many times encrease

them, Therefore to be Rich and to be Happy are not one and the same

thing.

Again, If there are some who are Happy and yet not Rich, then Riches

and Happiness are two distinct things. But a Good Poor Man is Happy (in

the Enjoyment of GOD who is better to him than Thousands of Gold and

Silver,) therefore Riches and Happiness are to be distinguish’d.

We may further consider, that if the Enjoyment of Riches can make a Man

Happy according to our Notion of Happiness, they must be his Proper

Good. Now if we compare the Idea of Riches with that which we have of

Man, we shall find in the former nothing but what’s Material, External

and Adventitious, but our Idea of the latter represents to us somewhat

that Thinks, and so is of an Immaterial and more noble Nature, a Nature

altogether different from the former, and much more excellent and

Superior to it; and by Consequence the less Noble cannot be the Good of

the more, nor a Body or an Extended Substance, the Proper Good of the

Mind, a Spiritual or Thinking Substance. So that upon the whole matter

we find, that we cannot affirm a Man is Happy because he is Rich,

neither can we deny it; Riches consider’d absolutely in themselves,

neither make a Man Happy nor hinder him from being so. They Contribute

to his Happiness or they Obstruct it according to the Use he makes of

’em.

As for the Common Rules of Disputation they do more frequently Intangle

than Clear a Question, nor is it worth while to know any more of them

than may help to guard us from the Sophistry of those who use them,

and assist us in the managing an Argument fairly, so long as it is

Tenable, and till we are driven from it by the meer dint of Truth. To

be able to hold an Argument Right or Wrong may pass with some perhaps

for the Character of a Good Disputant, which yet I think it is not,

but must by no means be allow’d to be that of a Rational Person; it

belongs to such to detect as soon as may be the Fallacies of an ill

one, and to establish Truth with the Clearest Evidence. For indeed

Truth not Victory is what we shou’d contend for in all Disputes, it

being more Glorious to be Overcome by her than to Triumph under the

Banners of Error. And therefore we pervert our Reason when we make it

the Instrument of an Endless Contention, by seeking after Quirks and

Subtilties, abusing Equivocal Terms, and by practising the rest of

those little Arts every Sophister is full of, which are of no service

in the discovery of Truth, all they can do is to Ward off an Opponents

blow, to make a Noise and raise a Dust, that so we may escape in the

Hurry, our Foil being undiscover’d.

It were endless to reckon up all the Fallacies we put on our selves

and endeavour to obtrude on others. On our selves in the first place,

for however we may be pleas’d in the Contemplation of our own Craft

or to use those softer Names we are apt to give it, our Acuteness and

Ingenuity; who ever attempts to impose on others is first impos’d on

himself, he is cheated by some of those grand Deceivers, the World,

the Flesh, and the Devil, and made to believe that Vain-glory, Secular

Interest, Ambition or perhaps Sensuality or Revenge, or any the like

contemptible Appetites are preferable to Integrity and Truth.

[Sidenote: \_Art of Thinking\_ Pt. 3. Ch. 19, 20.]

Neither is it necessary to reduce the most usual Sophisms to general

Heads, since that’s already very well perform’d in a Book to which

I’de rather refer you, than be at the trouble of Transcribing, having

nothing to add but this, that if I be not mistaken, all the false

Arguings enumerated there, and what others you may happen to meet

with may be discover’d and avoided by the Rules already given, and do

indeed proceed, so far as they relate to the Understanding, from the

Non-observation of some of ’em.

But it is to little purpose to guard our selves against the Sophisms of

the Head, if we lie open to those of the Heart. One irregular Passion

will put a greater Obstacle between us and Truth, than the brightest

Understanding and clearest Reasonings can easily remove. This every

one of us is apt to discern in others, but we’re blind to it in our

selves. We can readily say that it is Pride or Obstinacy, Interest

or Passion or in a word Self-love that keeps our Neighbour from

Conviction, but all this while imagine our own Hearts are very clear of

’em, tho’ more Impartial Judges are of another Mind.

I wish there were no Reason to think that there are some who attempt to

maintain an Opinion which they know to be false, or at least which they

have cause to suspect, and therefore industriously avoid what wou’d

manifest their Error. ’Tis hop’d however that the greatest part of the

Disputers of the World are not of this number, and that the reason why

they offer their Neighbours Sophistical Arguments, is because they

are not aware of it themselves; That what makes them so Positive is

their firm persuasion that they are acted only by a Zeal for GOD, an

honest Constancy and Stanch Integrity, tho at the very same time quite

different Motives move them under these Appearances.

And indeed he must be an extraordinary good Man, a Wonder scarce

produc’d in an Age, who has no Irregular Passion stirring; Who

receives no Manner of Tincture from Pride and Vitious Self-Love,

to which all are so prone, and which hide themselves under so many

disguises; Who is got above the World its Terrors and Allurements,

has laid up his Treasure in Heaven, and is fully Contented with his

Present Circumstances, let them be what they will, having made them

the boundaries of his Desires; who knows how to live on a Little very

happily and therefore receives no Bias from his own Conveniency, nor is

weigh’d down by the dead Weight of his Appetites and Interests; which

ought to be the Temper of every Person who wou’d find out Truth, and

who desires to make a Right Judgment in all things.

We all pretend to this it’s true, and think our selves Injur’d if

it be not believ’d that we are Disinteress’d and free from Passion,

that no Humour or Private End, nothing but an honest Zeal for Truth

gives warmth to our Discourses; and yet it often happens that e’re we

Conclude them, we give just occasion to have it thought, that how large

soever our Knowlege in other things may be, we are not well acquainted

with our own Hearts. All which consider’d, how confidently soever we’re

perswaded of our own Integrity, tho we think we have penetrated to the

very bottom of our Hearts, it wou’d not be amiss to suspect our selves

sometimes, and to fear a Bias, even at the very instant we take care to

avoid one.

For Truth being but One, and the Rational Faculties not differing

in Kind but in Degree, tho there may be different Measures of

Understanding, there could not be such Contradictions in Mens Opinions

as we find there are, even in those who examin as well as in those

who do not, were they acted only by the Love of Truth, and did not

Self-Love perswade them that they shall find their own particular

account by such an Opposition. I wou’d not be so understood as if I

thought that in all Controversies one side must needs be Criminal,

if not by Wilfully Opposing Truth, yet at least by an indulgence of

such unmortifi’d Passions as estrange them from her. No, without doubt

great allowances are to be made on the score of Education, Capacity,

the Leisure, and Opportunity of Information we have had. But this we

may venture to say, that had we but a Modest Opinion of our selves,

believing it as possible for us as for those who contradict us to be

mistaken, did we behave our selves answerable to such a belief; were

we seriously convinc’d that nothing is so much our Interest as a

readiness to admit of Truth, from what ever Hand it comes, greatest

part of our Disputes wou’d have a better Issue than we generally find.

At least if we cou’d not be to happy as to Convince one another, our

Contests wou’d be manag’d with more Temper and Moderation, wou’d not

conclude in such a breach of Charity, or at best in such a Coldness for

each other, as they usually do.

If we consider wisely we shall find it to be our Present Interest as

well as our Future, to do that in Reality which all of us Pretend to,

that is, to Search after and to Follow Truth. And to do it with all

that Candor and Ingenuity which becomes a true Philosopher as well

as a good Christian, making use of no Arguments but what we really

believe, and giving them up contentedly when we meet with stronger.

Our \_Present Interest\_, which is that which weighs most with the

generality, and to which we make all other considerations give place;

For what is it we Contend for? They who have such little Souls as to

bait at any thing beneath the highest End, make Reputation their Aim,

and with it that Authority and Wealth which usually attends it. But

now Reputation cannot be acquir’d, at least not a lasting one, by

Fallacious Reasonings; we may perhaps for a while get a Name by them

amongst unwary Persons, but the World grows too quick-sighted to be

long impos’d on. If a Love of Truth do not, yet Envy and Emulation

will set other heads a Work to discover our Ignorance or Fraud, they

are upon the same Design, and will not suffer us to go away with the

Prize undeservedly. And besides, with how ill an Aspect must he needs

appear who does not Reason fairly, and by consequence, how unlike is

he to gain on those who hear him? There are but three Causes to which

false Arguments can be refer’d, Ignorance, Rashness, or Design, and the

being suspected for any one of these hinders us very much in acquiring

that Reputation, Authority or Preferment we desire. I must confess were

we sure the Fallacy wou’d not be detected, and that we shou’d not lie

under Suspicion of it, we might gain our point; for provided the Paint

do not rub off, good Colouring may serve a present turn as well as a

true Complection: But there is little reason to hope for this, because

of what was just now mention’d, and for other Reasons that might be

added.

Now what can be more provoking than the Idea we have of a Designing

Person? of one who thinks his own Intellectuals so strong and ours

so weak, that he can make us swallow any thing, and lead us where

he pleases? such an one seems to have an Intention to reduce us to

the vilest Slavery, the Captivation of our Understandings, which we

justly reckon to be the highest Insolence. And since every one puts in

for a share of Sense, and thinks he has no reason to complain of the

distribution of it, whoever supposes that another has an over-weaning

Opinion of his own, must needs think that he undervalues his Neighbours

Understanding, and will certainly repay him in his own Coin, and deny

him those advantages he seems to arrogate.

The most we can say for our selves when the weakness of our Arguments

comes to be discover’d, is that we were mistaken thro Rashness

or Ignorance, which tho more pardonable than the former, are no

recommending Qualities. If we argue falsly and know not that we

do so, we shall be more pittied than when we do, but either way

disappointed. And if we have added Rash Censures of those who are not

of our Mind, Pride or Positiveness to our Errors as we cannot so

handsomely Retreat so neither will so fair a Quarter be allow’d as

those who Argue with Meekness, Modesty and Charity may well expect.

So that when we have cast up our Account and estimated the Present

Advantages that false Arguings bring us, I fear what we have got by

a Pretence to Truth, won’t be found to countervail the loss we shall

sustain by the Discovery that it was no more. Which may induce us (if

other Considerations will not) to be wary in receiving any Proposition

ourselves; and restrain us from being forward to impose our Sentiments

on others.

After all, ’tis a melancholy reflection that a great part of

Mankind stand in need of Arguments drawn from so low a Motive as

Worldly Interest, to persuade them to that to which they have much

greater inducements. It is strange that we shou’d need any other

considerations besides the bare performance of our Duty, and those

unspeakable advantages laid up for all such as do it sincerely,

hereafter. When we have the Approbation of GOD and the infinite Rewards

he has propos’d to those who study to recommend themselves to him,

for our Encouragement, how low are we sunk if the Applause of Men and

the little Trifles which they can bestow weigh any thing with us! I

am therefore almost asham’d of proposing so mean a consideration, but

the degeneracy of the Age requir’d it, and they who perhaps at first

follow Truth as the Jews did once, for the Loaves only, may at last be

attracted by its own Native Beauties.

[Sidenote: L’art de Penser, p. 22.]

§. V. As Nature teaches us Logic, so does it instruct us in Rhetoric

much better than Rules of Art, which if they are good ones are nothing

else but those Judicious Observations which Men of Sense have drawn

from Nature, and which all who reflect on the Operations of their own

Minds will find out ’emselves. The common Precepts of Rhetoric may

teach us how to reduce Ingenious ways of speaking to a certain Rule,

but they do not teach us how to Invent them, this is Natures work and

she does it best; there is as much difference between Natural and

Artificial Eloquence as there is between Paint and True Beauty. So that

as a good Author well observes, all that’s useful in this Art, “is the

avoiding certain evil ways of Writing and Speaking, and above all an

Artificial and Rhetorical Stile compos’d of false Thoughts, Hyperboles

and forc’d Figures which is the greatest fault in Rhetoric.”

I shall not therefore recommend under the name of Rhetoric an Art

of speaking floridly on all Subjects, and of dressing up Error and

Impertinence in a quaint and taking garb; any more than I did that

Wrangling which goes by the name of Logic, and which teaches to dispute

\_for\_ and \_against\_ all Propositions indefinitely whether they are

True or False. It is an abuse both of Reason and Address to press’em

into the Service of a Trifle or an Untruth; and a mistake to think

that any Argument can be rightly made, or any Discourse truly Eloquent

that does not illustrate and inforce Truth. For the design of Rhetoric

is to remove those Prejudices that lie in the way of Truth, to Reduce

the Passions to the Government of Reason; to place our Subject in a

Right Light, and excite our Hearers to a due consideration of it.

And I know not what exactness of Method, pure and proper Language,

Figures, insinuating ways of Address and the like signify, any farther

than as they contribute to the Service of Truth by rendring our

Discourse Intelligible, Agreeable and Convincing. They are indeed very

serviceable to it when they are duly managed, for Good Sense loses much

of its efficacy by being ill express’d, and an ill stile is nothing

else but the neglect of some of these, or over doing others of ’em.

Obscurity, one of the greatest faults in Writing, does commonly

proceed from a want of Meditation, for when we pretend to teach others

what we do not understand our selves, no wonder that we do it at a

sorry rate. ’Tis true, Obscurity is sometimes design’d, to conceal an

erroneous opinion which an Author dares not openly own, or which if it

be discover’d he has a mind to evade. And sometimes even an honest and

good Writer who studies to avoid may insensibly fall into it, by reason

that his Ideas being become familiar to himself by frequent Meditation,

a long train of ’em are readily excited in his mind, by a word or two

which he’s us’d to annex to them; but it is not so with his Readers who

are perhaps strangers to his Meditations, and yet ought to have the

very same Idea rais’d in theirs that was in the Authors mind, or else

they cannot understand him. If therefore we desire to be intelligible

to every body, our Expressions must be more plain and explicit than

they needed to be if we writ only for our selves, or for those to whom

frequent Discourse has made our Ideas familiar.

Not that it is necessary to express at length all the Process our Mind

goes thro in resolving a Question, this wou’d spin out our Discourse

to an unprofitable tediousness, the Operations of the Mind being much

more speedy than those of the Tongue or Pen. But we shou’d fold up our

Thoughts so closely and neatly, expressing them in such significant

tho few words, as that the Readers Mind may easily open and enlarge

them. And if this can be done with facility we are Perspicuous as well

as Strong, if with difficulty or not at all, we’re then perplext and

Obscure Writers.

Scarce any thing conduces more to Clearness, the great Beauty of

writing, than Exactness of Method; nor perhaps to Persuasion, for by

putting every thing in its proper place with due Order and Connexion,

the Readers Mind is gently led where the Writer wou’d have it. Such a

Stile is Easy without Softness, Copious as that signifies the omission

of nothing necessary, yet not Wordy and Tedious; nor stuft with

Nauseous Repetitions, which they who do not Think before they Write and

dispose their Matter duly, can scarce avoid. The Method of Thinking has

been already shewn, and the same is to be observ’d in Writing, which if

it be what it ought; is nothing else but the communicating to others

the result of our frequent and deep Meditations, in such a manner as

we judge most effectual to convince them of those Truths which we

believe. Always remembring that the most natural Order is ever best;

that we must first prepare their minds by removing those Prejudices and

Passions which are in our way, and then propose our Reasons with all

the Clearness and Force, with all the Tenderness and Good-Nature we can.

[Sidenote: \_Lock\_ of Hum. Und. B. 3. Ch. 7.]

And since the Clearness and Connexion as well as the Emphasis and

Beauty of a Discourse depends in a great measure on a right use of the

Particles, whoever wou’d Write well ought to inform themselves nicely

in their Proprieties. an \_And\_, a \_The\_, a \_But\_, a \_For\_, &c. do very

much perplex the Sense when they are misplac’d, and make the Reader

take it many times quite otherwise than the Writer meant it. But this

is not a place to say all that this Subject deserves; they who wou’d

have much in a little, may consult an Ingenious Author who has touch’d

upon’t, and from thence take hints to observe how these little words

are applied in good Authors, and how themselves may best use them to

express the several Postures of their own Minds.

In a word, I know not a more compendious way to good Speaking and

Writing, than to chuse out the most excellent in either as a Model

on which to form our selves. Or rather to imitate the Perfections of

all, and avoid their mistakes; for few are so perfect as to be without

fault, and few so bad as to have nothing good in them. A true Judgment

distinguishes, and neither rejects the Good for the sake of the Bad,

nor admits the Bad because of the Good that is mingled with it. No sort

of Style but has its excellency and is liable to defect: If care be

not taken the Sublime which subdues us with Nobleness of Thought and

Grandeur of Expression, will fly out of sight and by being Empty and

Bombast become contemptible. The Plain and Simple will grow Dull and

Abject; the Severe dry and Rugged, the Florid vain and impertinent. The

Strong instead of rousing the Mind will distract and intangle it by

being Obscure; even the Easy and Perspicuous if it be too diffuse, or

ever delicate tires us instead of pleasing. Good Sense is the principal

thing without which all our polishing is of little Worth, and yet if

Ornament be wholly neglected very few will regard us. Studied and

artificial periods are not natural enough to please, they shew too much

solicitude about what does not deserve it, and a loose and careless

Style declares too much contempt of the Public. Neither Reason nor Wit

entertain us if they are driven beyond a certain pitch, and Pleasure it

self is offensive if it be not judiciously dispenc’d.

Every Author almost has some beauty or blemish remarkable in his Style

from whence it takes its name; and every Reader has a peculiar tast

of Books as well as Meats. One wou’d have the Subject exhausted,

another is not pleas’d if somewhat be not left to enlarge on in his

own Meditations. This affects a Grave that a Florid Style; One is for

Easiness, a second for Plainness, a third for Strength, and a fourth

for Politeness. And perhaps the great secret of Writing is the mixing

all these in so just a proportion that every one may tast what he likes

without being disgusted by its contrary. And may find at once that by

the Solidity of the Reason, the purity and propriety of Expression, and

insinuating agreeableness of Address, his Understanding is Enlightned,

his Affections subdued and his Will duly regulated.

This is indeed the true End of Writing, and it wou’d not be hard for

every one to judge how well they had answer’d it, wou’d they but lay

aside Self-Love, so much of it at least, as makes them partial to their

own Productions. Did we consider our own with the same Severity, or

but Indifferency that we do anothers Writing, we might pass a due

Censure on it, might discern what Thought was Crude or ill exprest,

what Reasoning weak, what passage superfluous, where we were flat and

dull, where extravagant and vain, and by Criticizing on our selves do

a greater kindness to the World than we can in making our Remarques on

others. Nor shou’d we be at a loss, if we were Impartial, in finding

out Methods to Inform, Persuade and Please; for Human Nature is for the

most part much alike in all, and that which has a good effect on us,

will generally speaking have the same on others. So that to guess what

success we are like to have, we need only suppose our selves in the

place of those we Address to, and consider how such a Discourse wou’d

operate on us, if we had their Infirmities and Thoughts about us.

And if we do so I believe we shall find, there’s nothing more improper

than Pride and Positiveness, nor any thing more prevalent than an

innocent compliance with their weakness: Such as pretends not to

dictate to their Ignorance, but only to explain and illustrate what

they did or might have known before if they had consider’d it, and

supposes that their Minds being employ’d about some other things was

the reason why they did not discern it as well as we. For Human Nature

is not willing to own its Ignorance; Truth is so very attractive,

there’s such a natural agreement between our Minds and it, that we care

not to be thought so dull as not to be able to find out by our selves

such obvious matters. We shou’d therefore be careful that nothing pass

from us which upbraids our Neighbours Ignorance, but study to remove’t

without appearing to take notice of it, and permit’em to fancy if they

please, that we believe them as Wise and Good as we endeavour to make

them. By this we gain their Affections which is the hardest part of our

Work, excite their Industry and infuse a new Life into all Generous

Tempers, who conclude there’s great hopes they may with a little pains

attain what others think they Know already, and are asham’d to fall

short of the good Opinion we have entertain’d of ’em.

And since many wou’d yield to the Clear Light of Truth were’t not

for the shame of being overcome, we shou’d Convince but not Triumph,

and rather Conceal our Conquest than Publish it. We doubly oblige

our Neighbours when we reduce them into the Right Way, and keep it

from being taken notice of that they were once in the Wrong, which is

certainly a much greater satisfaction than that blaze of Glory which is

quickly out, that noise of Applause which will soon be over. For the

gaining of our Neighbour, at least the having honestly endeavour’d

it, and the leading our own Vanity in Triumph are Real Goods and such

as we shall always have the Comfort of. It is to be wish’d that such

Propositions as are not attended with the Clearest Evidence were

deliver’d only by way of Enquiry, since even the brightest Truth

when Dogmatically dictated is apt to offend our Readers, and make

them imagine their Liberty’s impos’d on, so far is Positiveness from

bringing any body over to our Sentiments. And besides, we’re all of us

liable to mistake, and few have Humility enough to confess themselves

Deceiv’d in what they have confidently asserted, but think they’re

obliged in Honour to maintain an Opinion they’ve once been Zealous

for, how desirous soever they may be to get rid on’t, cou’d they do it

handsomely. Now a Modest way of delivering our Sentiments assists us in

this, and leaves us at liberty to take either side of the Question as

Reason and Riper Consideration shall determine.

In short, as Thinking conformably to the Nature of Things is True

Knowledge, so th’ expressing our Thoughts in such a way, as most

readily, and with the greatest Clearness and Life, excites in others

the very same Idea that was in us, is the best Eloquence. For if our

Idea be conformable to the Nature of the thing it represents, and

its Relations duly stated, this is the most effectual way both to

Inform and Perswade, since Truth being always amiable, cannot fail

of attracting when she’s plac’d in a Right Light, and those to whom

we offer her, are made Able and Willing to discern her Beauties.

If therefore we throughly understand our Subject and are Zealously

affected with it, we shall neither want suitable words to explain, nor

perswasive Methods to recommend it.

And since Piety and Vertue shou’d in spite of the mistaken Customs

of the Age be the principal Theme of a Christians Conversation; that

which those who bear that Sacred Name ought always to regard some way

or other, even when it might be unseasonable to speak of it directly,

the way to be good Orators is to be good Christians, the Practice of

Religion will both instruct us in the Theory, and most powerfully

inforce what we say of it. Did we truly relish the Delights of GOD’s

Service, we cou’d neither refrain from talking of the Pleasure, nor be

so ill-natur’d as not to strive to Communicate it; and were we duly

warm’d with a Zeal for his Glory and concern for our Neighbours Soul,

no Figures of Rhetoric, no Art of Perswasion wou’d be wanting to us. We

shou’d diligently watch for Opportunities, and carefully improve them,

accommodating our Discourse to the Understanding and Genius of all we

cou’d hope to do good to.

Besides, by being True Christians we have Really that Love for others

which all who desire to perswade must pretend to; we’ve that \_Probity\_

and \_Prudence\_, that \_Civility\_ and \_Modesty\_ which the Masters of this

Art say a good Orator must be endow’d with; and have pluck’d up those

Vicious Inclinations from whence the most distastful faults of Writing

proceed. For why do we chuse to be Obscure but because we intend to

Deceive, or wou’d be thought to see much farther than our Neighbours?

One sort of Vanity prompts us to be Rugged and Severe, and so possess’d

with the imagin’d Worth and Solidity of our Discourse, that we think

it beneath us to Polish it: Another disposes us to Elaborate and

Affected ways of Writing, to Pompous and improper Ornaments; and why

are we tediously Copious but that we fancy every Thought of ours is

extraordinary? Contradiction is indeed for our advantage as tending to

make us wiser, yet our Pride makes us impatient under it, because it

seems to Lessen that Esteem and Deference we desire shou’d be paid us.

Whence come those sharp Reflections, those imagin’d strains of Wit,

not to be endur’d amongst Christians, and which serve not to Convince

but to Provoke, whence come they but from Ill-nature or Revenge, from

a Contempt of others and a desire to set forth our own Wit? Did we

write less for our selves we should sooner gain our Readers, who are

many times disgusted at a well writ Discourse if it carries a tang

of Ostentation: And were our Temper as Christian as it ought to be,

our Zeal wou’d be spent on the most Weighty things, not on little

differences of Opinions.

I have made no distinction in what has been said between Speaking and

Writing, because tho they are talents which do not always meet, yet

there is no material difference between ’em. They Write best perhaps

who do’t with the gentile and easy air of Conversation; and they Talk

best who mingle Solidity of Thought with th’ agreableness of a ready

Wit. As for \_Pronunciation\_, tho it takes more with some Auditors

many times than Good Sense, there needs little be said of it here,

since Women have no business with the Pulpit, the Bar or St. \_Stephens

Chappel\_: And Nature does for the most part furnish ’em with such a

Musical Tone, Perswasive Air and winning Address as renders their

Discourse sufficiently agreeable in Private Conversation. And as to

spelling which they’re said to be defective in, if they don’t believe

as they’re usually told, that it’s fit for ’em to be so, and that to

write exactly is too Pedantic, they may soon correct that fault, by

Pronouncing their words aright and Spelling ’em accordingly. I know

this Rule won’t always hold because of an Imperfection in our Language

which has been oft complain’d of but is not yet amended; But in this

case a little Observation or recourse to Books will assist us; and if

at any time we happen to mistake by Spelling as we Pronounce, the fault

will be very Venial, and Custom rather to blame than we.

I’ve said nothing of \_Grammar\_ tho we can’t Write properly if we

transgress its Rules, supposing that Custom and the reading of English

Books are sufficient to teach us the Grammar of our own Tongue, If

we do but in any measure attend to them. And tho Women are generally

accus’d of Writing false English, if I may speak my own Experience,

their Mistakes are not so common as is pretended, nor are they the only

Persons guilty. What they most commonly fail in is the Particles and

Connexion, and that generally thro a Briskness of temper which make

them forget, or Hast which will not suffer ’em to read over again what

went before. And indeed, those who Speak true Grammar unless they ’re

very Careless cannot write false, since they need only peruse what

they’ve Writ, and consider whether they wou’d express ’emselves thus in

Conversation.

[Sidenote: Art of speaking.]

But for this and for \_Figures\_, &c. and indeed for all that relates

to this Subject, I must refer you to an Ingenious Treatise which

handles it fully, and to which I’me oblig’d in great measure for what

little skill I have. Observing only, that whatever it is we Treat of,

our Stile shou’d be such as may keep our Readers Attent, and induce

them to go to the End. Now Attention is usually fixt by Admiration,

which is excited by somewhat uncommon either in the Thought or way

of Expression. We fall a sleep over an Author who tells us in an

ordinary manner no more than we knew before: He who wou’d Take must

be Sublime in his Sense, and must cloath it after a Noble way. His

Thoughts must not be superficial, such as every one may fall into at

the first glance, but the very Spirits and Essence of Thinking, the sum

of many hours Meditation folded up in one handsome and comprehensive

Period, whose Language is Intelligible and Easy that the Readers

may not lose the pleasure of the Kernel, by the pain they find in

cracking the Shell. The most difficult Subject must be made easy by

his way of handling it; tho his Matter may deserve a Meditation, yet

his Expressions must be so Clear that he needs not be read twice to

be Understood; \_these\_ are to be Natural and Familiar, condiscending

to the meanest Capacity, whilst his Thoughts are Great enough to

entertain the highest. He Discourses always on a Useful Subject in a

manner agreeable to it, and pleases that he may Instruct; Nothing seems

Studied in his whole Composition, yet every thing is Extraordinary, a

Beautiful Harmony shining thro all its parts. No Sentence is Doubtful,

no word Equivocal, his Arguments are Clear and his Images Lively; all

the Ideas he excites in your Mind, as nearly resemble the thing they

represent as Words can make them. Whilst th’ exactness of his Method,

and Force of his Reason Enlighten and Convince the Mind; the Vivacity

of his Imagination and insinuating Address, gain the Affections and

Conquer the Will. By the weight and closeness of the former you wou’d

take him for an Angel, and the tender and affable sweetness of the

last bespeaks him a Friend. He considers that as mere Florish and

Rhetorick are good for nothing, so neither will bare Reason dull and

heavily express’d perform any great matter, at least not on those who

need it most, whose Palates being deprav’d their Medicines must be

administred in a pleasing Vehicle. Since Mankind are averse to their

Real Happiness, he does not only tell ’em their Duty but Interesses

them in it; and thinking it not enough to run ’em down with the

strength of Reason, he draws ’em over to a Voluntary Submission by

th’ attractives of his Eloquence. For he has a peculiar Turn and Air

which animates every Period, so that the very same Truth which was

dry and Unaffecting in a vulgar Authors words, Charms and Subdues you

when cloath’d in his. He shews no more warmth than may convince his

Readers that he’s heartily persuaded of the Truths he offers them; and

if it is necessary at any time to make use of Figures to give a more

Lively Representation than plain Expressions cou’d, to discribe his

own Passions and excite the same in others upon a just occasion, in

a word to awaken a Stupid and Clear the Mind of a Prejudic’d Reader,

his Figures are duly chosen and discreetly us’d. For he knows that

scarce any thing speaks a greater want of Judgment than the shewing

concern where there needs none, or is a worse fault in Oratory than

the polishing a Wrong or a Trifling Thought, the neatness of whose

dress may strike with Admiration perhaps at first sight, but upon a

review it will certainly appear Contemptible. And therefore as he does

not abound in Superfluous Ornaments, so neither does he reject any

thing that can promote his End, which is not his own Reputation, but

the Glory of his GOD and his Neighbours Edification. He considers the

narrowness of the Humane Mind, and says all that is necessary but no

more; Understands it so well as to know what will move and Please,

and has so much command of himself as to give over when he has done

enough. Yet he can exhaust the most fruitful Subject without making

the Reader weary; for when he enlarges it is in Things not Words, and

he mingles Variety without Confusion. All the divers excellencies of

different Stiles meet in his to make up a perfect one, Strength and

Ease, Solidity and Liveliness, the Sublime and the Plain. He’s neither

so Lofty as to fly out of Sight, nor so humble as to become Creeping

and Contemptible. His Strength does not make him Rugged and Perplext

nor his Smoothness Weak and Nice; tho every thing is Neat, there’s not

a grain of Affectation; he is gratefull to the Ear, but far remov’d

from jingling Cadence. Brief when there is occasion without Dryness

or Obscurity, and Florid enough to entertain th’ Imagination without

Distracting the Mind. There’s not an Antiquated or Barbarous Word to be

found in him, all is Decent, Just and Natural; no peculiar or Affected

Phrases, whether Courtly or Clownish, Grave or Burlesque. For Plain and

Significant Language is ever best, we have a mistaken Idea of Learning

if we think to pretend to’t by sending our Reader every minute to the

Dictionary. Words out of the common way are only allowable when they

express our Sense with greater Force than Ordinary ones cou’d, or when

they are so significant as to ease us of Circumlocutions, a hard word

which I cou’d not avoid without using half a dozen words.

After all, it may not be amiss to take notice that Ornaments are common

to Falshood and Truth, but Clearness and strength of Reasoning are not.

They who wou’d propagate Error usually disguise it in Equivocal Terms

and Obscure Phrases; they strive to engage our Passions, rather than

to Convince our Reason, and carry us away in the torrent of a warm

Imagination. They endeavour to refute, or if they can’t do that, to

Ridicule the contrary opinion, and think this Sufficient to establish

their own. Being much better skill’d in pulling down former Systems

than in building new ones, for it requires no great skill to Object,

and there are many Truths which we’re very Certain of, and yet not able

to answer every Impertinent Enquiry concerning ’em. Their greatest Art

is in confounding things, in giving a probable Air to what they write,

in pretending to Demonstration where the nature of the Truth does not

require’t, and in evading it where it does. An Immoral or Heretical

Discourse therefore may be \_Cunningly\_ but not \_well\_ writ, for we can

never plead for Error and Vice with true Eloquence. We may trick’em

up in a handsom Garb, adorn’em with quaint Expressions, and give them

such a plausible turn as may enable them to do very much Mischief; but

this is only a fulsom Carcass, the substance and Life are not there if

Vertue and Truth are wanting.

§. VI. For it is to little purpose to Think well and speak well, unless

we \_Live well\_, this is our Great Affair and truest Excellency, the

other are no further to be regarded than as they may assist us in this.

She who does not draw this Inference from her Studies has Thought in

vain, her notions are Erroneous and Mistaken. And all her Eloquence is

but an empty noise, who employs it in any other design than in gaining

Proselytes to Heaven. I am therefore far from designing to put Women on

a vain pursuit after unnecessary and useless Learning, nor wou’d by any

means persuade them to endeavour after Knowledge cou’d I be convinc’d

that it is improper for ’em. Because I know very well that tho a thing

be never so excellent in it self, it has but an ill grace if it be not

suitable to the Person and Condition it is apply’d to. Fine Cloaths

and Equipage do not become a Beggar, and a Mechanic who must work

for daily bread for his Family, wou’d be wickedly Employ’d shou’d he

suffer ’em to starve whilest he’s solving Mathematical Problems. If

therefore Women have another Duty incumbent on ’em, and such as is

inconsistent with what we here advise, we do ill to take them from it:

But to affirm this is to beg the Question, and is what I will never

grant till it be better prov’d than as yet it appears to be. For if the

Grand Business that Women as well as Men have to do in this World be to

prepare for the next, ought not all their Care and Industry to Centre

here? and since the matter is of Infinite Consequence is it equitable

to deny ’em the use of any help? If therefore Knowledge were but any

ways Instrumental, tho at the remotest distance, to the Salvation of

our Souls, it were fit to apply our selves to it; and how much more

when it is so necessary, that without it we can’t do any thing that’s

Excellent, or Practise Vertue in the most Perfect manner. For unless we

Understand our Duty and the Principles of Religion, we don’t perform

a Rational Service, it is but by Chance that we are Good or so much as

Christians. We are their Property into whose hands we fall, and are led

by those who with greatest Confidence impose their Opinions on us; Are

as moveable as the different Circumstances that befall us; or if we

happen to be Constant in our first way, it is not Reason but Obstinacy

that makes us so. A great deal of Good will be omitted, and very much

Evil, or Imperfection at least, stick to us, if we are not throughly

acquainted with the Law of God and the secret springs and windings of

our Hearts, which is scarce to be obtain’d without much Meditation and

the helps that study affords.

And as when a rash young Traveller is about to run into dangerous

places beset with Thieves and full of Precipices, if you have any

hearty concern for his safety, you’l not think it enough barely to

shew him his way, or even to tell him of the Danger, especially if

the entrance seems fair and inviting and treacherous Companions are

upon the watch to decoy him into it: But you’l expose it in all its

frightful Circumstances, endeavour to quicken his vigilance and excite

his Passions, and all little enough for his Security. So it cannot be

thought sufficient that Women shou’d but just know whats Commanded and

what Forbid, without being inform’d of the Reasons why, since this is

not like to secure them in their Duty. For we find a Natural Liberty

within us which checks at an Injunction that has nothing but Authority

to back it; And tho Religion is indeed supported by the Strongest

Reasons, and inforc’d by the most powerful Motives, yet if we are not

acquainted with ’em, ’tis all one to us as if it were not. But having

spoke of this in the first part we shall not farther enlarge on it here.

Perhaps it will be objected that we’ve said \_the great Truths of

Religion carry a force and Evidence suited to the very Vulgar, and that

GOD has not design’d All for Philosophers\_. And therefore if the way

to the most necessary Knowlege be so very plain, and all Capacities

are not fitted for higher attainments, what needs this ado about th’

Improvement of our minds? the only thing necessary is to be good

Christians, and we may be that without being Philosophers. Suppose we

may: This will Justify such as want Time and Capacity, but can never

excuse the Sloth and Stupidity of those who have both.

For unless we have very strange Notions of the Divine Wisdom we must

needs allow that every one is placed in such a Station as they are

fitted for. And if the necessity of the world requires that some

Persons shou’d Labour for others, it likewise requires that others

shou’d Think for them. Our Powers and Faculties were not given us for

nothing, and the only advantage one Woman has above another, is the

being allotted to the more noble employment. No body is plac’d without

their own fault, in such unhappy Circumstances as to be incapable of

Salvation, but some are plac’d in such happy ones as to be capable of

attaining much greater degrees of Happiness than others if they do not

neglect them: And shou’d these last do no more than the very utmost

that is expected from the former, I know not how they wou’d acquit

themselves, or what account they cou’d give of their great Advantages.

And therefore tho no body shall be condemn’d because they \_Cou’d\_ not,

yet we have reason to fear if our Case be such as that we \_Might\_ but

\_Wou’d\_ not receive Instruction. She then who makes this Objection must

not take it amiss if we Judge of her in other Cases according to what

she Pleads in this: She must never set up for a Wit, or a censurer

of her Neighbours, must not pretend to be a fine Lady or any thing

extraordinary: but be content to herd amongst the Drudges of the World

who eat Their Bread in the Sweat of their Brows, if she says she wants

Leisure; or in a less acceptable rank amongst the Fools and Ideots,

or but one degree above them, if she says she wants Capacity for this

Employment. It is one thing to be content with Ignorance, or rather

with a less degree of Knowledge, on account of the Station that GOD

has plac’d us in, and Another to Chuse and Delight in’t thro a Stupid

Carelesness, a fear of Trouble, or an Inordinate pursuit of the Cares

and Pleasures of this Mortal Life. This last only shews our Disesteem

of our Souls, our Contempt of GOD and the Talents he has given us,

and exposes us to all the dreadful consequences of such a neglect; to

Punishments to which not only those who misemploy their Lord’s Talent,

but even they who don’t employ it at all, are Obnoxious.

And indeed as unnecessary as it is thought for Women to have Knowledge,

she who is truly good finds very great use of it, not only in the

Conduct of her own Soul but in the management of her Family, in the

Conversation of her Neighbours and in all the Concerns of Life.

Education of Children is a most necessary Employment, perhaps the chief

of those who have any; But it is as Difficult as it is Excellent when

well perform’d; and I question not but that the mistakes which are made

in it, are a principal Cause of that Folly and Vice, which is so much

complain’d of and so little mended. Now this, at least the foundation

of it, on which in a great measure the success of all depends, shou’d

be laid by the Mother, for Fathers find other Business, they will not

be confin’d to such a laborious work, they have not such opportunities

of observing a Childs Temper, nor are the greatest part of ’em like

to do much good, since Precepts contradicted by Example seldom prove

effectual. Neither are Strangers so proper for it, because hardly any

thing besides Paternal Affection can sufficiently quicken the Care

of performing, and sweeten the labour of such a task. But Tenderness

alone will never discharge it well, she who wou’d do it to purpose must

throughly understand Human nature, know how to manage different Tempers

Prudently, be Mistress of her own, and able to bear with all the little

humours and follies of Youth, neither Severity nor Lenity are to be

always us’d, it wou’d ruin some to be treated in that manner which is

fit for others. As Mildness makes some ungovernable, and as there is a

stupor in many from which nothing but Terrors can rouse them, so sharp

Reproofs and Solemn Lectures serve to no purpose but to harden others,

in faults from which they might be won by an agreeable Address and

tender application. GOD himself waits to be gracious and administers

his Medicines in the most proper season, and Parents shou’d imitate

him in this, for the want of observing it, and of accommodating their

Methods to the several Dispositions they have to deal with, is perhaps

the reason that many Pious Persons lose the fruit of their Pains and

Care.

Nor will Knowledge lie dead upon their hands who have no Children to

Instruct; the whole World is a single Ladys Family, her opportunities

of doing good are not lessen’d but encreas’d by her being unconfin’d.

Particular Obligations do not contract her Mind, but her Beneficence

moves in the largest Sphere. And perhaps the Glory of Reforming this

Prophane and Profligate Age is reserv’d for you Ladies, and that the

natural and unprejudic’d Sentiments of your Minds being handsomly

express’d, may carry a more strong conviction than the Elaborate

Arguments of the Learned. Such as fence themselves against the Cannon

they bring down, may lie open to an Ambuscade from you. And whilst the

strong arguings of the Schools like the Wind in the Fable, seems but to

harden these Sturdy Sinners, your Persuasions like the Suns mild and

powerful rays, may oblige them to cast off that Cloak of Maliciousness

in which they are so much intangled. And surely it is worth your while

to fit your selves for this: ’Tis a Godlike thing to relieve even

the Temporal wants of our Fellow Creatures, to keep a \_Body\_ from

perishing, but it is much more Divine, to \_Save a Soul from Death\_! A

Soul which in his estimate who best knows the value of it, is worth

more than all the World. They who are thus \_wise shall shine as the

brightness of the Firmament, and they who turn many to Righteousness

as the Stars for ever\_; which is a Glory we may honestly Contend for,

a Beauty we may lawfully Covet; O that we had but Ambition enough to

aspire after it! O that we had but so much at least as we see daily

thrown away on a poor transitory Earthly Diadem, which sets uneasy on

his head who wears it, and which a longer arm may wrest from his Brows!

But alas it was in our fore-fathers days that the Kingdom of Heav’n

was took by violence; they thought nothing, and we think every thing

too much to Do or Suffer to obtain it! Not but that it is still as

bright and glorious, as truly attractive, but we are dull and stupid we

shut our eyes and won’t behold its Charms. Were we but duly sensible

of this we shou’d think no Posterity so desireable as the Offspring

of our Minds, nor any state so great as the carrying a large Train of

Followers with us to the Court of Heaven! So much Knowledge therefore

as is necessary to engage and keep us firm in our Christian Course, to

fit us to help others in theirs, to stir us up to pursue, and direct us

in our endeavours after one of the brightest Crowns of Glory, does very

well become us; and more than this I do not contend for, being far from

desiring that any one shou’d neglect her Necessary Affairs to amuse her

self with nice Speculations. No; She who has a Family is discharging

part of her Christian Calling whilst She’s taking care for its Support

and Government, and wou’d be very much out, if she lock’d her self in

her Study, when her Domesticks had need of her direction. But there

are few of those to whom I write, who have not a good deal of time to

spare, if you reckon whats thrown away on fantastic Impertinencies,

and ’tis this I wou’d have better employ’d: Were not a Morning more

advantageously spent at a Book than at a Looking-Glass, and an

Evening in Meditation than in Gaming? Were not Pertinent and Ingenious

Discourse more becoming in a visit, than Idle twattle and uncharitable

Remarks? than a Nauseous repetition of a set of fine words which no

body believes or cares for? And is not the fitting our selves to do

Real Services to our Neighbours, a better expression of our Civility

than the formal performance of a thousand ridiculous Ceremonies, which

every one condemns and yet none has the Courage to break thro?

CHAP. IV.

\_Concerning the Regulation of the Will and the Government of the

Passions.\_

As the Capacity which we find in our selves of Receiving and Comparing

Ideas is what we call the Understanding, so the Power of Preferring

any Thought or Motion, of Directing them to This or That thing rather

than to another is what we mean by the Will: Whose Regularity consists

in a constant Tendency towards such things as ought to be Prefer’d, or

in a word, in Conformity to the Will of GOD. That GOD’s Will is the

Rule of ours is methinks so plain that it needs no proof; for why do

we Prefer a thing but because we Judge it Best? and why do we Chuse it

but because it Seems Good for us? Now GOD being Infinitely Wise all his

Judgments must be Infallible, and being Infinitely Good he can Will

nothing but what is best, nor prescribe any thing that is not for our

Advantage. This is I dare say what every one Thinks if they think at

all about the matter and is the Rule they wou’d Act by did they give

themselves leave upon all occasions duly to Consider and Weigh what is

propos’d to them.

But as there are some Ideas which our Understandings receive so early

that they seem to be born with us, which are never totally absent from

our minds, and are in a manner the source of all the rest; so there

are certain Motions or Inclinations inseparable from the Will, which

push us on to the use of that Power, and determine it to the Choice

of such things as are most agreeable to them. Nor shou’d we do amiss

in following these Inclinations did they keep that Impression which

the Author of Nature gave them, which is towards Good in general, or

towards himself, for he only is our True Good, and these are the Wings

of the Soul which shou’d carry it on vigorously towards him.

Whether there is not in us an Inclination to do what is \_Fit\_, that is

to think and Act agreeably to a Rational Nature, without considering

our own particular advantage I shall not here dispute. For whether

this be so or no, ’tis certain that in our present Circumstances, we

cannot separate \_Fit\_ and \_Good\_ in Reality, tho we may have distinct

Ideas of them. What is really proper for Rational Creatures to do,

tending necessarily to their Happiness, and nothing being able to make

them truly Happy but that which is fit to be done. Besides, so pure an

Inclination being wholly abstracted from Self-Love and Prejudice is not

subject to any Irregularity, and so needs not be spoken of here; and

perhaps so few are acquainted with it, that it will hardly be known

what we mean by it.

An Inclination therefore after Happiness is that to which we shall at

present reduce all the rest; which Happiness we pursue by removing

as far as we can from that which is uneasie to us, and by uniting

our selves as much as we are able to some Good which we suppose we

want. The former of these being indeed a pursuit of Good, tho not

so Directly as the latter. Good then is the Object of the Will, and

hitherto one wou’d think there were no probability of our straying from

the Will of GOD, and that there were so little need of advising us

to Will as GOD Wills that it is impossible we shou’d Will otherwise;

because whenever we oppose our Wills to his, we change in a manner the

very Constitution of our Nature and fly from that Happiness which we

wou’d pursue.

But the misfortune is as has been once observ’d already, that we

Will e’re we are capable of examining the Reasons of our Choice, or

of viewing our Ideas so exactly as we must if we wou’d Judge aright.

And the frequent repetition of such unreasonable Choices makes them

Customary to us, and consequently gives a new and wrong bias to our

Inclinations, which upon all occasions dispose the Will to the Choice

of such things as we suppose, tho by mistake, to contribute to our

Happiness. Add to this, that the Passions which are certain Commotions

in the Bloud and Animal Spirits accompanying these Inclinations,

design’d in the Order of Nature for the good of the Body, as the

Inclinations were intended for the Good of the Soul, do so unite

us to sensible things, and represent ’em with such advantage, that

Spiritual Good which seems at a greater distance relishes very little,

and abstracted Truths do not find us so Impartial as to examin them

throughly, and to give them their due Weight, when they’re ballanc’d

against such things as may be Seen and Felt; these being commonly

preferr’d, not for their intrinsic worth, but for their outward Shew

and the Bulk they carry.

That we always endeavour to be Happy is sufficiently evident, and that

we too frequently fly from GOD who only can make us so, Experience

sadly Demonstrates. Which cou’d not be did we not grosly mistake our

Happiness, as we certainly do whenever we Will any thing in opposition

to the Will of GOD, whatever Appearance of Good it may happen to carry.

’Tis true the Will does always pursue Good, or somewhat represented to

it as such, but it is not always, or rather very seldom, determin’d

to the Choice of what is in it self the greatest Good. And though I

suppose we always Chuse that which in that Juncture in which it is

propos’d seems fittest for our Present turn, yet it is often such

as we wou’d not prefer, did we impartially examin and observe the

Consequences. But we will not do that, chusing rather to Act by the

Wrong Judgments we have formerly made, and to follow blindly the

Propensities they have given us, than to suspend our Inclinations as

we both May and Ought, and restrain them from determining our Will,

till we have fairly and fully examin’d and ballanc’d, according to the

best of our Knowledge, the several degrees of Good and Evil present

and future that are in the Objects set before us. The neglect of which

is at once both our Fault and Misery; Our Fault in that we precipitate

our Choice, refusing to Consider sufficiently to rectifie our Mistakes.

And our Misery because we shall certainly be Disappointed sooner or

later, and be convinc’d that what was so Hastily and Unreasonably

Chosen, ought not even then to have been prefer’d, how Pleasant soever

it appear’d, seeing it neither Was nor Cou’d be Good for us.

It seems indeed the greatest wonder in the World how any Man in his

Senses can prefer the short Pleasures of Sin, which are attended even

in this Life with Pain and Shame, and a thousand Inconveniencies,

to the Present Delights of Vertue, and the Prospect of a Felicity

Infinite and Eternal, if he does at all compare them. An Eternity of

Joys must needs be preferable to Fifty or Threescore Years of Sinful

Pleasures, weigh them in what Scales you please, and supposing these

much greater than ever any Sinner found ’em, especially since they are

attended with Eternal Pains, and no perverse Inclination can make us

think otherwise if it will allow us to consider. But it will not allow

Consideration, or if it does a little permit it, it deceives us however

with fallacious Salvoes. It fixes our Thoughts on a Present Uneasiness

which it says must be remov’d, and our Desires gratify’d at any rate,

without suffering us to weigh the ill Consequences of doing so. And

perhaps the Wrong bias which we receive from our Evil Inclinations does

not consist in the persuading us that a Present Sinful Pleasure or

Profit, is the Greatest Good, or that it ought to be Prefer’d before

the Favour of GOD and Eternal Beatitude, which whenever we Think of

we must needs acknowledge to be infinitely greater, but in keeping us

from a full Conviction that th’ one can’t be Chosen without Renouncing

th’ other, and in making us unwilling to examine throughly, lest we

shou’d want the pretence of Ignorance or Passion to excuse what our

Consciences can’t but Reproach us with as an unworthy Choice, whenever

we permit our selves to Reflect.

So that the great aggravation of Sin seems to consist in this, That

the commission of it is a pretending to be Wiser or Stronger than

GOD, an attempt to out-wit him by Fineness, or else by plain Force

to wrest his Felicity from him whether he Will or no. For seeing we

always Will Happiness, and yet wou’d be Happy after another manner than

GOD Wills we shall, we express a Desire, and an Endeavour so far as

we’re able to Oppose and Alter his Will and Order, by reconciling the

gratification of a present unreasonable Appetite with the Enjoyment of

Happiness, tho he has declar’d they can’t be reconciled, and made it in

the ordinary course of things impossible they shou’d.

[Sidenote: Mr. \_Boyle\_ Style of Scripture.]

The Will of GOD then is the Rule of ours, and if it be ask’d how we

shall come to the Knowledge of it? the Answer is ready, that the

Eternal Word and Wisdom of GOD declares his Fathers Will unto us, by

\_Reason\_ which is that Natural and Ordinary Revelation by which he

speaks to every one; and by that which is call’d \_Revelation\_ in a

stricter Sense, which is nothing else but a more perfect and infallible

way of Reasoning, whereby we are Clearly and Fully instructed in so

much of GOD’s Will as is fit for us to know. We must therefore Improve

our Reason as much as our Circumstances in the World permit, and to

supply its deficiency Seriously, Devoutly and Diligently study the Holy

Scriptures “than which (to use the words of a most excellent Person) a

Christian needs understand no other Book to know the duty of his Faith

and Life, tho indeed to understand it well, ’tis ordinarily requisite

that a pretty number of other Books be understood.”

[Sidenote: See P. 114, \_&c.\_]

In the former Chapter we have laid down a Method of using our Reason so

as to discover Truth, by observing of which ’tis hop’d we may escape

from considerable Errors, and consequently from great Offences. And

tho I can’t say we shall never be Mistaken nor Chuse amiss, yet our

Infirmities will be very pitiable, such as our Just and Merciful Lord

God will never impute to us, tho we our selves ought to be humbled for

and always endeavouring to rectifie ’em.

After all, the best way to be further Instructed in the Knowledge of

our Duty is to Practise so much of it as we Know already. By keeping

GOD’s Commandments, we get such a sound and strong Constitution of

Soul, as leads us naturally to our True Good. For as a healthy person

whose Tast is not vitiated, is directed by that, without examining

the Philosophy of Bodys to such things as are fit for the nourishment

of his own: So a Divine Sensation gives us a lively relish of what’s

Good, and a perfect aversion to the contrary. It endues the Soul not

only with a Sagacity of Understanding to discern readily what is best,

but likewise with such a Regularity of Will, as makes it even Hate and

Abhor all evil ways.

A most desirable Temper no doubt, the very top of Human Felicity, but

how shall we obtain it? We find our selves under the power of quite

contrary Inclinations and Relishes, and how to get rid of ’em we know

not. This is indeed a very wretched condition, the only thing that

deserves our Sorrow, yet the Case is not so desperate, but that by the

help of an Almighty Physician we may be Cured, if in good earnest we

set about it. And because the not discerning our true Happiness and the

being accustom’d to pursue a false one is the cause of our Disorder,

somewhat must be done by way of Meditation and somewhat by way of

Exercise.

Now I know not any Subjects more proper for our Meditation on this and

all occasions, than our own Nature, the Nature of Material Beings, and

the Nature of GOD; because it is thro the mistake of some of these that

our Inclinations take a wrong bias, and consequently that we transgress

against GOD, our Neighbour and our selves. For did we consider what

we Are, that Humane Nature conflicts in the Union of a Rational Soul

with a Mortal Body, that the Body very often Clogs the Mind in its

noblest Operations, especially when indulg’d. That we stand not singly

on our own Bottom, but are united in some measure to all who bear a

Human Form, especially to the Community amongst whom we live, and yet

more particularly to those several Relations we may have in it. Did we

go on to consider what are the proper Duties and Enjoyments of such a

nature as ours, that is, what performances do naturally result from

those Capacities we find our selves endow’d with, which may therefore

be reasonably expected from us, and what sort of Pleasures we are made

to relish. Again, were we so far at least Philosophers, as to be able

to pass a due estimate on Material Beings, did we know ’em so well as

not to prize them above their real value. Did we in the last place

contemplate the Author of our Being, \_from\_ whom we Derive and \_to\_

whom we owe our \_All\_; and insted of prying saucily into his Essence,

(an insufferable presumption in Creatures who are ignorant of their

own) or pretending to know more of him than he has thought fit to

communicate in his Word, and in that Idea of Infinite Perfection which

he has giv’n us, Frequently, Seriously and Humbly Meditate on what he

has been pleas’d to unveil. Did we but employ so much of our Time and

Thoughts on these things as we do on our Sins and Vanities, we shou’d

not be long in discerning the good effects.

For I question not but that we shou’d be convinc’d that the Body is

the Instrument of the Mind and no more, that it is of a much Inferior

Nature, and therefore ought to be kept in such a Case as to be ready

on all occasions to serve the Mind. That the true and proper Pleasure

of Human Nature consists in the exercise of that Dominion which the

Soul has over the Body, in governing every Passion and Motion according

to Right Reason, by which we most truly pursue the real good of both,

it being a mistake as well of our Duty as our Happiness to consider

either part of us singly, so as to neglect what is due to the other.

For if we disregard the Body wholly, we pretend to live like Angels

whilst we are but Mortals; and if we prefer or equal it to the Mind we

degenerate into Brutes. The former indeed is not frequent, it is only

to be found amongst a few Scrupulous Persons, who sometimes impose

such rigors on the Body, as GOD never requires at their hands, because

they are inconsistent with a Human Frame. The latter is the common and

dangerous fault, for the most of us accustom our selves to tast no

other Pleasures than what are convey’d to us by the Organs of Sense, we

pamper our Bodies till they grow resty and ungovernable, and instead

of doing Service to the Mind, get Dominion over it.

Thus we learn what is truly to Love our selves: for tho Self-Love as it

is usually understood has a very ill Character and is the Root of Evil,

yet rightly apply’d it is Natural and Necessary, the great inducement

to all manner of Vertue. They cannot be said to Love their Body who

wou’d not willingly suffer a little pain in a Finger to preserve

an Arm, much more to save their Life; nor do they in reality love

themselves, who wou’d not readily suffer any uneasiness in their Body,

which may conduce to the good of their Mind; and who do not prefer the

least probability of bettering their condition in the next Life, to all

the Conveniencies of this, nay even to Life it self.

Again, when we consider that we are but several Parts of one great

Whole, and are by Nature so connected to each other, that whenever one

part suffers the rest must suffer with it, either by Compassion or else

by being punish’d for the want of it, we shall never be so absurd as

to fancy we can do ourselves a Service by any thing Injurious to our

Neighbours.

And finding both that we’re endow’d with many excellent Faculties,

which are capable of great Improvement, such as bespeak in us somewhat

too Divine, to have it once imagin’d that it was made for nothing else

but to move a portion of Matter 70 or 80 Years; to Act only on the

Stage of an Unjust and Ill-natur’d World, where Folly and Wickedness

usually go away with the Reward that is due to Wisdom and Vertue: And

yet that for all these Excellencies, somewhat is still wanting to

complete our Happiness, we do not find intire Felicity in our selves,

but we are conscious of many wants which must be supply’d elsewhere.

We therefore look about to see where we may meet with this Supply, and

Material Beings with which were compass’d do first present themselves.

These are the Objects of our Senses, it is at their presence that the

Body tasts all its Pleasures, no wonder therefore if it endeavour to

persuade us that our Good is here, tho a little Consideration, if not

our frequent disappointments when we seek no further, were sufficient

one wou’d think to convince us that it is not. For when we come to

weigh ’em in an impartial consideration we discern, that as they are

GOD’s Work they have a Perfection suitable to their several Natures,

and are as perfect as is consistent with the several Ranks and Stations

they are plac’d in, so that consider’d Positively they are not to be

Contemn’d, since they set forth the Wisdom, Power and Goodness of their

Maker. But if we compare them with the Human Soul they appear of

little value, and of none at all in comparison of Him who made them;

and since their Nature is beneath, and their Worth much less than ours,

we cannot find our Happiness in ’em. They contribute ’tis true to the

Preservation and Ease of the Body, they help to make it fit for the

Service of the Mind; But since a very few of ’em will do this, the rest

are but a load and trouble, so far from being useful, that they indeed

hurt us, unless they’re made to minister to Charity and Contemplation.

Let then these little things be drawn aside, these Clouds that hide

the most adorable Face of GOD from us, these Mud-walls that enclose

our Earthly Tabernacle and will not suffer us to be pierc’d with the

Beams of his Glory, and wounded, not to Death but Life, with the Arrows

of his Love and Beauty. In him we find that infinite Good which alone

can satisfie us, and which is not to be found elsewhere! Somewhat in

which we lose our selves with Wonder, Love and Pleasure! Somewhat too

ineffable to be nam’d, too Charming, too Delightful not to be eternally

desir’d! And were we not sunk into Sense, and buried alive in a croud

of Material Beings, it might seem impossible to think of any thing but

Him. For whether we consider the Infinite Perfection of his Nature,

or the Interest we have in, and our intire dependance on him. Whether

we consider him as Maker and Governor of all things, as filling all

places, intimately acquainted with all Events, as Righteous in all his

ways, and holy in all his works. Whether we contemplate his Almighty

Power; or what seems more suitable to our Faculties and Condition, the

Spotless Purity of his Nature, the Moral Rectitude of his Will, which

guided by Infallible Wisdom always Chuses what is Best. And more

particularly his Infinite Goodness, his Beneficence to the Children of

Men; that he is not only Good in himself, but that he is also \_Our\_

Good, the only Amiable Being, who is altogether Lovely, and worthy

of All our Love, the Object of our Hope, the Sum of our Desire, the

Crown of our Joy, without whom we shall for ever Languish and Grieve;

Enjoying whom we have nothing to Fear, nor any thing to Hate but what

wou’d deprive us of that Enjoyment. If we consider how much he has

done to render us capable of this Happiness even when we fled from it;

what affronts he has put up, with what Patience he bears our Follies

and solicits our Return, in a Word, all the Wonders of his Love in

Christ Jesus! We cannot sure do less than fix our Thoughts for ever on

Him, and devote our selves Intirely to Him! All our Passions will be

Charm’d, and every Inclination attracted! We shall no more dispute his

Will, nor seek exemption from it, but with all Sincerity of Heart, and

ardent Desire cry out, \_Lord what wilt thou have me to do? Not my Will

Lord, but thine be done!\_ The business of our Lives will be to improve

our Minds and to stretch our Faculties to their utmost extent, that so

we may have the fullest enjoyment our Nature will admit, of this ever

satisfying and yet ever desirable, because an Infinite, and our True,

Good.

As to what is to be done by way of Exercise, not to enter too far into

the Philosophy of the Passions, suffice it briefly to observe: That by

the Oeconomy of Nature such and such Motions in the Body are annext

in such a manner to certain Thoughts in the Soul, that unless some

outward force restrain, she can produce them when she pleases barely

by willing them; and reciprocally several Impressions on the Body

are communicated to, and affect the Soul, all this being perform’d by

the means of the Animal Spirits. The Active Powers of the Soul, her

Will and Inclinations are at her own dispose, her Passive are not,

she can’t avoid feeling Pain or other sensible Impressions so long

as she’s united to a Body, and that Body is dispos’d to convey these

Impressions. And when outward Objects occasion such Commotions in the

Bloud and Animal Spirits, as are attended with those Perceptions in the

Soul which we call the Passions, she can’t be insensible of or avoid

’em, being no more able to prevent these first Impressions than she

is to stop the Circulation of the Bloud, or to hinder Digestion. All

she can do is to Continue the Passion as it was begun, or to Divert it

to another Object, to Heighthen or to let it Sink by degrees, or some

way or other to Modifie and Direct it. The due performance of which is

what we call \_Vertue\_, which consists in governing Animal Impressions,

in directing our Passions to such Objects, and keeping ’em in such a

pitch, as right Reason requires.

By which it appears that it is not a fault to have Passions, since

they are natural and unavoidable, and useful too; for as the

Inclinations are the Wings of the Soul, so these give Life and Vigor

to the Inclinations, by disposing the Body to act according to the

Determination of the Mind. But the fault lies here, we suffer ’em too

often to get the Mastry of the Mind, to hurry it on to what Objects

they please and to fix it there, so that it is not able to consider

any Idea but what they present. Whereas the Soul can if she please,

and if she makes use of her Authority in time, divert the Course of

the Spirits, and direct ’em to a new Object, by Limiting or Extending

her Ideas, and by laying aside those the Passions excited, and

entertaining new ones. Nay, if we do but forbear to revolve such

Considerations as are apt to continue the Commotion of the Spirits, it

will cease of it self. This is what we \_can\_ and \_ought\_ to do, and

if we do not perform it, we act rather like the Slaves of Sense than

Creatures endued with Reason; but if we do, we can hardly receive any

Injury from the Passions.

The way therefore to Govern ’em is to be always in a Temper fit for

this, Recollect and Compos’d, holding our Minds in as even a poise as

ever we can between Mirth and Melancholy, one of which Stupifies the

Soul and the other Dissolves it; and both of ’em weaken and dispose it

for Passion. Nothing but what feeds the ill humor will make Impression

whilst it is under the power of \_this\_, nor any useful thing stay

in it, but it lies open to all manner of evil, when it is violently

agitated by \_that\_. Too much of either rendring us unfit to Converse

with our selves or others; such a mixture of both as makes us Serious

without Sourness, and Chearful without Levity, being the happy Temper.

It is by surprize that the Passions injure us, they violently attack

our Reason when she is not prepar’d to receive them, so that the Will

is determin’d all of a sudden by Confuse Perceptions and Sensations.

Nor is it easie to repulse them when once they have gain’d ground,

because they often bribe our Guard, and get the Mastry of us by those

very Considerations which shou’d have been arm’d against ’em. But

Recollection, a sedate and sober frame of Mind, prevents this Mischief,

it keeps our Reason always on her Guard and ready to exert her self;

it fits us to Judge truly of all occurrences, and to draw advantage

from whatever happens. This is the true Art of Prudence, for that

which properly speaks us Wise, is the accommodating all the Accidents

of Life to the great End of Living. And since the Passiveness of our

Nature makes us liable to many Sufferings which we cou’d wish to avoid,

Wisdom consists in the using those Powers, which GOD has given us the

free disposal of, in such a manner, as to make those very things which

befal us against our Will, an occasion of Good to us.

For if we do not live like Machines, but like Reasonable Creatures,

that is if we Observe, Examine and Apply whatever comes under our

Cognizance, every Turn in our own and our Neighbours Life will be

Useful to us. It is not to be deny’d that we’re generally Critical

Observators on our Neighbours, but I’m afraid it is with an Ill not a

Good Design. We do’t to feed our Pride by an ungenerous insulting over

their Infirmities, or thinking to Excuse and Justifie our own Faults by

theirs. But we seldom set a mark on the Precipices from whence they

fell that we may avoid ’em, or note their False Steps, that ours may be

more Exact.

And indeed as things are usually manag’d, since Modesty, Breeding, or

Sheepish Cowardise, restrains even those who are capable of bettering

Conversation, from Edifying Discourses, the only use we can make of

that Time which the World borrows of us and Necessary Civility exacts,

is to lay in Matter of Observation. I do not mean that we shou’d make

Ill-natur’d Remarks, or Uncharitable Reflections on Particular Persons,

but only that we take notice of the several workings of Human Nature,

the little turns and distinctions of Various Tempers; there being

somewhat peculiar almost in every one, which cannot be learn’d but by

Conversation and the Reflections it Occasions. For as to the main, we

learn it by looking into our own Hearts, one Person being but the

Counterpart of another, so that they who thorowly Know themselves have

a right Idea of Mankind in general, and by making reasonable allowances

for Circumstances, may pretty well guess at Particulars.

But even the Knowledge of our selves is not to be had without the

Temper here recommended. For since the Passions do mostly depend on the

Constitution of the Body, Age, Education and way of Living; so that

the same Object does not only Affect several Persons differently, but

variously moves the very same Person at several Seasons; and there was

once a time perhaps, when that which puts us now in a ferment had no

power to move us: We must therefore to the general consideration of

Human Nature already spoken of, add a more minute inquiry into our own;

Observing our Particular Passions, that especially to which we’re most

inclin’d by Nature, on which all the rest in a manner depend; and all

the Peculiarities that are to be found in our own Temper. Very great

things many times depending on a trivial Humour; nor is it so often

Reason, as our particular way of using it that determines our Thoughts

and Actions. Now nothing less than a continual Watch and Application

can procure us a sufficient Acquaintance with our selves, we cannot

well discern what Objects most sensibly touch us; which is our weakest

side; by what means it is Expos’d or Strengthened; how we may Restrain

or rightly Employ a Passion we cou’d not Prevent; and consequently grow

strong by our very Infirmities, whilst we make them an occasion of

Exercising and Encreasing our Vertue unless we’re always in a watchful

Frame, unless we make Remarks even whilst the Passion is working,

and Constantly attend the least beatings of our own Heart. Our own

Heart which is indeed one of the best Books we can Study, especially

in respect of Morality, and one principal Reason why we’re no better

Proficients in useful Knowledge, is because we don’t duly consult it.

Again, we shou’d endeavour to render Spiritual and Future things as

Present and Familiar as may be, and to withdraw as much as we can from

sensible Impressions, especially from such as attack us violently.

She whose Mind is busied about the former will find ’em of Weight and

Moment sufficient to employ all her Passions, whilst the other will be

scarce taken notice of; or be look’d on with Indifferency, because they

appear to deserve very little Admiration, Joy, or Sorrow, and are not

of value enough to discompose the Mind. And tho we have not Ambition

to aspire to St. \_Paul\_’s Perfection, who was \_Crucified to the World

and the World to him\_, a greater Character than that of \_Universal

Monarch\_; tho we think it impossible to be wholly Insensible to it

whilst we live in it: Yet sure we can’t deny that it is Possible, and

very much our Duty, to be more indifferent to the Objects of Sense than

the most of us are. For we certainly do amiss if we fix our Eyes and

Thoughts so constantly on ’em, as that at last we take them for the

most considerable things, and imagine that our Happiness is here; or,

tho we can’t be so gross as to \_believe\_ this, yet if we \_act\_ as if

we did; It wou’d become us much better to argue, that the Possession

of these Worldly Advantages which Mankind so much contend for, is Good

if it can procure us Eternal Felicity; and that the Want of ’em is an

Evil, if it exclude us from the Kingdom of Heav’n.

By which we learn how necessary it is to Retire and Meditate

frequently; and how much it becomes us to keep out of the way of

Theatrical Shows and inordinate Merriments, and not so much as to

enter into a Parley with those Pomps and Vanities we renounc’d in our

Baptism. For tho some extraordinary Tempers may make use of these to

stir up the Powers of their Soul, and to give them a greater aversion

to Vanity, as some Poysons are said to be Antidotes against others,

yet for the most part they have an ill Effect: Because they deprive

the Soul of real Joy and divine Serenity, by making too strong an

Impression on the Senses, whereby the Animal Spirits are very much

Mov’d and Exhausted, and being spent on trifles the Mind is left Dull,

Unactive, and Melancholy too, especially if it Reflect on its Actions

as it ought; so natural and necessary is it, that Vain Mirth shou’d

conclude in Heaviness.

[Sidenote: \_Les Passions de l’Ame.\_]

Again, the Passions consider’d as Bodily Impressions only, excite us

many times to the Gratification of the Animal in prejudice of the

Rational Nature. For tho Mankind had Originally no Appetites but what

might Innocently be satisfied; yet since our Degeneracy, and that we

have lost the true Relish of Good and Evil, they often give us false

alarms, stirring us up to Pursue or Avoid what indeed we Ought not,

if we consult our Good in the Main, and not the pleasing of a Part,

nay the Worst part of us. But if we consider ’em as attending our

Inclinations, they can do no hurt, let ’em be as Brisk and Active as

they can, provided they fix on their Proper Objects. Now what these are

is to be found by the Nature of the Passions, by which we are led to

the Use of ’em, since every thing ought to be employ’d about that which

it is fitted for. But this being already accounted for by \_Des Cartes\_

and \_Dr. More\_, in his excellent \_Account of Vertue\_, I cannot pretend

to add any thing to what they have so well Discours’d. Only as a

further confirmation of what has been already said we may observe; That

Admiration gives Rise to all the Passions; for unless we were Affected

with the Newness of an Object, or some other remarkable Circumstance,

so as to be attentively engag’d in the Contemplation of it, we shou’d

not be any wise mov’d, but it wou’d pass by unregarded. And therefore

’tis very necessary not to be struck with \_little\_ things, or to busie

our Minds about ’em, but to fix all our Attention on, and to keep all

our Admiration for things of the greatest moment, such as are those

which relate to another World.

We may further observe, that there is a leading Passion almost in

every one, to which the Temper of their Body inclines, and on which

the rest do in a manner wholly depend, especially if it be confirm’d

by Education and Custom, so that if we duly manage \_this\_, we have

the Command of all. Some are more subject to \_Fear\_, some to \_Hope\_,

to \_Joy\_, \_Sorrow\_ or the like, than others; but \_Love\_ seems to be

the predominant Passion in every one, and that which makes one of

the former more remarkable than another, is only because it has been

oftner mixt with Love. And indeed, since this is at the bottom of

all the Passions, one wou’d think they’re nothing else but different

Modifications of it, occasion’d by some Circumstance in the Subject

or Object of this Passion. Thus \_Desire\_ is a Love to Good consider’d

as Future; \_Hope\_ the Passion that disposes us to believe we may, and

\_Fear\_ that we shall not obtain it. \_Joy\_ is a pleasant Commotion

of the Soul in the Fruition of the Good we Love; and \_Sorrow\_ a

disagreeable one occasion’d by the want of it, or presence of its

contrary. The like may be said of the rest, for even \_Hatred\_ tho it

appear directly opposite to Love, may be refer’d to it, the very same

motion that carrys the Soul towards Good, carrying her also from those

things which wou’d deprive her of it, which on that account are call’d

Evils, and why do we Hate any thing, but because it does some way or

other hinder our Enjoyment of what we Love?

If therefore our Love be Right, the rest of our Passions will of course

be so; and our Love which is \_a motion of the Soul to joyn it self to

that which appears to be grateful to it\_, will then be right when our

Notions of Good and Evil are; That is, when we do not take up with

Imaginary or Particular, but pass on to the Sovereign Good, to GOD who

is the only proper and adequate Object of our Love, as Sin is of our

Hatred, all things else being no otherwise to be Pursued or Avoided,

than in proportion to the Relation they bear to these. So that if we

Love GOD with \_All\_ our Soul, as He certainly Deserves, and as we

certainly Must if we wou’d be Happy; we shall be so taken up with the

Contemplation and \_Admiration\_ of his Beauties, have so boundless an

\_Esteem\_, such an awful \_Veneration\_ for, and so great a \_Contempt\_ of

all things in Comparison of Him; that our \_Desires\_ will be carried

out after nothing but GOD, and such things as may further our Union

with Him. His Favour, and the Light of His Countenance will be the

Object of our \_Hopes\_, nor shall we much \_Fear\_ any thing but His

Displeasure. No \_Grief\_ will pierce our Heart but for our many Offences

against, and our Imperfect \_Enjoyment of Him\_. \_We shall perfectly

Hate all evil ways\_, be \_Jealous\_ of Sin at the remotest distance, and

\_suspect\_ every thing that has the least appearance of a Temptation. We

shall be extremely Watchful over all our Actions, and never Resolve

upon any till we’re fully assur’d it is conformable to his Will and

Pleasure. Whither will not our \_Emulation\_ rise, what Difficulties

won’t our \_Courage\_ surmount, when th’ Enjoyment of a GOD is what

we aspire to! The defects of our Services, and our failings in our

Duty towards Him, will be the only occasion of \_Shame\_; for Reproach

from Men when suffer’d for His sake will be counted a high Encomium,

and his Approbation our only \_Glory\_. If ever we are \_Angry\_ it will

be when His Laws are Contemn’d and Right Reason violated; a just

\_Indignation\_ will arise when the Worthless are Prefer’d, and Merit

is left unregarded. His Favourites will be ours, we shall dispense

our \_Good-will\_ to every one proportionably as they are dear to Him;

and shall think our \_Gratitude\_ can never enough express it self, to

that Bountiful Being from whom we receiv’d our All. And Oh! with what

\_Joy\_ and \_Satisfaction of Mind\_ shall we proceed in every step of

this! how pure and exalted is that Pleasure, how highly entertaining,

which results from the right use of our Faculties, and Fruition of the

Sovereign Good! Happiness is the natural Effect as well as the Reward

of an Ardent Love to GOD, and what necessarily flows from it, Universal

Piety: That Holy Soul is always serene, and full of unutterable Bliss,

whose Reason Directs, and whose Passions readily Obey, whilst both are

Guided by his Will and Spirit who is Infallible. She tasts a Pleasure

which the World can neither give nor take away, nor can Worldly Minds

so much as Imagine it: She is satisfied with the Past, Enjoys the

Present, and has no Solicitude for, but a Joyful Expectation of what’s

approaching. For why the Dawnings of a Blisful Endless Day, break

forth already in that Happy Mind, whose Temper and Constitution is

Heavenly; it has a Foretaste, and thereby a well-grounded Assurance, of

never-ceasing Joys to Come!

So far (by the way) is Religion from being an Enemy either to Nature

or Pleasure, that it perfects the one, and raises the other to the

greatest height. It teaches us the true Use of the Creatures, keeps

us from expecting more in them than we can ever find, and leads us to

the Enjoyment of the Creator who only can satisfie us. For I wou’d

fain know of any experienced Person, whether any of the Delights of

this World did ever answer Expedition when Enjoy’d, and whether the

Joys of Religion do not exceed it? We come to the first with mighty

hopes and are always Disappointed, to the last we approach with Fear

and Trembling, supposing it will rob us of all the Satisfactions of

Life, we shrink at the Pain and Difficulty, and thats the only thing

in which after a little Trial we find our selves much mistaken. Good

Christians being indeed the truest \_Epicures\_, because they have the

most tastful and highest Enjoyment of the greatest Good.

[Sidenote: Ladies Calling.]

For GOD is too Kind and Bountiful to deny us any Pleasure befitting

our Nature; he does not require us to relinquish Pleasure, but only

to exchange the Gross and Insipid for the Pure and Relishing, the

Pleasures of a Brute for those of a Man. He wou’d not have us enslav’d

to any Appetite, or so taken up with any Created Good whatever, as not

to be able to maintain the Empire of our Reason and Freedom of our Will

and to quit it when we see occasion. And this is all that the Rules

of Self-Denial and Mortification tend to so far as they are Rational,

they mean no more than the procuring us a Power and Disposition to do

that which we come now in the last place to recommend, which is, To

sanctifie our very Infirmities, to make even the disorderly Commotions

of our Spirits an occasion of producing Holy Passions. It were better

indeed if they were rais’d upon a right Principle; that the Passions

did not move the Mind, but the Mind the Passions; and that the Motives

to Religion were not Sensitive but Rational. However in the Infancy

of our Vertue, it may not be amiss to make some use of our Vices, and

what we advise if it serve no other end, ’twill help at least to break

Ill-Habits and that’s a considerable benefit. Agreeable to which did

an excellent Author bespeak the Ladies sometime ago: \_Let her that

is Amorous, place her Love upon him who is the Chiefest among ten

thousand; she that is Angry turn her edg against her Sins; she that is

haughty disdain the Devils Drudgery; she that is Fearful dread him who

can destroy, both Body and Soul in Hell; and she that is sad reserve

her Tears for her Penitential Offices.\_ Which, with the rest of that

Authors Ingeniuous and Kind Advice, I heartily wish were not only to be

seen in their Closets, but transcrib’d in their Hearts and Legible in

their Lives and Actions.

Now in order to this, if our guard has been surpriz’d, and some

sensible Impression has strongly broke in upon us, so that we find our

selves all in a ferment, let us manage the Opportunity discreetly,

change the Object and hallow the Passion. Which is no very difficult

thing, for when a Passion is boyling it will spend it self on any

Object that we please to fix it on. And the Proper Objects of our

Passions, being most considerable in ’emselves, and naturally most apt

to move us if we’ll but give them fair play, that is allow ’em a place

in our Thoughts, they’ll work out the other, and make our Passions what

they shou’d be: We have a plain Instance of this in Afflictions, in

which our \_Grief\_ is at first excited by some outward Cause, and when

that has softned us, the Spirit of GOD who is never wanting unless we

Neglect or Quench him, improves this Worldly into a \_Godly Sorrow\_ that

worketh Repentance not to be Repented of.

Besides, as there is a Pleasure in the Passions as well as in all the

genuine Operations of Nature, so there’s a Pain accompanying ’em when

misplac’d, which disposes the Mind to a readiness to rectifie them,

that so it may enjoy the Pleasure without mixture of Pain. If therefore

we assist it with a little Meditation, it will readily come over; and

tho we may find it difficult absolutely to quash a Passion that is once

begun, yet it is no hard matter to transfer it, so that it may pour

forth it self in all its pleasing transports, without fear of danger,

or mixture of uneasiness.

But a Caution will not be amiss, which is, that we don’t mistake the

Fits of Passion for a Spirit of Piety and Devotion. They are good

beginnings ’tis true, but if we’re only wafted up to Heaven in our

Closets, and shew forth nothing or very little of it in our Lives

and Conversations, we may cheat our selves with the conceit of being

Holy, but neither GOD nor Man will be so impos’d on. She who mourns

for her Sins, tho never so bitterly, and yet returns to them at the

next occasion, gives a very good Evidence of her Weakness, but none of

her Repentance. She who pretends to never so great transports of Love

to GOD, and yet is wedded to the world, can part with nothing for his

sake, nor be content and easie when He only is her Portion, gives Him

good words, and makes Him many fine Complements and that’s the whole

of the matter. She who makes shew of great Awe and Reverence towards

the Divine Majesty at Church and has no regard to Him in the World

his larger Temple, as good as declares that she thinks his Presence

confin’d to a place, or that she hopes to commute a Days neglect for

an Hours Observance, and expresses her Contempt of GOD much more than

her Veneration. How can she profess to Hope in Him who is Anxious and

Solicitous about the least Event? Or say that her Desires are fix’t on

GOD who has a great many Vanities and Sensual Aptites to be Satisfied?

Nor are we less out of the way when we tincture our Religion with our

Passions, and fashion an Idea of it according to our own Complection

not the tenor of the Gospel. Hence comes that great diversity we meet

with both in Practice and Theory, for as there is somewhat Peculiar

almost in every ones Temper, so is there in their Religion. Is our

Disposition Sad and Cloudy, are we apt to take Offence, Suspicious

and hard to be pleas’d? we imagine GOD is so, Religion is not our Joy

but our Task and Burden, we become extremely scrupulous and uneasie

to our selves and others. And if Resolution and Daring be joyn’d with

our Melancholy, and Temptations fall pat in our way, we discard such

a troublesome Religion and set up for Atheism and Infidelity. On the

other hand, if we’re Fearful and Timerous our Superstition has no

bounds, we pay less regard to those Laws our Maker has prescrib’d, than

we do to those Chimera’s our own Fancy has invented to reconcile Him.

A mistake which the Brisk and Jovial are sensible of, but not of the

contrary extreme they run into; they discern that GOD’s ways are ways

of Pleasantness, and all his Paths are Peace, that Good Christians

live the Happiest Lives, ’tis their Duty to Rejoyce evermore, and all

the good things of the World are at their service. All which is very

true, but then it is as true, that their Pleasures are not Sensual

but Rational and Spiritual, which is not a lessening, but an Addition

to their Character; that we are to Use the World so as not to abuse

either our selves or it, to testify on all occasions our Moderation and

Contempt of it, to be ready to quit it, nay even to part with Life it

self when ever they come in competition with our Duty. In a word, if

our Anger against our own Sins provokes us to be Peevish with others,

tho not so good as they shou’d be, it goes too far. If our Zeal finds

fault with all who do not come up to our Heights, or who don’t express

their Devotion in our way, it is not according to Knowlege, that is, it

is not Discreet and Christian. If our great Love to GOD takes us up so

much, that we think we may be morose and ill-natur’d to our Neighbour,

we express it in a very disagreeable way: And I dare say it wou’d be

more acceptable to Him, if insted of spending it all in Rapture and

Devotion, a part of it were employ’d in Imitating his Beneficence to

our Fellow-Creatures.

To wind up all; The Sum of our Duty and of all Morality, is to have a

Temper of Mind so absolutely Conform’d to the Divine Will, or which is

the same in other words, such an Habitual and Intire Love to GOD, as

will on all occasions excite us to the Exercise of such Acts, as are

the necessary consequents of such a Habit. This frame and Constitution

of Soul is what we must all our Life time Labour after, it is to be

begun, and some Proficiency made in it whilst we stay on Earth, and

then we may joyfully wait for its Consummation in Heaven, the reason

why we cannot be perfectly Happy whilst we tarry here, being only

because we can have this Temper but Imperfectly. The want of which is

the Hell of the Damn’d, the degree of their misery bearing a proportion

to their opposition to the Divine Will. For Happiness is not \_without\_

us, it must be found in our own Bosoms, and nothing but a Union with

GOD can fix it there; nor can we ever be United to Him any other wise

than by being like Him, by an Intire Conformity to his Will.

Now she who has obtain’d this blessed Temper, whose Will is Right, and

who has no Passion but for GOD’s Service, is pleas’d that his Wisdom

shou’d Chuse her Work, and only prepares to dispatch it with the

greatest Diligence and Chearfulness. She keeps All his Precepts, and

does not pick and Chuse such as are for her turn, and most agreeable

to her own Humor; but as she does every thing for His Sake, so is she

easy and pleas’d under all his Dispensations; is truly indifferent to

Applause, and fully content with GOD’s Approbation. Indeed the Conquest

of our Vanity is one of our last Triumphs, and a Satisfaction in all

GOD’s Choices for us, from a full Conviction that they are most for our

advantage, the best Test of a Regular Will and Affections. For these

are heights to which we can’t arrive till we have travers’d over all

the Paths of Vertue, and when once our Passions are reduc’d to this, I

know not in what they can oppose us.

Not but that we’re strictly oblig’d to \_Provide for honest things in

the Sight of Men\_ as well as of \_GOD\_, to do nothing but what is of

\_Good Report\_; \_to Abstain from all Appearance of Evil\_; not to \_give

Occasion\_ of Slander to those who desire and \_Seek\_ it; but to \_Let

our Light so shine before Men, that they may see our Good-works and

Glorify our Father who is in Heaven\_. But when we have done this, and

have taken all possible care to approve our selves to GOD and Man,

can we be at Ease if we fail in the latter? Are we more desirous of a

Good than a Great Reputation? and wou’d we not to get a Name amongst

our Fellow Servants, do any thing that may in the least Offend, or be

less acceptable to our Common Master? Can we bear the being Censur’d

as Singular and Laugh’d at for Fools, rather than comply with the evil

Customs of the Age? and are we much more Covetous of the Substance

\_Vertue\_, than of the Shadow \_Fame\_? If it be so we’re pretty sure

that all is Right, and that GOD’s will is the Rule, and his Glory the

End of all our Actions. It goes to a good Womans heart to receive that

Commendation which the good-nature or Civility of another bestows on

her, when she knows she does not Merit it, and to find whilst she’s

applauded abroad, a thousand Follies, Mistakes and Weaknesses in her

own Mind. All the use that she makes of her Credit and Esteem in the

World, is to excite her to Deserve it, tho at present perhaps she does

not, and \_Really\_ to come up to that Character which all are Ambitious

to have.

Again, what is said of Submission and a perfect acquiescence in the

Divine Will, is not to be so understood as if it were a fault to change

our Circumstances when we’re fairly and honestly call’d to’t, or that

we might not seek by honourable ways to enlarge them if they sit too

strait. But it is design’d to correct that Complaining humor, which

makes us always dissatisfied with the Present, and longing after a

Change; which, how Religious soever we wou’d appear, is a very sure

sign that our Passions are not mortified nor our Will reduced to a due

Regularity: As hers is without doubt who can be pleas’d when even her

most innocent Desires are denied, when she is disappointed in what she

thinks her Best Designs. For such an one has nothing in her Temper that

Sensible Impressions can so strongly fasten on, as to discompose her

Mind; and what can she meet with to seduce her to Unlawful, who desires

not to be her own Chuser in Lawful and Indifferent things?

The Laws of GOD have a Natural and Inward Goodness, which wou’d

recommend them to a Rational Mind tho they were not injoyn’d, and

therefore no wonder that Temper inclines one, Conveniency another, and

Reputation a third to the Practise of some of them. But a Will duly

regulated passes over these and is acted by a higher Motive, she who is

Religious upon a Right Principle regards the Will of GOD only, for that

and that alone is able to carry her Uniformly and Constantly thro all

her Duty. Thus Acts of Beneficence, Liberality and Charity, are full

of Lustre, they procure for their Possessor a lofty Character, and

therefore whether we Value them or no, we’re willing however to \_seem\_

to be fond of ’em. We fancy what mighty things we wou’d do were we in

such or such a Persons Circumstances, and long to be Rich and Great

that we may Relieve the Needy and Rescue the Oppressed. But we are

not so forward in aspiring after Poverty, tho nothing shews a Braver

Mind than the bearing it Nobly and Contentedly; we care not to be the

Oppressed Person, that we might exercise Meekness and Forgiveness,

Patience and Submission. Not but that the Vertues of Adversity are as

lovely in themselves, and as Acceptable to GOD as those of Prosperity,

or rather more so, because they express a greater Love to GOD, are

more opposite to Vicious Self-Love, and do more eminently declare the

Veneration we have for the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, which we can

Adore and Delight in, which we can Justify and Applaud even in the

most uneasy Circumstances. But they don’t make so great a Figure in

the World, they don’t feed our Vanity so much, nor are so agreeable to

Flesh and Bloud, and that’s the reason why we care not for them.

’Tis true we profess that we desire Riches and Honour, a great

Reputation and Theater in the World, on no other account but to do GOD

Service. But if we are real in this, why don’t we perform so much as

we might in our Present Station? Alas! we Cheat our selves, as well

as endeavour to impose on others; and under Pretence of seeking GOD’s

Glory, in Reality pursue nothing but our own. For had we indeed that

Esteem for GOD and Intire Conformity to his Will, which is at once both

the Duty and Perfection of all Rational Beings, we shou’d not complain

of his Exercise of that Power, which a Prince or even an Ordinary

Master has a Right to; which is, to set his Servants about such work as

he thinks them fittest for. If we allow that GOD Governs the Universe,

can we so much as imagine that it is not Govern’d with the Greatest

Justice and Equity, Order and Proportion? Is not every one of us plac’d

in such Circumstances as Infinite Wisdom discerns to be most suitable,

so that nothing is wanting but a careful observation whither they lead

us, and how we may best improve them? What reason then to complain of

the Management of the world? and indeed except in the Morals of Mankind

which are visibly and grossly deprav’d, I see not why we shou’d so much

as wish for any alteration. The Wicked Prosper sometimes and what then?

shall we grudge them their Portion \_here\_, since that’s their All, and

alas a very sorry one!

Besides, this world is not a soil for perfect Happiness to Grow in,

Good and Evil are blended together, every Condition has its Sweet and

Bitter, we maybe Made by Adversity and ruin’d by Prosperity according

as we manage them. Riches and Power put opportunities of doing Good

into our hands, if we have a Will to Use them, but at the same time

they furnish us with Instruments of doing Evil. They afford us at once

the Conveniences of Life and fuel for irregular Appetites. They make us

known to others, but many times hinder us from being acquainted with

our selves. They set us in view, so that if our Example be Bright it

becomes the more Illustrious; but we must also remember that our Faults

are as conspicuous as our Vertues, and that Peoples eyes are most

intent on \_those\_, and most inquisitive to find ’em, so that even our

innocent Liberties are many times misconstrued.

By Obscurity, and a Narrow Fortune, we’re depriv’d of somewhat

Necessary or Commodious to our Present Living, but are quickned to a

more diligent concern for a Life to Come; we don’t find our Good things

\_here\_, and common Prudence will teach us to take care that we may

enjoy them \_hereafter\_. If we do not Possess much, we have not much to

Lose, nor such great Accounts to make; have little Business and less

Authority with others, but hereby the more Command of our own Time and

Thoughts. Our Vertue is plac’d in an ill-light, and our Wisdom rejected

with a \_What Impertinents are these, who pragmatically attempt to

Instuct their Betters\_? but we have fewer Temptations to shock the one,

and greater Advantages, as things are commonly manag’d to improve both.

We’re expos’d to the Contempt and Outrage of the World, but that makes

us less in love with it, and more ready to welcome Death, whene’er it

brings the kind Releasing Summons.

It may be thought a considerable omission that no directions have bin

given, any further than the management of our \_Own\_ Inclinations and

Passions; tho’t be very advantageous to know how to deal with other

Peoples, both in regard of Education, and of the Influence that they

have on ours. But I have this to say, that Education is a beaten

Subject, and has been accounted for by better Pens than mine: And that

in this as in all other things, we are to treat our Neighbours as we

do our selves, shew ’em the unsuitableness of those Objects which

Irregular Affections pursue, and persuade them to a willing use of such

methods as we take to Cure our own. It requires I confess, no little

Skill to do this to purpose, and to convince them that, we’re really

their Friends, whilst we strive to divorce them from such Objects as

they’re endear’d and fastned to by a thousand tyes: And this is so nice

a matter, so laborious a task, that the more I consider it the more

unable I find my self to give sit Directions for the performance of

it. They who wou’d do that, must have a more exact Knowlege of Human

Nature, a greater Experience of the World, and of those differences

which arise from Constitution, Age, Education, receiv’d Opinions,

outward Fortune, Custom and Conversation, than I can pretend to. And

perhaps there is no need of Directions since few will attempt to

practise them; for if a Passion that is young and tender gives us work

enough, as the difficulty of Education plainly shews it does, they had

need be very Kind, very Good, and very Wise, who set about the Cure of

an Old and inveterate one. Nor can they who have so much Divinity in

their Mind as to design such a noble work, be thought to stand in need

of any advice how to perform it.

However, I’ll venture to say in general, that we must never oppose

Commotion with Commotion, nor be in Passion our selves if we wou’d

reform anothers, else we lose many good Opportunities and seem to seek

the gratification of our own humor rather than our Neighbours good. No

discouragements shou’d shock us, no ungrateful returns shou’d lower

our Temper, but we must expect and be prepar’d to bear many repulses

and wild disorders, and patiently sustain that greatest uneasiness to

a Christian Mind, the bitter appearance that our Hopes are lost, and

that all the Labour of our Love is ineffectual! We must abound both in

Good-Nature and Discretion, and not seldom make use of quite contrary

Means to bring about the End we aim at. Removing all Fuel from the

Passion sometimes; and sometimes Indulging it as far as Innocently we

may; and if nothing else will do, give it line enough, that so it may

destroy it self in its own Excesses.

But ah! will any one drive us to such a desperate Remedy as often

Kills, and cannot Cure without a very great Care, and a more than

Ordinary assistance of GOD’s Grace, which they have little reason

to hope for, who abandon themselves to Temptations, and push things

to such Extremities! Will nothing less than Temporal Ruin which

unreasonable Passions naturally end in serve to prevent Eternal? and it

were well if even that wou’d do, for they usually involve in both. If

therefore such as are in Passion are capable of hearing any thing but

what soothes ’em in their own way, I wou’d beg of ’em for GOD’s sake

and their own, to grant but this one very easy and equitable Request,

which is Calmly to Hear and to Consider what may be said against their

darling Passion. For if it be Right it will stand the test of all that

can be urg’d against it; if it be not, is it Good for them to retain

and cherish it any longer? And if they refuse to listen to the \_Kind\_,

tho according to them, unseasonable and mistaken advice that is given,

and seek no further than for Arguments to Justifie themselves, do

they not by so great a Partiality secretly confess that they are in

the Wrong, and wou’d not have it discover’d that they are so, because

they’re resolv’d with or without Reason to continue their irregular

Passion?

And the cause of this strange Resolution seems to be this, That a

Passion of any sort having got the hank of one, it becomes so Natural,

so Agreeable, that the going about to wean them from it, looks like an

attempt to deprive them of all their Joy; and they’re hardly persuaded

to part with what’s a \_Present\_ Delight, let its Consequences be what

they may, and tho the quitting of it be in order to th’ enjoyment of

that much Sweeter, as well as Nobler Pleasure, which arises from

the due use of Reason; and with which those Wise and Holy Souls are

entertain’d, who prefer the relishes of a Rational before those of an

Animal Life.

But they ought not to think us their Enemies, when we endeavour their

Cure, tho we happen to Lance and Scarifie them. They who are Sick of

Passion are like People in a Lethargy, insensible of their Danger;

nay they’re fond of their Disease, and set themselves against our

Medicines; tho the greater unwillingness they show to be Disturb’d,

so much the more need of Rousing ’em out of their pleasing slumber.

The more secure they think themselves, the more wretched is their

Condition, for that’s a sign that the Passion has got an intire

Possession of their Soul, and has fortified all its Avenues against

Reason and Wholesome Advice. And ’tis worth being remarqued, that our

Inclinations how Innocent and Harmless soever they appear, are always

to be suspected if the Passions that accompany them are violent. For

Violence does not Answer but Destroy the Use of Passion, it hinders

th’ Operations of the Soul, insted of disposing the Body to follow her

Directions Vigorously.

And as to the Influence that another Persons Passion may have on us,

enough has bin said to warn us, not to dally with the Flame when our

Neighbours house is on Fire, lest we be consum’d in it; and carefully

to avoid doing any thing which may excite, or encrease their Passions.

But when we discern that the Plague is begun, let’s remove with all

possible speed out of the infected Air. Great Passions arise from very

small beginings, and that which appear’d Innocent at first if allow’d

on that account, does often become our Ruin, or gives us at least the

greatest trouble in overcoming it.

\_The CONCLUSION.\_

[Sidenote: P.72, \_&c.\_]

Thus you have Ladies, the best Method I can at present think of for

your Improvement, how well it answers my Design the World must judge,

if you are so favourable as to think it comes up to’t in any measure,

what remains but to put it in Practise, tho in the way in which you

live, ’tis not probable that all of you either Will or Can, for reasons

mention’d in the first Part, and particularly because of the great

waste of your Time, without Redeeming of which there’s nothing to be

done. It is not my intention that you shou’d seclude your selves from

the World, I know it is Necessary that a great number of you shou’d

live in it; but it is Unreasonable and Barbarous to drive you into’t,

e’re you are capable of doing Good in it, or at least of keeping

Evil from your selves. Nor am I so fond of my Proposal, as not to

lay it aside very willingly, did I think you cou’d be sufficiently

serv’d without it. But since such Seminaries are thought proper for

the Men, since they enjoy the fruits of those Noble Ladies Bounty who

were the foundresses of several of their Colleges, why shou’d we not

think that such ways of Education wou’d be as advantageous to the

Ladies? or why shou’d we despair of finding some among them who will

be as kind to their own Sex as their Ancestors have been to the other?

Some Objections against this design have already been consider’d, and

those which I have since met with are either too trifling to deserve a

serious Answer, or too Ill-natur’d not to require a severer than I care

to give them. They must either be very Ignorant or very Malicious who

pretend that we wou’d imitate Foreign Monastries, or object against

us the Inconveniencies that they are subject to; a little attention

to what they read might have convinc’d them that our Institution is

rather \_Academical\_ than \_Monastic\_. So that it is altogether beside

the purpose, to say ’tis too Recluse, or prejudicial to an Active Life;

’tis as far from that as a Ladys Practising at home is from being a

hindrance to her dancing at Court. For an Active Life consists not

barely in \_Being in the World\_, but in \_doing much Good in it\_: And

therefore it is fit we Retire a little, to furnish our Understandings

with useful Principles, to set our Inclinations right, and to manage

our Passions, and when this is well done, but not till then, we may

safely venture out.

As for those who think so Contemptibly of such a considerable part of

GOD’s Creation, as to suppose that we were made for nothing else but to

Admire and do them Service, and to make provision for the low concerns

of an Animal Life, we pity their mistake, and can calmly bear their

Scoffs, for they do not express so much Contempt of us as they do of

our Maker; and therefore the reproach of such incompetent Judges is not

an Injury but an Honor to us.

The Ladies I hope pass a truer estimate on themselves, and need not

be told that they were made for nobler purposes. For tho I wou’d by

no means encourage Pride, yet I wou’d not have them take a mean and

groveling Spirit for true Humility. A being content with Ignorance is

really but a Pretence, for the frame of our nature is such that it is

impossible we shou’d be so; even those very Pretenders value themselves

for some Knowlege or other, tho it be a trifling or mistaken one.

She who makes the most Grimace at a Woman of Sense, who employs all

her little skill in endeavouring to render Learning and Ingenuity

ridiculous, is yet very desirous to be thought Knowing in a Dress,

in the Management of an Intreague, in Coquetry or good Houswifry.

If then either the Nobleness or Necessity of our Nature unavoidably

excites us to a desire of Advancing, shall it be thought a fault to do

it by pursuing the best things? and since we \_will\_ value our selves

on somewhat or other, why shou’d it not be on the most substantial

ground? The Humblest Person that lives has some Self-Esteem, nor is it

either Fit or Possible that any one should be without it. Because we

always Neglect what we Despise, we take no care of its Preservation and

Improvement, and were we throughly possess’d with a Contempt of our

selves, we shou’d abandon all Care both of our Temporal and Eternal

Concerns, and burst with Envy at our Neighbours. The only difference

therefore between the Humble and the Proud is this, that whereas the

former does not prize her self on some Imaginary Excellency, or for any

thing that is not truly Valuable; does not ascribe to her self what is

her Makers due, nor Esteem her self on any other account but because

she is GOD’s Workmanship, endow’d by him with many excellent Qualities,

and made capable of Knowing and Enjoying the Sovereign and Only Good;

so that her Self-Esteem does not terminate in her \_Self\_ but in \_GOD\_,

and she values her self only for GOD’s sake. The Proud on the contrary

is mistaken both in her Estimate of Good, and in thinking it is her

Own; She values her self on things that have no real Excellency, or

which at least add none to her, and forgets from whose Liberality she

receives them: She does not employ them in the Donors Service, all

her care is to Raise her self, and she little considers that the most

excellent things are distributed to others in an equal, perhaps in a

greater measure than to herself, they have opportunities of advancing

as well as she, and so long as she’s puft up by this Tumor of Mind,

they do really excel her.

The Men therefore may still enjoy their Prerogatives for us, we mean

not to intrench on any of their Lawful Privileges, our only Contention

shall be that they may not out-do us in promoting his Glory who is

Lord both of them and us; And by all that appears the generality will

not oppose us in this matter, we shall not provoke them by striving

to be better Christians. They may busy their Heads with Affairs of

State, and spend their Time and Strength in recommending themselves

to an uncertain Master, or a more giddy Multitude, our only endeavour

shall be to be absolute Monarchs in our own Bosoms. They shall still

if they please dispute about Religion, let ’em only give us leave to

Understand and Practise it. And whilst they have unrival’d the Glory

of speaking as \_many\_ Languages as \_Babel\_ afforded, we only desire

to express our selves Pertinently and Judiciously in \_One\_. We will

not vie with them in thumbing over Authors, nor pretend to be walking

Libraries, provided they’ll but allow us a competent Knowlege of the

Books of GOD, Nature I mean and the Holy Scriptures: And whilst they

accomplish themselves with the Knowlege of the World, and experiment

all the Pleasures and Follies of it, we’ll aspire no further than to be

intimately acquainted with our own Hearts. And sure the Complaisant and

Good natur’d Sex will not deny us this; nor can they who are so well

assur’d of their own Merit entertain the least Suspicion that we shall

overtop them. It is upon some other account therefore that they object

against our Proposal, but what that is I shall not pretend to guess,

since they do not think fit to speak out and declare it.

Some indeed are pleas’d to say, that tho this appears in Speculation

to be a very Happy and Useful way of Living, it will be quite another

thing when reduc’d to Practice. Variety of Humours will occasion

Resentments and Factions, and perhaps other inconveniencies not yet

foreseen; nor can we expect that every Person there will be of such

an agreeable, obliging and teachable Temper, as neither to Give nor

Take Offence. And supposing the first Company were as tractable and as

happily cemented by the mutual love of Vertue, and prudent Management,

as we cou’d desire, yet how can we be secure of their Successors, or

that this as well as other good Institutions shall not degenerate?

I agree so far with this Objection as to grant that our Proposal is

not such a piece of Perfection that nothing can be said against it,

but is there any thing in this World that is so? Or do Men use to quit

their Employments and Houses, their Wives and Children, Relations and

Friends, upon every little pet, or because they very often find trouble

or disagreeableness? do they not rather if they are good Christians,

bear with Infirmities and endeavour to mend them? He then who wou’d

Object to purpose must shew that the Good it may do is not equivalent

to the Evil which may attend it; that the Ladies will suffer greater

Inconveniencies with, than without it, and that it will not in the

\_Main\_ be best. Otherwise we shall take liberty to believe that it is

Humor, Covetousness or any thing rather than Reason which restrains him

from Approving and Promoting it. There is a certain Pride in the Mind

of Man, which flatters him that he can See farther and Judge better

than his Neighbour, and he loves to feed it by scrupling and objecting

against what another proposes, who perhaps has not over-look’d those

fine discoveries in which he hugs himself, but having view’d them on

all sides has discern’d and despis’d their insignificancy. I wou’d

only ask our Objectors whether they think the World so good as that

it needs none, or so bad as that it is not capable of Amendment? If

neither of these, let them tell me whether Complaining and Wishing will

ever do the business, or who is the greatest Benefactor to Mankind, he

who finds fault with every Project set on foot to better and improve

them, because it is not exactly after the Pattern in the Mount, that

is indeed according to his own tooth and relish; it is not beyond

exception, but has a touch of Humane Weakness and Ignorance mingled

with it? Or he who vigorously and sincerely with a pure heart and a

diligent hand, sets about doing what he Can, tho not so much as he

Wou’d, were his abilities greater? We’re all apt enough to cry out

against the Age, but to what purpose are our Exclamations unless we go

about to Reform it? Not faintly and coldly as if we were unconcern’d

for the success, and only wou’d do somewhat to still the reproaches

of our Consciences and to exalt us in our own Imaginations, with

the Pompous Idea of Zeal and Public Spiritedness; \_but with all our

Might\_, with an Unwearied Industry and Vigor, I’me asham’d to say

like that which the Instruments of Satan express in making Proselytes

to Wickedness and Prophaneness; but rather with such as becomes

the Servants of Christ, which bears some sort of proportion to the

Greatness of our Master, the Importance of the Work and the Excellency

of the Reward.

We do not expect that all who come into this Society will be perfect,

but we will endeavour to make them and our selves so as much as may

be. Nor shall any be admitted who either have not, or are not desirous

to have, that Divine yet humble, that Great and Generous, yet Meek and

Condescending Spirit, that unfeigned Love to GOD and all Mankind which

was in Christ Jesus. We set no other Rules than those of the Gospel,

Christianity being the highest Improvement of a Rational Nature, and

every one’s oblig’d to keep its Institutions whether they Live in such

a Society or out of it.

And as for that degeneracy which it may fall into, ’tis too general

an objection to have any weight, and may as well be urg’d against

Universities, all sorts of Government, and indeed against every

thing, as against this. \_May be’s\_ and \_if’s\_ are endless, and he

who undertakes to provide against all Future Contingencies, either

believes no GOD or fancies himself to be one. A Prudent Man will look

as far as he can, and provide to the utmost of his Knowlege and Power,

but when that’s done, he knows he’s but a Man and therefore can’t

possibly Forsee and Remedy all things.

Let’s then do what we \_Can\_, and leave the rest to our Great Benefactor

and Governor, but let us set about our own part, not only when the

way is open and easy, who shall give us thanks for that? but in spite

of all Difficulties and Discouragement, since we have so Glorious a

Leader, so indefatigable in his Labours, so boundless in his Love, such

an Omnipotent Assister who neither wants Power nor Will to help us. The

Peevishness and Obstinacy of such as Quarrel with our Labour of Love

and set themselves against all we can do to serve them, will only add

to our Laurels and enlarge our Triumphs, when our Constancy in doing

Good has at last o’ercome those Perverse Opposers of it.

\_The End.\_

ERRATA.

Page 22. Line 19. dele \_yet\_, p. 31. l. 13 d. \_not only----but

against\_, p. 76. l. 5. r. \_imm’diate\_, p. 87. l. 11. r. \_Body\_, p. 168.

l. 17.f. \_of\_ r. \_the\_, p. 109, l. 8, after \_Thoughts\_ add \_to\_, p.

135. Marg. l. 4. r. \_Part\_ I. §. 45, p. 180. l. 15.f. \_a\_ r. \_an\_, p.

185. l. 9. f. \_bad\_ r. \_had\_, p. 260. l. 3. r. \_Ingenious\_.

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