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# The Government of the Tongue

Richard Allestree





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## The Government of the Tongue

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**Author(s):** Allestree, Richard (1619-1681)

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**Description:** Allestree meant *The Government of the Tongue* to serve as a partner to his treatise on biblical interpretation, *The Lively Oracles Given to Us*. While the latter deals with the proper use and application of the received Word, *The Government of the Tongue* deals with that of the spoken word. He draws primarily from the book of Proverbs and the general letter of James. First, he discusses why God gifted humankind with speech, then how humankind has since abused it. Serving for many years as provost of a boys' boarding school, Allestree writes practically and instructively.

Kathleen O'Bannon

CCEL Staff

**Subjects:** Ethics  
Individual ethics. Character. Virtue (Including practical and applied ethics...)

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THE  
**Government**  
OF THE  
**Tongue**

By the Author of  
The Whole Duty of Man, &c.

Death and Life are in the power of the Tongue. [Prov. 18. 21.](#)

The Second Impression

MDCLXXIV.

## The Preface

The Government of the Tongue has ever been justly reputed one of the most important parts of human Regiment. The Philosopher and the Divine equally attest this: and Solomon (who was both) gives his suffrage also; the persuasions to, and encomiums of it, taking up a considerable part of his book of Proverbs. I shall not therefore need to say anything, to justify my choice of this subject, which has so much better Authorities to commend it. I rather wish that it had not the super-addition of an accidental fitness grounded upon the universal neglect of it, it now seeming to be an art wholly out-dated. For though some lineaments of it may be met with in books, yet there is scarce any footsteps of it in practice, where alone it can be significant. The attempt therefore of reviving it I am sure is seasonable, I wish it were half as easy.

2. Indeed that skill was never very easy, it requiring the greatest vigilance and caution, and therefore not to be attained by loose trifling spirits. The Tongue is so slippery, that it easily deceives a drowsy or heedless guard. Nature seems to have given it some unhappy advantages towards that. 'Tis in its frame the most ready for motion of any member, needs not so much as the flexure of a joint, and by access of humors acquires a glibness too, the more to facilitate its moving. And alas, we too much find the effect of this its easy frame; it often goes without giving us warning; and as children when they happen upon a rolling engine, can set it in such a carrier, as wiser people cannot on a sudden stop; so the childish parts of us, our passions, our fancies, all our mere animal faculties, can thrust our tongues into such disorder, as our reason cannot easily rectify. The due management therefore of this unruly member, may be rightly be esteemed one of the greatest mysteries of Wisdom and Virtue. This is intimated by *St. James, If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body, Jam. 3. 2.* 'Tis storied of *Bembo*, a primitive Christian, that coming to a friend to teach him a Psalm, he began to him the thirty-ninth, *I said I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my Tongue*; upon hearing of which first verse, he stopped his Tutor, saying, "This is enough for me, if I learn it as I ought"; and being after six months rebuked for not coming again, he replied, that he had not yet learned his first lesson: nay, after nineteen years he professed, that in that time he had scarce learned to fulfill that one line. I give not this instance to discourage, but rather to quicken men to the study; for a lesson that requires so much time to learn, had need be early begun with.

3. But especially in this age, wherein the contrary liberty has got such a prepossession, that men look on it as a part of their birth-right; nay, do not only let their tongues loose, but studiously suggest inordinacies to them, and use the spur where they should the bridle. By this means conversation is so generally corrupted, that many have had cause to wish they had not been made sociable creatures. A man secluded from company can have but the Devil and himself to tempt him; be he that converses, has almost as many snares as he has

companions. Men barter vices, and as if each had not enough of his own growth, transplant out of his neighbors soil, and that which was intended to cultivate and civilize the world, has turned it into a wild desert and wilderness.

4. This face of things, I confess, looks not very promising to one who is to solicit a reformation. But whatever the hopes are, I am sure the needs are great enough to justify the attempt; for as the disease is Epidemic, so it is mortal also, utterly inconsistent with that pure religion, which leads to life. We may take *St. James's* word for it, "*If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is in vain*", *Jam. 1. 26*. God knows we have not much Religion among us: Tis great pity we should frustrate the little we have, render that utterly insignificant, which at the best amounts to so little. Let therefore the difficulty and necessity of the task, prevail with us to take time before us, not to defer this so necessary a work, till the night come; or imagine that the Tongue will be able to expiate its whole age of guilt by a feeble "*Lord have mercy on me*" at the last. Though indeed if that were supposable, Twere but a broken reed to trust to, none knowing whether he shall have time or grace for that. He may be surprised with an Oath, a Blasphemy, a Detraction in his mouth: many have been so. Tis sure there must be a dying moment: and how can any man secure himself, it shall not be the same with that in which he utters those, and his expiring breath, be so employed? Sure they cannot think that those incantations (though hellish enough) can make them scot free, render them invulnerable to death's darts; and if they have not that or some other as a ridiculous reserves, Tis strange what should make them run such a mad adventure.

5. But I expect it should be objected, that this little despicable Tract is not proportionable to the encounter to which it is brought; that besides the unskillful managing of those points it does touch, it wholly omits many proper to the subject, there being faults of the Tongue which it passes in silence. I confess there is color enough for this objection. But I believe if it were put to votes, more would resolve I had said too much, rather than too little. Should I have enlarged to the utmost compass of this Theme, I should have made the volume of so affrighting a bulk, that few would have attempted it; and by saying much I should have said nothing at all to those who most need it. Men's stomachs are generally so queasy in these cases, that Tis not safe to overload them; let them try how they can digest this: if they can so as to turn it into kindly nourishment, they will be able to supply themselves with the remainder. For I think I may with some confidence affirm, that he that can confine his Tongue within the limits here prescribed, may without much difficulty refrain from its other excursions. All I shall beg of the Reader, is but to come with sincere intentions, and then perhaps these few *Stones* and *Sling* used in the Name, and with invocation of the *Lord of Hosts*, may countervail the massive armor, of the *uncircumcised Philistine*; And may that God who loves to magnify his power in weakness, give it the like success.

## Section I. Of the Use of Speech.

Man at his first creation was substituted by God as his Viceregent, to receive the homage, and enjoy the services of all inferior beings: nay, farther was endowed with excellencies fit to maintain the port of so vast an Empire. Yet those very excellencies, as they qualified him for dominion, so they unfitted him for satisfaction or acquiescence in those his vassals: the dignity of his nature set him above the society or converse of mere animals; so that in all the pomp of his royalty, amidst all the throng and variety of creatures, he still remained solitary. But God who knew what an appetite of society he had implanted in him, judged this no agreeable state for him, It is not meet that man should be alone. [Gen. 2. 18.](#) And as in the universal frame of nature, he engrafted such an abhorrence of vacuity, that all creatures do rather submit to a preternatural motion than admit it, so, in this empty, this destitute condition of man, he relieved him by a miraculous expedient, divided him that he might unite him, and made one part of him an associate for the other.

2. Neither did God take this care to provide him a companion, merely for the intercourses of Sense: had that been the sole aim, there needed no new productions, there were sensitive creatures enough: the design was to entertain his nobler principle, his reason, with a more equal converse, assign him an intimate, whose intellect as much corresponded with his, as did the outward form, whose heart, according to *Solomon's* resemblance, answered his, *As in water face answers face*, [Prov. 27. 19.](#) with whom he might communicate minds, traffic and interchange all the notions and sentiments of a reasonable soul.

3. But though there were this sympathy in their sublimer part which disposed them to a most intimate union; yet there was a cloud of flesh in the way which intercepted their mutual view, nay, permitted no intelligence between them, other than by the mediation of some Organ equally commensurate to soul and body. And to this purpose the infinite wisdom of God ordained Speech; which as it is a sound resulting from the modulation of the Air, has most affinity to the spirit, but as it is uttered by the Tongue, has immediate cognition with the body, and so is the fittest instrument to manage a commerce between the rational yet invisible powers of human souls clothed in flesh.

4. And as we have reason to admire the excellency of this contrivance, so have we to applaud the extensiveness of the benefit. From this it is we derive all the advantages of society: without this men of the nearest neighborhood would have signified no more to each other than the *Antipodes* now do to us. All our arts and sciences for the accommodation of this life, had remained only a rude Chaos in their first matter, had not speech by a mutual comparing of notions ranged them into order. By this it is we can give one another notice of our wants, and solicit relief; by this we interchange advices, reproofs, consolations, all the necessary aids of human feebleness. This is that which possesses us of the most valuable



blessing of human life, I mean Friendship, which could no more have been contracted amongst dumb men, than it can between pictures and statues. Nay, farther to this we owe in a great degree the interests even of our spiritual being, all the oral, yea, and written revelations too of God's will: for had there been no language there had been no writing. And though we must not pronounce how far God might have evidenced himself to mankind by immediate inspiration of every individual, yet we may safely rest in the Apostle's inference in [Rom. 10. 14](#). *How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?*

5. From all these excellent uses of it in respect to man, we may collect another in relation to God, that is in *praising* and *magnifying* his goodness, as for all other effects of his bounty, so particularly that he hath given us language, and all the consequent advantages of it. This is the just inference of the son of Syrach in [Ecclus. 51. 22](#). *The Lord hath given me a tongue, and I will praise him therewith*. This is the sacrifice which God calls for so often by the Prophets, *the Calves of our Lips*, which answers to all *the oblations out of the herd*, and which the Apostle makes equivalent to those of the *floor* and *winepress* also, [Heb. 13. 15](#). *The fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name*. To this we frequently find the Psalmist exciting both himself and others, *Awake up my glory, I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the people, and I will sing unto Thee among the nations*. [Psa. 57. 9, 10](#). And *O praise the Lord with me, and let us magnify His name together*. [Psa. 34. 3](#). And indeed, whoever observes that excellent magazine of Devotion, the book of Psalms, shall find that the *Lauds* make up a very great part of it.

6. By what hath been said, we may define what are the grand Uses of speech, viz. the glorifying of God, and the benefiting of men. And this helps us to an infallible test by which to try our words. For since everything is so far approvable as it answers the end of its being, what part soever of our discourses agrees not with these primitive ends of speech, will not hold weight in the balance of the sanctuary. It will therefore nearly concern us to enter upon this scrutiny, to bring our words to this touchstone: for though in our depraved estimate the Eloquence of Language is more regarded than the innocence, though we think our words vanish with the breath that utters them, yet they become records in God's Court, are laid up in his Archives as witnesses either for, or against us: for he who is truth itself hath told us, that *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*. [Mat. 12. 37](#).

## Section II. Of the manifold Abuse of Speech.

And now, since the original designs of speaking are so noble, so advantageous, one would be apt to conclude no rational creature would be tempted to pervert them, since tis sure he can substitute none for them, that can equally conduce, either to his honor, or interest.

2. Yet experience (that great baffler of speculation) assures us the thing is too possible, and brings in all ages matter of fact to confute our suppositions. So liable alas, is speech to be depraved, that the Scripture describes it as the force of all our other depravation. Original sin came first out of the mouth by speaking, before it entered by eating. The first use we find *Eve* to have made of her language, was to enter parley with the tempter, and from that to become a tempter to her husband. And immediately upon the fall, guilty *Adam* frames his tongue to a frivolous excuse, which was much less able to cover his sin than the fig leaves his nakedness. And as in the infancy of the first world, the tongue had licked up the venom of the old serpent, so neither could the Deluge wash it off in the second. No sooner was that small colony (wherewith the depopulated earth was to be replanted) come forth of the Ark, but we meet with *Ham*, a detractor of his own father, inviting his brethren to that execrable spectacle of their parent's nakedness.

3. Nor did this only run in the blood of that accursed Person; the holy seed was not totally free from its infection, even the Patriarchs themselves were not exempt. *Abraham* used a repeated collusion in the case of his wife, and exposed his own integrity to preserve her chastity. *Isaac* the heir of his blessing, was son of his infirmity also, and acted over the same scene upon *Rebecca's* account. *Jacob* obtained his father's blessing by a flat lie. *Simeon* and *Levi* spake not only falsely, but insidiously, nay, hypocritically, abusing at once their proselytes, and their religion, for the effecting their cruel designs upon the *Shechemites*. *Moses*, though a man of unparalleled meekness, yet *spake unadvisedly with his lips*, [Psa. 106. 33](#). *David* uttered a bloody vow against *Nabal*, *spake words smoother than oil* to *Uriah*, when he had done him one injury, and designed him another. Twere endless to reckon up those several instances the Old Testament gives us of these lapses of the Tongue: neither want there divers in the New; though there is one of so much horror, as supersedes the naming more, I mean that of *St. Peter* in his reiterated abjuring his Lord, a crime which (abstracted from the intention) seems worse than the one of *Judas*: that traitor owned his relation, cried *Master, Master*, even when he betrayed him, so that had he been measured only by his tongue, he might have passed for the better disciple.

4. These are sad instances, not recorded to pratonize the sin, but to excite our caution. It was a politic inference of the elders of Israel in the case of *Jehu*, *Behold two kings stood not before him, how then shall we stand?* [2 King. 10](#). And we may well apply it to this: if persons of so circumspect a piety have been thus overtaken, what security can there be for

our wretched obstinacy? If those who *kept their mouths, as it were, with a bridle*, [Psa. 39.](#) could not have always preserve their innocence, to what guilts may not our unrestrained licentious tongues hurry us? Those which as the Psalmist speaketh in [Psa. 73. 9.](#) *go through the world*, are in that unbounded range very likely to meet with him who walks the same round. [Job 2. 2.](#) and by him be tuned and set to his key, be screwed and wrested from their proper use, and made subservient to his vilest designs.

5. And would God this were only a probable supposition! But alas, experience supplants the use of conjecture in the point: we do not only presume it may be so, but actually find it is so; for amidst the universal depravation of our Faculties, there is none more notorious than that of speech. Whither shall we turn us to find it in its pristine integrity? Amidst that infinity of words in which we exhaust our breath, how few are there which do at all correspond with the original designation of speech, nay, which do not flatly contradict it? To what unholy, uncharitable purposes is that useful faculty perverted? That which was meant to serve as the perfume of the tabernacle, to send up the incenses of praise and prayers, now exhales in impious vapors, to eclipse, if it were possible, the Father of light. That which should be the store-house of relief and refreshment to our brethren, is become a magazine of all offensive weapons against them, *spears and arrows and sharp swords*, as the Psalmist often phrases them. We do not only fall by the slipperiness of our tongues, but we deliberately discipline and train them to mischief. *We bend our tongues as our bows for lies*. As the Prophet speaks in [Jer. 9.](#) And in a word, what God affirmed of the old world in relation to thoughts, is too applicable to our words, *they are evil and that continually*, [Gen. 6. 5.](#) and that which was intended for the instrument, the aid of human society, is become the disturber, the pest of it.

6. I Shall not attempt a particular discussion of all the vices of the Tongue: it doth indeed pass all Geography to draw an exact Map of that *world of iniquity*, as *St. James* calls it. I shall only draw the greater lines, and distribute it into its principal and more eminent parts, which are distinguishable as they relate to God, our Neighbor, and our Selves: in each of which I shall rather make an essay by way of instance, than attempt to exact enumeration or survey.

### Section III. Of Atheistical Discourse.

I Begin with those which relate to God, this poor despicable member the tongue being of such a gigantic insolence, though not size, as even to make war with heaven. Tis true every disordered speech doth remotely so, as it is a violation of God's law; but I now speak only of those which as it were attack his person, and immediately fly in the face of Omnipotency. In the highest rank of these we may well place all Atheistical Discourse, which is that bold fort of rebellion, which strikes not only at his Authority, but Himself. Other blasphemies level some at one Attribute, some another; but this by a more compendious impiety, shoots at his very being; and as if it scorned those piece-meal guilts, sets up a single monster big enough to devour them all: for all inferior profaneness is an much outdated by Atheism, as is religion itself.

2. Time was when the inveighing against this, would have been thought a very impertinent subject in a Christian nation, and men would have replied upon me as the *Spartan Lady* did, when she was asked what was the punishment for adulteresses, *There are no such things here*. Nay, even amongst the most barbarous people, it could have concerned but some few single persons, no numbers, much less societies of men, having ever excluded the belief of a Deity. And perhaps it may at this day concern them as little as ever; for amidst the various Deities and worships of those remoter nations, we have yet no account of any that renounced all. Tis only our light hath so blinded us: so that God may upbraid us as he did Israel, *Hath a nation changed their gods which yet are no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.* Jer. 2. 11. This madness is now the enclosure, the peculiarity of those, who by their names and institution should be Christians: as if that natural Aphorism, *That when things are at their height they must fall again*, had place here also, and our being of the most excellent, most elevated religion, were but the preparation to our being of none.

3. Tis indeed deplorable to see, how the professors of no God begin to vie numbers with all the differing persuasions in religion, so that Atheism seems to be the gulf that finally swallows up all our Sects. It has struck on a sudden into such a reputation, that it scorns any longer to skulk, but owns itself more publicly than most men dare do the contrary. Tis *set down in the seat of the scorner*, and since it cannot argue, resolves to laugh all Piety out of countenance, and having seized the mint, nothing shall pass for wit that hath not its stamp, and with it there is no metal of so base an alloy, but shall go current. Even the dullest creature that can but stoutly disclaim his Maker, has by it sufficiently secured its title to ingenuity; and such measures being once established, no wonder at its shoals of proselytes, when it gives at the one hand license to all sensual inordinancies, permits them to be as much beasts as they will, or can, and yet tells them on the other, that they are the more men for it. Sure tis not strange that a hook thus doubly baited should catch many. Either of those

allurements single, we see has force enough. The charms of sensuality are so fascinating, that even those who believe another world, and the severe revenges that will there attend their luxuries, yet choose to take them in present with all their dismal reversions. And then sure it cannot but be very good news to such a one to be told, that that after-reckoning is but a false alarm: and his great willingness to have it true, will easily incline him to believe it is so. And doubtless were Atheism traced up to its first cause, this would be found the most operative. 'Tis so convenient for a man that will have no God to control or restrain him, to have none to punish him neither, that that utility passes into Argument, and he will rather put a cheat upon his understanding by concluding there is no future account, than leave such a sting in his pleasures, as the remembrance of it must needs prove. This seems to be the original and first rise of this impiety, it being impossible for any man that sees the whole, nay, but the smallest part of the Universe, to doubt of a first and supreme Being, until from the consciousness of his provocations, it become his interest there should be none.

4. This is indeed, considering the depravity of the world, a pretty fast tenure for Atheism to hold by; yet it has of late twisted its cord, and got that other string to its bow we before mentioned. Its bold monopolizing of wit and reason compels, as other invited men. This we many indeed call the devil's press, by which he hath filled up his troops. Men are afraid of being reproached for silly and irrational, in giving themselves up to a blind belief of what they do not see: and this bugbear frights them from their religion, resolving they will be *no fools for Christ's sake*. [1 Cor. 4. 10](#). I dare appeal to the breasts of many in this Age, whether this have not been one of the most prevalent temptations with them to espouse the tenet: and though perhaps they at first took it up, only in their own defense, for fear of being thought fools, yet that fear soon converts into ambition of being thought wits. They do not satisfy themselves with deserting their religion, unless they revile it also; remembering how themselves were laughed out of it, they essay to do the like by others. Yea, so zealous propugners are they of their negative Creed, that they are importunately diligent to instruct men in it, and in all the little sophistries and colors for defending it: so that he that would measure the opinions by their industry and the remissness of believers, would certainly think that the great interests of Eternity lay wholly on their side. Yet I take not this for any argument of the confidence of this persuasion, but the contrary: for we know they are not the secure, but the desperate undertakings, wherein men are most desirous of partners, and there is somewhat of horror in an uncouth way, which makes men unwilling to travail it alone.

5. The truth is, though these men speak big, and prescribe as positively to their pupils, as if they had some counter revelation to confute those of *Moses* and *Christ*, yet were their secret thoughts laid open, there would scarce be found the like assurance there. I will not say to what reprobate sense some particular persons may have provoked God to deliver them, but in the generality, I believe one may affirm, that there is seldom an infidelity so

sanguine as to exclude all fears. Their most bold Thesis, That *there is no God*, no judgement, no hell, is often met with an inward tremulous Hypothesis, What if there be? I dare in this remit me to themselves, and challenge (not their consciences, who profess to have none, but) their natural ingenuity to say, whether they have not sometimes such damps and shivering within them. If they shall say, that these are but the relics of prepossession and education, which their reason soon dissipates, Let me then ask them farther, whether they would not really give a considerable sum to be infallibly ascertained there were no such thing: no sensible man would give a farthing to be secured from a thing which his reason tells him is impossible: therefore, if they would give anything (as I dare say they cannot deny to themselves that they would) tis a tacit demonstration that they are not so sure as they pretend to be.

6. I Might here join issue upon the whole, and press them with the unreasonableness, the disingenuousness of embracing a profession to which their own hearts have an inward reluctance, nay, the imprudence of governing their lives by that position, which for ought they know may be (nay, they actually fear is) false, and if it be, must inevitable immerse them in endless ruin. But I must remember my design limits me only to the faults of the Tongue, and therefore I must not follow this chase beyond those bounds. I shall only extend it to my proper subject, that of Atheistical talk, wherein they make as mad an adventure as in any other of their enormous practices, nay, perhaps in some respects a worse.

7. In the first place, tis to be considered, that if there be a God, He, as well as men, may be provoked by our words as well as our deeds. Secondly, tis possible he may be more. Our ill deeds may be done upon a vehement impulse of temptation; some profit or pleasures may transport and hurry us, and they may at least have this alleviation, that we did them to please or advantage ourselves, not to spite God: but Atheistical words cannot be so palliated: they are arrows directly shot against heaven, and can come out of no quiver but malice; for tis certain there never was man that said, There was no God, but he wished it first. We know what an enhancement our injuries to each other receive from their being malicious: and sure they will do so much more to God, whose principal demand from us is, that we give him our heart. But thirdly, this implies a malice of the highest sort. Human spite is usually confined within some bounds, aims sometimes at the goods, sometimes at the fame, at most but at the life of our neighbor: but here is an accumulation of all those, backed with the most prodigious insolence. Tis God only that has power of annihilation, and we (vile worms) seek here to steal that incommunicable right, and retort it upon himself, and by an anti-creative power would unmake him who has made us. Nay lastly, by this we have not only the utmost guilt of single rebels, but we become ringleaders also, draw in others to that accursed association: for tis only this liberty of Discourse that has propagated Atheism. The Devil might perhaps by inward suggestions have drawn here and there a single Proselyte,

but he could never have had such numbers, had he not used some as decoys to ensnare others.

8. And now let the alert Atheist a little consider, what all these aggravations will amount to. 'Twas good counsel was give to the Athenians to be very sure *Philip* was dead, before they expressed their joy at his death, lest they might find him alive to revenge that hasty triumph. And the like I may give to these men, Let them be very sure *there is no God*, before they presume thus to defy Him, lest they find Him at last assert His being in their destruction. Certainly nothing less than a Demonstration can justify the reasonableness of such a daring. And when they can produce that, they have so far outgone all the comprehensions of mankind, they may well challenge the liberty of their Tongue, and say, *We are our own, who is Lord over us?* [Psa. 12. 4.](#)

9. But till this be done, twere well they would soberly balance the hazards of this liberty with the gains of it. The hazards are of the most dreadful kind, the gains of the slightest: the most is but a vain applause of wit for an impious jest, or of reason for a deep considerer: and yet even for that they must encroach on the Devil's right too, who is commonly the prompter, and therefore, if there be any credit in it may justly challenge it. Indeed tis to be feared he will at last prove the master wit, when as for those little loans he made to them, he gets their souls in mortgage. Would God they would consider betimes, what a woeful raillery that will be, which for ought they know may end in *gnashing of teeth*.

10. The next impiety of the Tongue is Swearing, that foolish sin which plays the Platonic to damnation, and courts it purely for itself, without any of the appendant allurements which other sins have: a vice which for its guilt may justify the sharpest, and for its customariness the frequentest invectives which can be made against it: but it has been assaulted so often by better pens, and has showed itself so much proof against all Homily, that it is as needless as discouraging a task for me to attempt it. Tis indeed a thing taken up so perfectly without all sense, that tis the less wonder to find it maintain itself upon the same principle tis founded, and continue in the same defiance to reason wherein it began.

11. All therefore that I shall say concerning it, is to express my wonder how it has made a shift to twist itself with the former sin of Atheism, by which according to all rules of reasoning it seems to be superseded: and yet we see none own God more in their oaths, than those that disavow him in their other discourse: nay, such men swear not only to swell their language, and make it sound more full and blustering, but even when they most desire to be believed. What an absurdity of wickedness is this? Is there a God to swear by, and is there none to believe in, none to pray to? We call it frenzy to see a man fight with a shadow: but sure tis more so, to invoke it. Why then do these men of reason make such solemn appeals (for such every oath is) to a mere Chimera and Phantasm? It would make one think they had some inward belief of a Deity, which they upon surprise thus blurt out: if it argue not this, it does something worse, and becomes an evidence how much the appearance of a sin



recommends it to them, that they thus catch at it, without examining how it will consist with another they like better. These are indeed wholesale chapmen to Satan, that do not truck and barter one crime for another, but take the whole herd: and though by reason of their disagreeing kinds they are apt to gore and worry each other, yet he still keeps up his old policy, and will not let one Devil cast out another. A league shall be made between the most discordant sins, and there shall be a God, or there shall be none, according as opportunity serves to provoke him: so assuming to himself a power which even Omnipotence disclaims, the reconciling of contradictions. And the Devil succeeds in it as far as his concern reaches: for though he cannot solve the repugnancies in reason, yet as long as he can unite the sins in men's practice, he has his design, nay, has at once the gain and the sport of fooling these great pretenders to ratiocination.

12. A Third sort of impious discourse there is, which yet is bottomed on the most sacred, I mean those profane paraphrases that are usually made upon the holy Text, many making it the subject of their cavils, and others of their mirth. Some do it out of the former Atheistical principle, and I cannot but confess they act consonantly to themselves in it: for this but a needful artifice for men to disparage those testimonies, which they fear may be brought against them. But there are others who not only profess a God, but also own the sacred Scripture for His word, and use it as coarsely as the others. And these, I confess, are riddles of profaneness that hang, as some have pictured *Solomon*, between heaven and hell, borrow the Christian's faith, and the Atheist's drollery upon it: and tis hard to say in which they are more the earnest. It is indeed scandalous to see, to what despicable uses those holy Oracles are put: such as should a Heathen observe, he would little suspect them to be owned by us as the rule of our religion, and could never think they were ever meant for anything beyond a whetstone for wit. One tries his Logic upon them, and objects to the sense; another his Rhetoric, and quarrels at the phrase; a third his contrivance, and thinks he could have woven the parts with a better contexture: never considering, that unless they could confute the Divinity of their original, all these accusations are nothing else but direct blasphemy, the making God *such a one as themselves*, [Psa. 50. 21.](#) and charging Him with those defects which are indeed their own. They want learning or industry to sound the depths of those sacred treasures, and therefore they decry the Scripture as mean and poor; and to justify their wisdom, dispute God's. This is as if the mole should complain that the sun is dark, because he dwells under ground, and sees not its splendor. Men are indeed in all instances apt to speak ill of all things they understand not, but in none more than this. Their ignorance of local customs, Idioms of language, and several other circumstances, renders them incompetent judges, (as has been excellently evinced by a late Author). Twill therefore befit them, either to qualify themselves better, or to spare their Criticisms. But upon the whole, I think I may challenge any ingenious man, to produce any writing of that antiquity, whose phrase and genius is so accommodated to all successions of ages. Styles and ways of address we



know grow obsolete, and are almost antiquated as garments: and yet after so long a tract of time, the Scripture must (by considering men) be confessed to speak not only properly, but often politely and elegantly to the present age: a great argument that it is the dictate of Him that is, *The same yesterday, today, and forever*. [Heb. 13. 7.](#)

13. But besides these more solemn traducers, there are a lighter ludicrous sort of profaners, who use the Scripture as they do odd ends of plays, to furnish out their jests; clothe all their little impertinent conceits in its language, and debase it by the mixture of such miserable trifles, as themselves would be ashamed of, were they not heightened and inspired by that profaneness. A Bible phrase serves them in discourse as the haut-goust does in diet, to give a relish to the most insipid stuff. And were it not for this magazine, a great many men's raillery would want supplies: for there are divers who make a great noise of wit, that would be very mute if this one Topic were barred them. And indeed, it seems a tacit confession that they have little of their own, when they are fain thus to commit sacrilege to drive on the trade. But sure tis a pitiful pretence to ingenuity that can be thus kept up, there being little need of any other faculty but memory to be able to cap Texts. I am sure such repetitions out of other books would be thought pedantic and silly. How ridiculous would a man be, that should always enterlard his discourse with fragments of *Horace*, or *Virgil*, or the Aphorisms of *Pythagoras*, or *Seneca*? Now tis too evident, that it is not from any superlative esteem of sacred Writ, that it is so often quoted: and why should it then be thought a specimen of wit to do it there, when tis folly in other instances? The truth is, tis so much the reserve of those who can give no better Testimony of their parts, that me thinks upon that very score it should be given over by those that can. And sure were it possible for anything that is so bad to grow unfashionable, the world has had enough of this to be cloyed with it: but how fond soever men are of this divertissement, twill finally prove that *mirth Solomon* speaks of, which *ends in heaviness*. [Prov. 14. 13.](#) For certainly, whether we estimate it according to human or divine measure, it must be a high provocation of God.

14. Let any of us but put the case in our persons: suppose we had written to a friend, to advertise him of things of the greatest importance to himself, had given him ample and exact instructions, backed them with earnest exhortations and conjurings not to neglect his own concern, and lastly enforced all with the most moving expressions of kindness and tenderness to him: suppose, I say, that after all this, the next news of we should hear of that letter, were to have it put in doggerel rime, to be made sport for the rabble, or at best have the most eminent phrases of it picked out and made a common by-word: I would fain know how any of us would resent such a mixture of ingratitude and contumely. I think I need make no minute application. The whole design of the Bible does sufficiently answer, nay, outgo the first part of the parallel, and God knows our vile usage of it does too much (I fear too literally) adapt the latter. And if we think the affront too base for one of us, can we believe God will take it in good part? That were to make Him not only more stupid than any man, but as

much so as the heathen idols, that have *eyes and see not*, [Psa. 115. 5](#). And tis sure the highest madness in the world, for any man that believes that there is a God, to imagine he will finally sit down by such usage.

15. But if we weigh it in the scale of religion; the crime will yet appear more heinous. Mere natural Piety has taught men to receive the Responses of their gods with all possible veneration. What applications had the Delphic Oracle from all parts, and from all ranks of men? What confidence had they in its prediction, and what obedience did they pay to its advice? If we look next into the Mosaical Oeconomy, we shall see with what dreadful Solemnities that Law was promulgated, what an awful reverence was paid to the mount whence it issued, how it was fenced from any rude intrusions either of men or beasts: and after it was written on tables, all the whole equipage of the Tabernacle, was designed only for its more decent repository, the Ark itself receiving its value only for what it had in custody. Yea, such a hallowing influence had it, as transfused a relative sanctity even to the meanest utensils, none of which were after to be put to common uses: the very perfume was so peculiar and sacred, that it was a capital crime to imitate the composition. Afterwards, when more of the divine revelations was committed to writing, the Jews were such scrupulous reverers of it, that twas the business of the Masorites, to number not only the sections and lines, but even the words and letters of the Old Testament, that by that exact calculation they might the better secure it from any surreptitious practices.

16. And sure the New Testament is not of less concern than the Old: nay, the Apostle asserts it to be of far greater, and which we shall be more accountable for, *For if the word spoken by Angels were steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken to us by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard it?* [Heb. 2. 23](#). And it is in another place the inference of the same Apostle, from the excellency of the Gospel above the Law, that we should *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*. [Heb. 12. 28](#). And certainly tis but an ill essay of that reverence and godly fear, to use that very Gospel so irreverently and ungodly as men now do. If we pass from the Apostolic to the next succeeding ages of the Church, we find the Primitive Christians looked on their Bibles as their most important treasure. Such was the outward respects they paid to them, (of which the standing up at the reading of Gospel, still in use among us, is a faint memorial) that the heathen persecutors made it one part of their examination of the Christians brought to their tribunals, *What those books were which they adored while they read them?* Such was their intimate esteem, that they exposed all things else to the rapine of their enemies, so they might secure those volumes. Nor was this only an heroic piece of zeal in some, but indispensably required of all: insomuch that when in the heat of persecution, they were commanded to deliver up their Bibles to be burned, the Church gave no indulgence for that necessity of the times, but exhorted men rather to deliver up their lives: and those whose

courage failed them in the encounter, were not only branded by the infamous name of *Traitors*, but separated from the communion of the faithful, and not readmitted till after many years of the severest penance.

17. I Have given this brief narration, with a desire that the reader will compare the practice of former times with those of the present, and see what he can find either among Heathens, Jews, or Christians, that can at all patronize our profaneness. There was no respect thought too much for the false Oracles of a falser god: and yet we think no contempts too great for those of the true. The moral law was so sacred to the Jews, that no parts of its remotest retinue, those ceremonial attendants, were to be looked upon as common: and we who are equally obliged by that Law, laugh at that by which we must one day be judged. The Ritual, the Preceptive, the Prophetic, and all other parts of sacred Writ, were most sedulously, most religiously guarded by them: and we look upon them as a winter night's tale, from which to fetch matter of sport and merriment. Lastly, the first Christians paid a veneration to, nay, sacrificed their lives to rescue their Bibles from the unworthy usage of the Heathens, and we ourselves expose them to the worse: they would but have burned them, we scorn and vilify them, and outvy even the persecutor's malice with our contempt. These are miserable Antitheses; yet this God knows is the case with too many. I wonder what new state of Felicity hereafter these men have fancied to themselves: for sure they cannot think these retrograde steps, can ever bring them so much as to the Heathen Elysium, much less the Christian Heaven.

18. It will therefore concern those who do not quite renounce their claim to that Heaven, to consider soberly, how inconsistent their practice is with those hopes. A man may have a great estate conveyed to him; but if will madly burn, or childishly make paper kites of his Deeds, he forfeits his title with his evidence: and those certainly that deal so with the conveyances of their eternal inheritance, will not speed better. If they will thus dally and play with them, God will be as little in earnest in the performance, as they are in the reception of the promises; nay, He will take His turn of mocking too, and when their scene of mirth is over, His will begin. [Prov. 1. 24.](#) which deserves to be set down at large, *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded: But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I will also laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind: when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.* Would God I could as well transcribe this Text into men's hearts, and there would need no more to secure the whole Canon of Scripture from their profanation. Could men but look a little before them, and apprehend how in the days of their distress and agony, they will gasp for those comforts which they now turn into ridicule; they would not thus madly defeat themselves, cut off their best and only reserve, and with a pitiful contempt cast away those Cordials,

which will then be the only support of their fainting spirits. As for those who deride Scripture upon Atheistical grounds, all I shall say is to refer to what I have said in the beginning of the Section; they had need be very well assured that foundation be not sandy: for if it be, this reproaching God's word will be a considerable addition to the guilt of all their other hostility, and how jolly soever they seem at present, it may be when that question they are so willing to take for granted, is by death drawing near a decision, some of their confidence will retire, and leave them in an amazed expectation of somewhat, which they are sure cannot be good for them, who have so ill provided for it. Then perhaps their merry vein will fail them; and not their infidelity, but their despair may keep them from invoking that Power that they have so long derided. Tis certain it has so happened with some: for as practical, so Speculative wickedness, has usually another aspect, when it stands in the shadow of death, than in the dazzling beams of health and vigor. It would therefore be wisdom beforehand to draw it out of this deceitful light, and by sober, serious thoughts place it as near as may be in those circumstances in which twill then appear: and then sure to hearts that are not wholly petrified, twill seem safer to own a God early and upon choice, than later upon a compulsion.

19. However, if they will not yield themselves Homagers, yet the mere possibility of their being in the wrong, should methinks, persuade them at least to be civil to adversaries. A generous man will not pursue even a falling enemy with revilings and reproach, must less will a wise man do it to one who is in any the least probability of revenging it: it being a received Maxim, That there is no greater folly than for a man to let his tongue betray him to mischief. Let it therefore, in this case at least, stand neuter, that if by their words they be not justified, yet by their words they may not be condemned. They can be no losers by it: for at the utmost, tis but keeping in a little unsavory breath, which (supposing no God to be offended with it) is yet nauseous to all those men who believe there is one. To those indeed who have a zeal for their faith, there can be no Discourse so intolerable, so disobliging: it turns conversation into skirmishing, and perpetual disputes. The Egyptians were so zealous for their brutish Deities, that *Moses* presumed the Israelites sacrificing of those beasts they adored, must need set them in an uproar, [Exod. 8. 26](#). And sure those who do acknowledge a Divine power, cannot contentedly sit by to hear Him blasphemed. Tis true there are some so cool, that they are of the same mind for God, that *Gideon's* father was for *Baal*, [Judg. 6. 31](#). *Let him plead for himself*, they will not appear in His defense: yet even these have a secret consciousness, that they ought to do so, and therefore have some uneasiness in being put to the Test: so that it cannot be a pleasant entertainment even for them. And therefore those who have no fear of God to restrain them, should methinks, unless they be perfectly of the temper of the unjust Judge, [Luke 17. 1](#). in respect to men abstain from all sorts of impious discourse; and at least be civil, though they will not be pious.

## Section IV Of Detraction.

We have seen in the last Section the insolence of the Tongue towards God; and sure we cannot expect it should pay more reverence to men. If there be those that dare *stretch their mouths against heaven*, [Psa. 7. 39.](#) we are not to wonder if there be more that will *shoot their arrows, even bitter words*, against the best on earth, [Psa. 64. 3.](#) I shall not attempt to ransack the whole quiver, by showing every particular sort of verbal injuries which relate to our Neighbors, but rather choose out some few, which either for the extraordinariness of their guilt, or the frequency of their practice, are the most eminent. I begin with *Detraction*, in which both those qualities concur: for as in some instances tis one of the highest sins, so in the general tis certainly one of the most common, and by being so becomes insensible. This vice (above all others) seems to have maintained not only its Empire, but its reputation, too. Men are not yet convinced heartily that it is a sin: or if any, not of so deep a die, or so wide an extent as indeed it is. They have, if not false, yet imperfect notions of it, and by not knowing how far its Circle reaches, do often like young Conjurers step beyond the limits of their safety.

This I am the apter to believe, because I see some degree of this fault cleave to those, who have eminently corrected all other exorbitancies of the Tongue. Many who would startle at an Oath, whose stomachs as well as consciences, recoil at an obscenity, do yet slide glibly into a Detraction: which yet, methinks, persons otherwise of strict conversations should not do frequently and habitually, had not their easy thoughts of the guilt smoothed the way to it.

It may therefore be no unkind attempt, to try to disentangle from this snare by displaying it; showing the whole contexture of the sin, how tis woven with threads of different sizes, yet the least of them strong enough to noose and entrap us. And alas, if Satan fetter us, tis indifferent to him whether it be by a cable or a hair. Nay, perhaps the smallest sins are his greatest stratagems. The finer his line is spun, the less shadow it casts, and is less apt to fright us from the hook: and though there be much odds between a talent of lead and a grain of sand, yet those grains may be accumulated till they out-weigh the talent. It was a good replay of *Plato's*, to one who murmured at his reproving him for a small matter, *Custom*, says he, *is no small matter*. And indeed, supposing any sin were so small as we are willing to fancy most, yet an indulgent habit even of that would be certainly ruinous: that indulgence being perfectly opposite to the Love of God, which better can consist with the indeliberate commissions of many sins, than with an allowed persistence in any one.

But in this matter of Detraction I cannot yield that any is small, save only comparatively with some other of the same kind which is greater: for absolutely considered, there is even in the very lowest degrees of it, a flat contradiction to the grand rule of Charity, the loving

our neighbor as ourselves. And surely that which at once violates the sum of the whole second Table of the Law, for so our Savior renders it, [Luke 10. 7.](#) must be looked on as no trifling inconsiderable guilt. To evidence this I shall in the Anatomizing this sin apply this Rule to every part of it: first consider it in Gross, in its entire body, and after descend to its several limbs.

1. Detraction, in the native importance of the word, signifies the withdrawing or taking off from a thing; and as it is applied to the reputation, it denotes the impairing or lessening a man in point of fame, rendering him less valued and esteemed by others, which is the final aim of Detraction, though pursued by various means.

2. This is justly looked on as one of the most unkind designs one man can have upon another, there being implanted in every man's nature a great tenderness of Reputation: and to be careless of it, is looked on as a mark of a Degenerous mind. On which account *Solon* in his Law presumes, that he that will sell his own fame, will also sell the public interest. 'Tis true, many have improved this too far, blown up this native spark into such flames of Ambition, as has set the world in a combustion; Such as *Alexander, Caesar,* and others, who sacrificed Hecatombs to their Fame, fed it up to a prodigy upon a Cannibal diet, the flesh of Men: yet even these excesses serve to evince the universal consent of mankind, that Reputation is a valuable and desirable thing.

3. Nor have we only the suffrage of man, but the attestation of God Himself, who frequently in Scripture gives testimony to it: *A good name is better than great riches, Prov. 22. 1.* And again, *A good name is better than precious ointment. Eccles. 7. 1.* And the more to recommend it, he proposes it as a reward of piety and virtue, as he menaces the contrary to wickedness. *The memory of the just shall be blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot. Prov. 10. 7.* And that we may not think this an invitation fitted only to the Jewish Oeconomy, the Apostle goes farther, and proposes the endeavor after it as a duty, *Whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Phil. 4. 8.*

4. And accordingly, good men have in their estimate ranked their names the next degree to their Souls, preferred them before goods or life. Indeed, 'tis that which gives us an inferior sort of Immortality, and makes us even in this world survive ourselves. This part of us alone continues verdant in the grave, and yields a perfume, when we are stench and rottenness: the consideration whereof has so prevailed with the more generous Heathens, that they have cheerfully quitted life in contemplation of it. Thus *Epaminondas* alaciously expired, in a confidence that he left behind him a perpetual memory of the victories he had achieved for his Country. *Brutus* so courted the fame of a Patriot, that he broke through all the obstacles of gratitude and humanity to attain it: he cheerfully bore the defeat of his attempt, in contemplation of the glory it. Twere endless to recount the stories of the *Codri, Decii,* and *Curtii,*

with the train of those noble Heroes, who in behalf of their Countries devoted themselves to certain death.

5. But we need no foreign Mediums to discover the value of a good name: let every man weigh it but in his own scales, retire to his breast, and there reflect on that impatience he has when his own repute is invaded. To what dangers, to what guilts does sometimes the mere fancy of a reproach hurry men? It makes them really forfeit that virtue from when all true reputation springs, and like *Aesop's* dog, lose the substance by too greedy catching at the shadow; an irrefragable proof how great a price they set on their fame.

6. And then, since reason sets it as so high a rate, and passion at a higher, we may conclude the violation this interest, one of the greatest injuries in the human commerce; such as is resented not only by the rash, but the sober: so that we must pick out only blocks and stones, the stupid and insensible part of mankind, if we think we can inflict this would without an afflictive smart. And though the power of Christianity does in some so moderate this resentment, that none of those blows shall recoil, no degree of revenge be attempted; yet that does not at all justify or excuse the inflicter. It may indeed be a useful trial of the patience, and meekness of the defamed, yet the defamer has not the less either of crime or danger: not of crime, for that is rather enhanced than abated by the goodness of the person injured; nor of danger, since God is the more immediate avenger of those who attempt not to be their own. But if the injury meet not with this meekness (as in this vindictive age tis manifold odds it will not) it then acquires another accumulative guilt, stands answerable not only for its own positive ill, but for all the accidental which it causes in the sufferer, who by this means is robbed not only of his repute, but his innocence also, provoked to those unchristian returns, which draw God also into the enmity, and set him at war with heaven and earth. And though as to his immediate judgement, he must bear his iniquity, answer for his impatience: yet as in all Civil insurrections the ring-leader is looked on with a particular severity, so doubtless in this case, the first provoker has by his seniority and primogeniture a double portion of the guilt, and may consequently expect of the Punishment, according to the Doom of our Savior, *Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.* [Matt. 18. 7.](#)

7. Indeed, there is such a train of mischiefs usually following this sin, that tis scarce possible to make a full estimate of its malignity. Tis one of the grand incendiaries which disturbs the peace of the world, and has a great share in the most of its quarrels. For could we examine all the feuds which harass Persons, Families, nay, sometimes Nations, too, we should find the greater part take their rise from injurious, reproachful words, and that for one which is commenced upon the intuition of any real considerable interest, there are many which owe their being to this licentiousness of the Tongue.

8. In regard therefore, of its proper guilt, and all those remoter sins and miseries which ensue it, tis every man's great concern to watch over himself. Neither is it less in respect both of that universal aptness we have to this sin, and its being so perpetually at hand, that



for others we must attend occasions and convenient season, but the opportunities of this are always ready: I can do my neighbor this injury, when I can do him no other. Besides the multitude of objects do proportionally multiply both the possibilities and incitations; and the objects here are as numerous, as there are Persons in the world, I either know, or have heard of. For though some sorts of Detractions seem confined to those to whom we bear particular malice, yet there are other kinds of it more ranging, which fly indifferently at all. Lastly, this sin has the aid almost of universal example, which is an advantage beyond all other, there being scarce any so irresistible insinuation as the practice of those with whom we converse, and no subject of converse so common as the defaming our neighbors.

9. Since then the path is so slippery, it had not need to be dark, too. Let us then take in the best light we can, and attentively view this sin in its several branches, that by a distinct discovery of the divers acts and degrees of it, we may the better be armed against them all.



## SECTION V. Of Lying Defamation.

Detraction being (as we have already said) the lessening and impairing a man in his repute, we may resolve, that whatever conduces to that end, is properly a Detraction. I shall begin with that which is most eminent, the spreading of Defamatory reports. These may be of two kinds, either false, or true: which though they seem to be of very different complexions, yet may spring from the same stock, and drive at the same design. Let us first consider of the false.

2. And this admits of various circumstances. Sometimes a man invents a perfect falsity of another; sometimes he that does not invent, yet reports it, though he know it to be false; and a third sort there are, who having not certain knowledge whether it be false or no, do yet divulge it as an absolute certainty, or at least with such artificial insinuations, as may bias the hearer on that hand. The former of these crimes is so high, so disingenuous a nature, that though many are vile enough to commit it, none are so impudent as to avow it. Even in this age of insulting vice, when almost all other wickedness appears barefaced, this is feign to keep on the vizard. No man will own himself a false accuser: for if modesty do not restrain him, yet his very malice will; since to confess would be to defeat his design. Indeed, it is of all other sins the most Diabolical, it being a conjunction of two of Satan's most essential properties, Malice and Lying. We know tis his peculiar title to be *the Accuser of the brethren*: and when we transcribe his copy, we also assume his nature, entitle ourselves to a descent from him, *Ye are of your Father the Devil*. [John. 8. 44](#). We are by it rendered a sort of *Incubus* brats, the infamous progenies of the Lying spirit. It is indeed a sin of so gross, so formidable a bulk, that there needs no help of Optics to render it discernable, and therefore, I need not further expatiate on it.

3. The next degree is not much short of it; what it wants is rather of invention than malice: for he that will so adopt another's lie, shows he would willingly have been its proper Father. It does indeed differ no more than the maker of adulterate wares, does from the vendor of them: and certainly there cannot be a more ignominious trade, than the being Hucksters to such vile Merchandize. Neither is the sin less that the baseness: we find the *Lover* of a lie ranked in an equal form of guilt with the *Maker*, [Rev. 21](#). And surely he must be presumed to love it, that can descend to be the broker to it, help it to pass current in the world.

4. The third sort of Detractors look a little more demurely, and with the woman in [Proverbs, Chap. 30](#). *Wipe their mouths, and say they have done no wickedness*. They do not certainly know the falsity of what they report, and their ignorance must serve them as an Amulet against the guilt both of deceit and malice: but I fear it will do neither. For first, perhaps, they are affectedly ignorant: they are so willing it should be true, that they have

not attempted to examine it. But Secondly, it does not suffice that I do not know the falsity; for to make me a true speaker, tis necessary I know the truth of what I affirm. Nay, if the thing were never so true, yet if I knew it not to be so, its truth will not secure me from being a liar: and therefore, whoever endeavors to have that received for a certainty, which himself knows not to be so, offends against truth. The utmost that can consist with sincerity, is to represent it to others as doubtful as it appears to him: yet even that how consonant soever to truth, is not to Charity. Even doubtful accusations leave a stain behind them, and often prove indelible injuries to the party accused: how much more than do the more positive and confident aspersions we have hitherto spoken of? Let me add only this concerning this later sort, that they are greater advancers of Defamatory designs, than the very first contrivers. For those, upon a consciousness of their falseness, are obliged to proceed cautiously, to pick out the credulous and least discerning persons, on whom to impose their fictions, and dare not produce them in all companies for fear of detection: but these in confidence that the untruth (if it be one) lies not at their door, speak it without any restraint in all places, at all times, and what the others are fain to whisper, they proclaim, like our new Engine, which pretends to convey a whisper many miles off. So that as in the case of Stealing, tis proverbially said, that if there were no receivers there would be no thieves; so in this Slander, if there were fewer spreaders, there would be fewer forgers of Libels: the manufacture would be discouraged, if it had not these retailers to put off the wares.

5. Now to apply these practices to our rule of duty, there will need no very close inspection to discern the obliquity. The most superficial glance will evidence these several degrees of Slanderers to do what they would not be willing to suffer. Who among them can be content to be falsely aspersed? Nay, so far are they from that, that let but the shadow of their own calumny reflect on themselves, let any but truly tell them that they have falsely accused others, they grow raving and impatient, like a dog at a looking glass fiercely combating that image which himself creates: and how smoothly soever the original lie slides from them, the Echo of it grates their ears. And indeed tis observable, that those who make the greatest havoc of other men's reputation, are the most nicely tender of their own; which sets this sin of calumny in a most Diametrical opposition to the Evangelical precept of *Loving our neighbors as ourselves*.

6. Thus, much is discernable even in the surface of the crime: but if we look deeper and examine the motives, we shall find the foundation well agrees to the superstructure, they being usually one of these two, *Malice* or *Interest*. And indeed, the thing is so disingenuous, so contrary to the dictates of Humanity as well as Divinity, that I must in reverence to our common nature, presume it must be some very forcible impellent, that can drive a man so far from himself. The Devil here plays the Artist: and as the fatalest poisons to man are (they say) drawn from human bodies, so here he extracts the venom of our Irascible and Concupiscible part, and in it dips those arrows, which we thus shoot to one another.

7. Tis needles to harangue severally upon each. The world too experimentally knows the force of both. *Malice* is that whirlwind, which has shook States and Families, no less than private Persons; a passion so impetuous and precipitate, that it often equally involves the Agent and the Patient: a malicious man being of like violence with those who flung in the three Children, [Dan. 3.](#) consumed by those flames into which he cast others. As for *Interest*, tis that universal Monarch to which all other Empires are Tributaries, to which men sacrifice not only their Consciences and Innocence, but (what is usually much dearer) their Sensualities and Vices. Those whom all the Divine (either) threats or promises, cannot persuade to mortify, and but restrain one Lust, at *Mammon's* beck will disclaim many, and force their inclinations to comply with their interest.

8. And whilst this sin of Calumny has two such potent Abettors, we are not to wonder at its growth: as long as men are malicious and designing, they will be traducing; those Cyclopes will be perpetually forging Thunderbolts, against which no innocence or virtue can be proof. And alas, we daily find too great effect of their industry. But though these are the forgers of the more solemn deliberate calumnies, yet this sportive age hath produced another sort, there being men that defame others by way of divertissement, invent little stories that they may find themselves exercise, and the Town talk. This, if it must pass for sport, is such as *Solomon* describes, [Prov. 26. 18, 19.](#) *As a mad man that casteth firebrands, arrows and death, so is he that deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, am I not in sport?* He that shoots an arrow in jest, may kill a man in earnest; and he that gives himself liberty to play with his neighbor's fame, may soon play it away. Most men have such an aptness to entertain sinister opinions of others, that they greedily draw in any suggestion of that kind; and one may as easily persuade the thirsty earth to refund the water she has sucked into her veins, as them to deposit a prejudice they have once taken up. Therefore, such experiments upon fame, are as dangerous as that which *Alexander* is said to have made of the force of Naptha upon his Page, from which he scarce escaped with life. These jocular slanders are often as mischievous as those of deeper design, and have from the slightness of the temptation an enhancement of guilt. For sure, he that can put such an interest of his neighbor's in balance with a little fit of laughter, sets it at a lower price than he that hopes to enrich or advance himself by it: and thought it pass among some for a specimen of Wit, yet it really lifts them among *Solomon's* fools who *make a mock at sin*, [Prov. 14. 9.](#) In the meantime, since slander is a plant that can grow in all soils, since the frolic humor, as well as the morose, betrays to the guilt, who can hope to escape this *Scourge of the Tongue*, as the Wise man calls it, *which communicates with all*, [Ecclus. 26. 6.](#) Persons of all ranks do mutually asperse, and are aspersed: so that he who would not have his credulity abused, has scarce a securer way, than (like the Astrologer, who made his Almanac give a tolerable account of the weather by a direct inversion of the common prognosticators.) to let his belief run quite counter to reports. Yea, so Epidemic is this disease grown, that even religion (at least those parties and factions

which assume that name) has got a taint of it; each sect or opinion seeking to represent its Antagonist as odious as it can. And whilst they contend for speculative truth, they by mutual calumnies forfeit the practice: a thing that justly excites the grief of good men, to see that those who all pretend to the same Christianity, should only be unanimous in the violating that Truth and Charity it prescribes.

9. And if these be the weapons of our spiritual warfare, what may we think of the carnal? How are our secular animosities pursued, when our Speculations are thus managed? How easily do we run down the reputation of any who stand in the way, either of our spleen or avarice? When *Joseph's* resolute purity had changed the scene of his Mistress's passion, she does as readily shift that of guilt too, and fixes her crime upon him, [Gen. 39. 14](#). So when *Zeba* had a mind to undermine *Mephibosheth* in his estate, he first practices upon his fame in a false accusation, [2 Sam. 16. 3](#). And alas, how familiarly do we now see both these scenes reacted? Those who will not take vice into their bosoms, shall yet have it bespatter their faces: they who will not run *to the same excess of riot*, must expect to be evil spoken of, [1 Pet. 4. 4](#). Nay, not only pious men, but piety itself partakes of the same fate, falls under the two edged slander both of deceit and folly. And if men cannot be permitted quietly to enjoy their piety, much less will they those things whereof the world hath more gust, I mean secular advantages. There are still crimes to be discovered in the possessors of honors or Estates, and they wonderfully excite the zeal of those who would supplant them. What artifices are there to make them appear unworthy of what they have, that others more unworthy may succeed them? Nor are these storms only in the upper regions, in the higher ranks of men; but if we pass through all degrees, we shall find the difference is rather in the value of the things, than in the means of pursuing them. He that pretends to the meanest office, does as studiously disparage his competitor, as he that is rivaled for a kingdom. Nay, even he that has but a merry humor to gratify, makes no scruple to do it with the loss of another man's reputation.

10. Thus we do accommodate every petty temporal interest at the cost of our eternal: and as an unskillful Fencer, whilst he is pursuing his thrust, exposes his body; so whilst we thus actuate our own malice, we abandon ourselves to Satan's, receive mortal wounds from him, only that we may give a few light scratches to one another. For, as I have before said, there is nothing does more secure his title to us, than this vice of Calumny, it bearing his proper impress and figure. And we may fear *Christ* will one day make the same Judgment of Persons as he did of coin, and award them to him whose *Image and Superscription they bear*. [Matt. 22. 20](#).

11. And now, how great a madness is it to make such costly oblations to so vile an Idol? This is indeed the worshipping our own Imaginations, preferring a malicious fiction before a real felicity: and is but faintly resembled by him, who is said to have chosen to part with his Bishopric, rather than burn his Romance. Alas, are there not gross corporal sins enough

to ruin us, but must we have aerial ones too, damn ourselves with Chimeras, and by these forgeries of our brains, dream ourselves to destruction?

12. Let all those who thus unhappily employ their inventive faculty, timely consider, how unthriving a trade tis finally like to prove, that all their false accusations of others will rebound in true ones upon themselves. It does often so in this world, where many times the most clandestine contrivances of this kind meet with detection: or if they should happen to keep on the disguise here, yet twill infallibly be torn off at the great day of manifestation, when before God, Angels, and Men, they will be rendered infinitely more vile, than twas possible for them here to make others.

## SECTION VI. Of Uncharitable Truth.

In the next place we are to consider of the other branch of Defamatory reports, viz. such as are true: which though they must be confessed to be of a lower form of guilt than the former, yet as to the kind, they equally agree in the definition of Detraction, since tis possible to impair a man's credit by true reports as well as by false.

2. To clear this I shall first observe, that although every fault hath some penal effect which are coetaneous to the act, yet this of Infamy is not so: this is a more remote consequent; that which it immediately depends upon, is the publishing. A man may do things which to God and his own conscience render him abominable, and yet keep his reputation with men: but when this stifled crime breaks out, when his secret guilts are detected, then, and not till then, he becomes infamous: so that although his sin be the Material, yet it is the discovery that is the Formal cause of his infamy.

3. This being granted, it follows that he that divulges an unknown, concealed fault, stands accountable for all the consequences that flow from that divulging; but whether accountable as for guilt, must be determined by the particular circumstances of the cause. So that here we must admit of an exception: for though every discovery of another's fault be in the strict natural sense of the word a Detraction, yet it will not always be the sin of Detraction, because in some instances there may be some higher obligation intervene, and supersede that we own to the fame of our neighbor; and in those cases it may not only be lawful, but necessary to expose him.

4. Now all such cases I conceive may summarily be reduced to two heads, Justice and Charity. First as to Justice: that we know is a fundamental virtue, and he that shall violate that, to abound in another, is as absurd, as he that undermines the foundation to raise the walls. We are not to steal to give alms, and God himself has declared that he hates robbery for a burnt offering: so that no pretence either of Charity or Piety can absolve us from the duty we owe to Justice. Now it may often fall out, that by concealing one man's fault, I may be injurious to another, nay, to a whole community: and then I assume the guilt I conceal, and by the Laws both of God and Man am judged an accessory.

5. And as Justice to others enforces, so sometimes Justice to a man's self allows the publishing of a fault, when a considerable interest either of fame or fortune cannot otherwise be rescued. But to make loud outcries of injury, when they tend nothing to the redress of it, is a liberty rather assumed by rage and impatience, than authorized by Justice. Nay, often in that case the complainer is the most injurious Person; for he inflicts more than he suffers, and in lieu of some trivial right of his which is invaded, he assaults the other in a nearer interest, by wounding him in his good name: but if the cause be considerable and the manner regular, there lies no sure obligation upon any man to wrong himself, to indulge to another.

6. Neither does Charity retrench this liberty; for though it be an act of Charity to conceal another man's faults, yet sometimes it may be inconsistent with some more important Charity, which I owe to a third Person, or perhaps to a Multitude; as in those cases wherein public benefit is concerned. If this were not allowable, no History could lawfully be written, since if true, it cannot but recount the faults of many: no evidence could be brought in against a Malefactor: and indeed all discipline would be subverted, which would be so great a mischief, that Charity obliges to prevent it, what Defamation soever fall upon the guilty by it. For in such instances tis a true rule, that mercy to the evil proves cruelty to the innocent. And as in a competition of mischiefs, we are to choose the least, so of two goods the greatest, and the most extensive, is the most eligible.

7. Nay, even that Charity which reflects upon myself, may also sometimes supersede that to my neighbor, the rule obliging me to love him as, not better than, myself. I need not surely silently assent to my own unjust Defamation, for fear of proving another a false accuser; nor suffer myself to be made a beggar, to conceal another man's being a thief. Tis true, in a great inequality of interest, Charity (whose Character it is, *Not to seek her own*, 1 Cor. 13. 5.) will prompt me to prefer a greater concern of my neighbors, before a slight one of my own: but in equal circumstances I am sure at liberty to be kind first to myself. If I will recede even from that, I may; but that is then to be accounted among the Heroic flights of Charity, not her binding and indispensable Laws.

8. Having now set the boundaries to the excepted cases; as all instances within them will be legitimated, so all without them will be (by the known rule of exceptions) be precluded, and fall under that general duty we owe to our neighbor, of tendering his credit: an obligation so Universally infringed, that tis not imaginable the breach should always happen within the excepted cases. When tis remembered how unactive the principles of Justice and Charity are grown in the world, we must certainly impute such incessant effects, to some more vigorous causes: of which it may not be amiss to point out some of the most obvious, and leave every man to examine which of them he finds most operative in himself.

9. In the first place, I may reckon *Pride*, a humor which as it is always mounting, so it will make use of any footstool towards its rise. A man who affects an extraordinary splendor of reputation, is glad to find any foils to see him off; and therefore will let no fault nor folly of another's enjoy the shade, but brings it into the open light, that by that comparison, his own excellencies may appear the brighter. I dare appeal to the breast of any proud man, whether he do not upon such occasions, make some Pharisaical reflections on himself, whether he be not apt to say, *I am not like other men, or as this Publican*, Luke 18. though probably he leave out the *God, I thank Thee*. Now he that cherishes such resentments as these in himself, will doubtless be willing to propagate them to other men, and to that end render the blemishes of others as visible as he can. But this betrays a degenerate spirit, which from a consciousness that he wants solid worth, on which to bottom a reputation, is fain to

found it on the ruins of other men's. The true Diamond sparkles even in the sunshine: tis but a glow-worm virtue that owes its luster to the darkness about it.

10. Another prompter to Detraction is *Envy*, which sometimes is particular, sometimes general. He that has a pique to another, would have him as hateful to all mankind as he is to him; and therefore, as he grieves and repines at anything that may advance his estimation, so he exults and triumphs when anything occurs which may depress it, and is usually very industrious to improve the opportunity, nay, has a strange sagacity in hunting it out. No vulture does more quickly scent a carcass, than an envious Person does, those *dead flies* which corrupt his neighbor's ointment, [Eccles. 10. 1.](#) the vapor whereof his hate, like a strong wind, scatters and disperses far and near. Nor needs he any great crime to practice on: every little infirmity or passion, looked on through his Optics, appears a mountainous guilt. He can improve the least speck or freckle to leprosy, which shall overspread the whole man: and a cloud no *bigger than a man's hand*, like that of *Elisha*, [1 King. 18. 44.](#) may in an instant, with the help of prejudice, grow to the utter darkening of the brightest reputation, and fill the whole horizon with tempest and horror. Sometimes this Envy is general, not confined to any man's person, but diffused to the whole nature. Some tempers there are so malign, that they wish ill to all, and believe ill of all; like *Timon* the Athenian, who professed himself a universal man-hater. He whose guilty conscience reflects dismal images of himself, is willing to put the same ugly shape upon the whole nature, and to conclude that all men are the same, were they but closely inspected. And therefore, when he can see but the least glimmering of a fault in any, he takes it as a proof of his Hypothesis, and with an envious joy calls in as many spectators as he can. Tis certain there are some in whose ears nothing sounds so harsh as the commendation of another, as on the contrary nothing is so melodious as a Defamation. *Plutarch* gives an apt instance of this upon *Aristides's* banishment, whom when a mean Person had proposed to Ostracism, being asked what displeasure *Aristides* had done him, he replied, *None, neither do I know him, but it grieves me to hear everybody call him a just man.* I fear some of our keenest accusers nowadays may give the same answer. No man that is eminent for Piety (or indeed but moral virtue) but he shall have many insidious eyes upon him *watching for his halting*: and if any the least obliquity can be espied, he is used worse than the vilest malefactor: for such are tried but at one bar, and know the utmost of their doom, but these are arraigned at every Table, in every Tavern. And at such variety of Judicatures, there will be as great variety of sentences; only they commonly concur in this one, that he is an Hypocrite, and then what complacency, what triumph have they in such a discovery? There is not half so much Epicurism in any of their most studied luxuries, no spectacle affords them so much pleasure, as a bleeding fame thus lying at their mercy.

11. Another sort of Detractors there are, whose designs are not so black, but are equally mean and sordid, much too light to be put in balance with a neighbor's Credit. Of those



some will pick up all the little stories they can get; to humor a Patron: an artifice well known by those trencher guests, who, like Rats, still haunt the best Provisions. These men do almost come up to a literal sense of what the *Psalmist* spoke in a figurative, [Psa. 14.](#) *and eat up people for bread*, tear and worry men in their good names, that themselves may eat. It was a Curse denounced against *Eli's* offspring, *that they should come and crouch for a morsel of bread.* [1 Sam. 2. 39.](#) But such men court this as a preferment, and to bring themselves within reach of it, stick not to assume that vilest office of common Delators. There are others who when they have got the knowledge of another man's fault, think it an endearing thing to whisper it in the ear of some friend or confidant. But sure if they must needs sacrifice some secret to their friendship, they should take *David's* rule, and *not offer that which cost them nothing.* If they will express their confidence, let them acquaint them with their own private crimes. That indeed would show something of trust: but those experiments upon another man's cost, will hardly convince any considering person of their kindness.

12. There still remains a yet more trifling sort of Defamers, who have no deliberate design which they pursue in it, yet are as assiduous at the Trade as the deeper contrivers. Such are those who publish their neighbors' failings as they read Gazettes, only that they may be telling News: and Itch wherewith some people's tongues are strangely over-run, who can as well hold a glowing Coal in their mouths, as keep anything they think New; nay, will sometimes run themselves out of breath, for fear lest anyone should serve them as *Ahimaaz* did the *Cushite* [2. Sam. 18. 23.](#) and tell the tale before them. This is one of the most Childish vanities imaginable: and sure men must have Souls of a very low level that can think it a commensurate entertainment. Others there are who use Defamatory discourse, neither for the love of News, nor Defamation, but purely for the love of talk: whose speech like a flowing current bears away indiscriminately whatever lies in its way. And indeed, such incessant talkers are usually people not of depth enough to supply themselves out of their own store, and therefore can let no foreign accession pass by them, no more than a Mill which is always going, can afford any waters to run wait. I know we used to call this Talkativeness a Feminine vice; but to speak impartially, I think, though we have given them the enclosure of the Scandal, they have not of the fault, and he that shall appropriate Loquacity to Women, may perhaps sometimes need to light *Diogenes's* Candle to seek a man: for tis possible to go into Masculine company, where twill be as hard to edge in a word, as at a Female Gossiping. However, as to this particular of Defaming, both the Sexes seem to be at a vie: and I think he were a very Critical Judge, that could determine between them.

13. Now lest this later sort of Defamers should be apt to absolve themselves, as men of harmless intentions, I shall desire them to consider, that they are only more impertinent, not less injurious. For though it be granted, that the proud and envious are to make a distinct account for their Pride and envy; yet as far as related to the neighbor, they are equally mischievous. *Anacreon* that was choked with a grape-stone, died as surely as *Julius Caesar* with

his three and twenty wounds; and a man's reputation may be as well fooled and prattled away, as maliciously betrayed. Nay, perhaps more easily; for where the speaker can least be suspected of design, the hearer is apter to give him Credit: this way of insinuating by familiar discourse, being like those poisons that are taken in at the pores, which are the most insensibly sucked in, and the most impossible to expel.

14. But we need not *dispute* which is worst, since tis certain all are bad, none of them (or any that hold proportion with them) being at all able to pretend their warrant either from Justice or Charity. And then what our Savior says in another case, will be applicable to this, *He that is not for us is against us.* [Matt. 12. 30.](#) He that in publishing his neighbor's faults, acts not upon the dictates of Justice or Charity, acts directly in contradiction to them: for where they do not upon some particular respects command, they do implicitly and generally forbid all such discoveries.

15. For first, if a fault divulged be of a light nature, the offender cannot thereby merit so much, as to be made a public discourse. Fame is a tender thing, and seldom is tossed and bandied without receiving some bruise, if not a crack: for reports we know, like snow balls, gather still the farther they roll, and when I have once handed it to another, how know I how he may improve it, and if he deliver it so advanced to a third, he may give his contribution also to it, and so in a successive transmitting, it may grow to such a monstrous bulk, as bears no proportion to its Original. He must be a great stranger to the world, that has not experimentally found the truth of this. How many persons have lain under great and heavy scandals, which have taken their first rise only from some inadvertence, or indiscretion? Of so quick a growth is Slander, that the least grain, like that of mustard seed, mentioned [Mat. 13. 32.](#) immediately shoots up into a tree. And when it is so, it can no more be reduced back into its first cause, than a tree can shrink into that little seed from whence it first sprang. No ruins are so irreparable as those of reputation: and therefore he that pulls out but one stone towards the breach, may do a greater mischief than perhaps he intends: and a greater injustice too; for by how much the more strictly Justice obliges to reparation in case of injuries done, so much the more severely does it prohibit the doing those injuries which are incapable of being repaired. In the Levitical Law, he that knew his ox was apt to gore, and yet kept him not up, stood responsible for any mischief he happened to do, [Exod. 21. 29.](#) I think there is no considering man can be ignorant how apt even little trivial accusations are to tear and mangle one's fame: and yet if the lavish talker restrain them not, he certainly stands accountable to God, his Neighbor, and his own Conscience, for all the danger they procure.

16. But if the report concern some higher and enormous crime, tis true the delinquent may deserve the less pity, yet perhaps the reporter may not deserve the less blame: for often such a discovery serves but to enrage, not reclaim the offender, and precipitate him into farther degrees of ill. Modesty and fear of shame, is one of those natural restraints, which

the wisdom of God has put upon mankind, and he that once stumbles, may yet by a check of that bridle recover again: but when by a public detection he is fallen under that infamy he feared, he will then be apt to discard all caution, and to think he owes himself the utmost pleasures of his vice, as the price of his reputation. Nay, perhaps he advances farther, and sets up for a reversed sort of Fame, by being eminently wicked: and he who before was but a Clandestine disciple, becomes a Doctor of impiety. And sure it were better to let a concealed crime remain in its wished obscurity, than by thus rousing it from its covert, bring it to stand at bay, and set itself in this open defiance; especially in this degenerate age, when vice has so many well willers, that, like a hopping party, eagerly run into any that will head them.

17. And this brings in a third consideration relating to the public, to which the divulging of private (especially if they be novel, unusual) crimes, does but an ill piece of service. Vice is contagious, and casts pestilential vapors: and as he that should bring out a plague-sick Person, to inform the world of his disease, would be thought not to have much befriended his neighborhood, so he that displays these vicious Ulcers, whilst he seeks to defame one, may perhaps infect many. We too experimentally find the force of ill examples. Men often take up sins, to which they have no natural propension, merely by way of conformity and imitation. But if the instance happen in a crime, which more suits the practice of the hearers, thought it cannot be said to seduce, yet it may encourage and confirm them; embolden them not only the more frequently to act, but even to avow those sins, wherein they find they stand not single, and by discovering a new accessory to their Party, invite them the more heartily and openly to espouse it.

18. These are such effects as surely do very ill correspond with that Justice and Charity we owe either to particular Persons, or to mankind in General. And indeed, no better can be expected, from a practice which so perfectly contradicts the grand rule both of Justice and Charity, The doing as we would be done to. That this does so, every man has a ready conviction within him, if he please but to consult his own heart. Alas, with what solicitude do we seek to hide our own guilts, what false dresses, what varnishes have we for them? There are not more arts of disguising our Corporal blemishes, than our Moral: and yet whilst we thus paint and parget our deformities, we cannot allow any the least imperfection of another's to remain undetected, but tear off the veil from their blushing frailties, and not only expose them, but proclaim them. And can there be a grosser, a more detestable partiality than this? God may sure in this instance (as in many others) expostulate with us as he did with Israel, [Ezek. 33](#). *Are not your ways unequal?* What Barbarism, what inhumanity is it, thus to treat those of the same common nature with ourselves, whom we cannot but know have the same concern to preserve a Reputation, and the same regret to lose it, which we have? And what shame it is, that that Evangelical precept, of doing as we would be done to, which met with so much reverence even from the Heathens, that *Severus* the Emperor preferred it to all the Maxims of Philosophers, should be thus condemned and violated by

Christians, and that too upon such slight inconsiderable motives as usually prevail in this case of Defamation?

19. But we are not to consider this fault only in its root, as it is a defect of Justice and Charity, but in its product too, as it is a Seminary of more Injustice and Uncharitableness. Those disadvantageous reports we make of our neighbors, are almost seen to come round: for let no man persuade himself, that the hearers will keep his counsel any better than he does that of the defamed Person. The softest whisper of this kind, will find others to Echo it, till it reach the ears of the concerned Party, and perhaps with some enhancing circumstances, too. And when tis considered how unwilling men are to hear of their faults, though even in the mildest and most charitable way of admonition, tis not to be doubted a public Defamation will seem disobliging enough to provoke a return, which again begets a rejoinder, and so the quarrel is carried on with mutual recriminations, all malicious inquiries are made into each others manners, and those things which perhaps they did in closets, come to be proclaimed upon the house top: so the wild-fire runs round, till sometimes nothing but blood will quench it; or if it arrive not to that, yet it usually fixes in an irreconcilable feud. To this is often owing those distances we see among friends and relations; this breeds such strangeness, such animosities amongst neighbors, that you cannot go to one, but you shall be entertained with invectives against the other; nay, perhaps you shall lose both because you are willing to side with neither.

20. These are the usual consequences of the liberty of the Tongue; and what account can any man give to himself, either in Christianity or prudence, that has let in such a train of mischiefs, merely to gratify an impotent childish humor of telling a tale? Peace was the great Legacy Christ left to his followers, and ought to be guarded, though we expose for it our greatest temporal concerns, but cannot without despite to Him, as well as our brethren, be thus prostituted.

21. Yet if we consider it abstractedly, from these more solemn mischiefs which attend it, the mere levity and unworthiness of it sets it below an ingenuous Person. We generally think a tattler and busybody a title of no small reproach: yet truly I know not to whom it more justly belongs, than to those, who busy themselves first in learning, and then in publishing the faults of others: an employment which the Apostle thought a blot, even upon the weaker sex, and thinks the prevention of such importance, that he prescribes them to change their whole condition of life; to convert widow-hood (though a state which in other respects he much prefers, [1 Cor. 7. 8](#)) into marriage, rather than expose themselves to the temptation, [1 Tim. 5. 13, 14](#). And if their impotence cannot afford excuse for it, what a debasement is it of men's nobler faculties to be thus entertained? The Historian gives it as an ill indication of *Domitian's* temper, that he employed himself in catching and tormenting Flies: and sure they fall not under a much better character, either for wisdom, or good nature,

who thus snatch up all the little fluttering reports they can meet with, to the prejudice of their neighbors.

22. But besides this divulging the faults of others, there is another branch of Detraction naturally springing from this root, and this is the censuring and severe judging of them. We think not we have well played the Historians, when we have told the thing, unless we add also our remarks, and animadversions of it. And although tis, God knows, bad enough to make a naked relation, and trust it to the severity of the hearers; yet few can content themselves with that, but must give them a sample of rigor, and by the bitterness of their own censure, invite them to pass the like: a process contrary to all rules of Law or equity, for the plaintiff to assume the part of a Judge. And we may easily divine the fate of that man's fame that is so unduly tried.

23. Tis indeed sad to see how many private tribunals are everywhere set up, where we scan and judge our neighbor's actions, but scarce ever acquit any. We take up with the most incompetent witnesses, nay, often suborn our own surmises and jealousies, that we may be sure to cast the unhappy Criminal. How nicely and scrupulously do we examine every circumstance, (Would God we were but half as exact in our own penitential inquisitions) and torture it to make it confess something which appears not in the more general view of the fact, and which perhaps never was in the actor's intentions? In a word, we do like witches with their Magical Chemistry, extract all the venom, and take none of the allay. By this means we confound the degrees of sins, and sentence deliberate and indeliberate, a habit or an act all at one rate, that is commonly, at the utmost it can amount to, even it its worse exception: and sure this were a most culpable corruption in judgment, could we show our commission to judge our brethren.

24. But here we may every one of us interrogate ourselves in our Savior's words, *Who made me a Judge?* [Luke. 12. 14.](#) And if he disclaimed it, (who in respect of his Divinity had the Supreme right) and that too in a case wherein one (at least) of the Litigants had desired his interposition, what a boldness is it in us to assume it, where no such appeal is made to us, but on the contrary the Party disowns our Authority? Nay, (which is infinitely more) tis superseded by our great Law-giver, in that express prohibition, [Matt. 7. 1.](#) *Judge not,* and that backed with a severe penalty, *that ye be not judged?* As God hath appropriated vengeance to himself, so has He Judicature also; and tis an invasion of His peculiar, for any (but His Delegates the lawful Magistrates) to pretend to either. And indeed, in all private Judgments so much depends upon the intention of the Offender, that unless we could possess ourselves of God's Omniscience, twill be as irrational as impious to assume His Authority. Until we know men's hearts, we are at the best but imperfect Judges of their actions. At our rate of judging, St. Paul surely passed for a most malicious Persecutor, whereas God saw he *did ignorantly in unbelief,* and upon that intuition *had mercy on him,* [1 Tim. 1. 13.](#) Tis therefore good counsel which the Apostle gives, [1 Cor. 4. 5.](#) *Judge nothing before the time until the*

*Lord come.* For though tis said *the Saints shall judge the world*, 1 Cor. 6. 3. yet it must be at the great Assize, and he that will needs intrude himself into the office before the time, will be in danger to be rather Passive than Active in the Judicatory. I do not here advise to such a stupid charity as shall make no distinction of Actions. I know there is a woe pronounced as well to those who *call evil good, as good evil*. Surely when we see an open notorious sin committed, we may express a detestation of the Crime, though not of the Actor; nay, it may sometimes be a necessary Charity, both to the Offender, and to the innocent Spectators, as an Amulet to keep them from the Contagion of the Example. But still, even in these cases, our Sentence must not exceed the evidence, we must judge only according to the visible undoubted circumstances, and not aggravate the crime upon the presumptions and conjectures; if we do, how right soever our guesses may be, our judgment is not, but we are as St. James speaks, *Judges of evil thoughts*. Chap. 2. 4.

25. Indeed, this rash judging is not only very unjust both to God and man, but it is an act of the greatest pride. When we set our selves in the Tribunal, we always look down with contempt on those at the bar. And certainly there is nothing does so gratify, so regale a haughty humor, as this piece of usurped Sovereignty over our brethren: but the more it does so, the greater necessity there is to abstain from it. Pride is a hardy kind of vice, that will live upon the barest pasture: you cannot starve it with the most industrious mortifications: how little need is there then of pampering and heightening it, which we cannot more effectually do, than by this censorious humor? for by that we are so perpetually employed abroad, that we have no leisure to look homeward, and see our own defects. We are like the inhabitants of *Ai*, Josh. 8. so eager upon the pursuit of others, that we leave ourselves exposed to the ambushes of Satan, who will be sure still to encourage us in our chase, draw us still farther and farther from ourselves, and cares not how zealous we are in fighting against the crimes of others, so he can but keep that zeal from recoiling upon our own.

26. Lastly, this judging others is one of the highest violations of Charity. The Apostle gives it as one of the properties of that grace, that *it thinks no evil* (*i.e.*) is not apt to make severe constructions, but sets everything in the fairest light, puts the most candid interpretations that the matter will bear. And truly this is of great importance to the reputation of our neighbors. The world we know is in many instances extremely governed by opinion, but in this tis all in all; it has not only an influence upon it, but is that very thing: reputation being nothing but a fair opinion and estimation among others. Now this opinion is not always swayed by due motives: sometimes little accidents, and often fancy, and most often prepossession governs in it. So that many times he that puts the first ill Character, fixes the stamp which afterwards goes current in the world. The generality of people take up prejudices (as they do religions) upon trust, and of those that are more curious in inquiring into the grounds, there are not many who vary on the more charitable hand, or bring the common sentence to review, with intent to moderate but enhance it. Men are apt to think it some



disparagement to their acuteness and invention, if they cannot say something as sharp upon the subject as hath been said before; and so tis the business of many to lay on more load, but of few to take off: and therefore he that passes the first condemnatory sentence, is like the incendiary in a popular tumult, who is chargeable with all those disorders to which he gave the first rise, though that free not his Abettors from their share of the guilt.

27. And as this is very uncharitable in respect of the injury offered, so also it is in reflection on the grand rule of Charity. Can we pretend to love our neighbors as ourselves, and yet shall our love to him have the quite contrary effects to that we bear ourselves? Can self-love lessen our beam into a mote, and yet can our love to him magnify his mote into a beam? No, certainly true Charity is more sincere, does not turn to us the reverse end of the perspective, to represent our own faults at a distance, and in the most diminutive size, and yet shuffle the other to us when we are view his. No, these are Tricks of Legerdemain we learn in another School, even in whose style is *the accuser of the brethren*. We know how frequently God protests against false weights and false measures. And sure tis not only in the shop or market that he abhors them, they are no less abominable in conversation than in traffic. To buy by one measure and sell by another, is not more unequal, than it is to have these differing standards for our own and our neighbor's faults, that our own shall weigh, in the Prophet Jeremiah's Phrase, *lighter than vanity, yea nothing*, and yet his (though really the lighter) shall prove Zechariah's talent of lead. This is such a partiality, as consists not with common honesty, and can therefore never be reconciled with Christian Charity: and how demurely soever such men may pretend to sanctity, that interrogation of God's presses hard upon them, *Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?* [Mich. 6. 11](#). Such bitter invectives against other men's faults, and indulgence or palliation of their own, shows their zeal lies in their spleen, and that they consider no so much what is done, as who does it: and to such the sentence of the Apostle is very applicable, [Rom. 2. 1](#). *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest dost the same thing*. But admit a man have not the very same guilts he censures in another, yet tis sure every man has some, and of what sort soever they be, he desires not they should be rigorously scanned, and therefore by the rule of Charity, yea, and justice too, ought no to do that which he would not suffer. If he can find extenuations for his own crimes, he is in all reason to presume others may have so for theirs: the common frailty of our nature, as it is apt alike to betray us to faults, so it gives as equal share in the excuse; and therefore, what I would have pass for the effect of impotency or inadvertence in myself, I can with no tolerable ingenuity give a worse name to in him.

28. We have now viewed both these branches of Detraction, seen both the sin and mischiefs of them, we may now join them together in a concluding observation, which is that they are as imprudent as they are unchristian. It has been received among the maxims of

civil life, not unnecessarily to exasperate anybody; to which agrees the advice of an ancient Philosopher, Speak not evil of they neighbor, if thou dost thou shalt hear that which will not fail to trouble thee. There is no Person so inconsiderable, but may at some time or other do a displeasure: but in this of Defaming men need no harnessing, no preparation, every man has his weapons ready for a return: so that none can shoot these arrows, but they must expect they will revert with a rebounded force: not only to the violation of Christian Unity (as I have before observed) but to the Aggressors great secular detriment, both in fame, and oftentimes interest also. Revenge is sharp-sighted, and overlooks no opportunity of a retaliation, and that commonly not bounded as the Levitical ones were, *An eye for any eye, a tooth for a tooth*, [Exod. 21. 24.](#) no, nor by the larger proportions of their restitutions *fourfold*, [Exod. 22. 1.](#) but extended to the utmost power of the inflicter. The examples are innumerable of men who have thus laid themselves open in their greatest concerns, and have let loose the hands as well as Tongues of others against them, merely because they would put no restraint upon their own, which is so great an indiscretion, that to them we may well apply that of Solomon, *A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.* [Prov. 18. 7.](#)

29. And now, who can sufficiently wonder that a practice that so thwarts our interest of both worlds, should come universally to prevail among us? Yet that it does so, I may appeal to the consciences of most, and to the observation of all. What so common Topic of discourse is there, as this of backbiting our neighbors? Come into company of all Ages, all Ranks, all Professions, this is the constant entertainment. And I doubt he that at night shall duly recollect the occurrences of the day, shall very rarely be able to say he has spent it without hearing or speaking (perhaps both) somewhat of this kind. Nay, even those who restrain themselves other liberties are often apt to indulge to this: many who are so just to their neighbor's property, that as Abraham once said, [Gen. 14. 23.](#) *they would not take from him, even from a thread to a shoe latchet*, are yet so inconsiderate of his Fame, as to find themselves discourse at the expense of that, though infinitely a greater injury than the robbing of his Coffers: which shews what false measures we are apt to take of things, and evinces that many of those, who have not only in a general abjured the world in their baptism, but do in many instances seem to themselves (as well as others) to have gained a Superiority over it, do yet in this undiscernibly yield it the greatest ensign of Sovereignty, by permitting it to set the Standards and estimate of things, and taking its customary Prescriptions for Laws. For what besides this unhappy servility to custom, can possibly reconcile men that own Christianity, to a practice so widely distant from it? 'Tis true those that profess themselves men of this world, who design only their portion in this life, may take it up as sometimes conducting (at least seemingly) to their end: but for those who propose higher hopes to themselves, and know that Charity is one of the main props to those hopes, how foolishly do they undermine themselves, when they thus act against their principles, and that upon no other Authority,



but that of popular usage? I know men are apt to excuse themselves upon their indignation against vice, and think that their zeal must as well acquit them for this violation of the Second Table, as it once did Moses for the breaking both, [Ex. 32. 19](#). But to such I may answer in Christ's words, [Luke 9. 55](#). *Ye know not what manner of spirit you are of*. Meekness and Charity are the Evangelical graces, which will most recommend and assimilate us to Him, who was meek and lowly in heart. But after all this pretext of Zeal, I fear it is but a cheat we put on ourselves, the Elder brother's raiment only to disguise the Supplanter. [Gen. 27](#). Let men truly ransack their own breasts, and I doubt the best will find there is something of vanity which lies at the bottom, if it be not the positive sort mentioned before, of designing to illustrate myself by others' blemishes, yet at least the negative, that I am unwilling to incur the contempt incident to those who scruple at small sins. Besides, I observe perhaps, that tis the common entertainment of the world to Defame their neighbors, and if I strike not in upon the Theme, I shall have nothing to render me acceptable company; perhaps I shall be reproached as morose or dull, and my silence shall be construed to proceed not from the abundance of my Charity, but the defect of my Wit.

30. But sure they that can thus argue, do hereby give a more demonstrative proof of that defect. He whose wit is so precarious that it must depend only upon the folly or vice of another, had best give over all pretence to it. He that has nothing of his own growth to set before his guests, had better make no invitations, than break down his neighbor's enclosure, and feast them upon his plunder. Besides, how pitiful an attestation of wit is it, to be able to make a disgraceful relation of another? No scolding women but may set up such Trophies: and they that can value a man upon such an account, may prefer the Scarabes, who feed upon dung, and are remarked by no other property, before the Bee that sucks the flowers and returns honey.

31. But in the next place, admit this restraint should certainly expose one to that reproach; methinks this should be no news to those who know the condition of Christianity is to take up the Cross: and sure it cannot weigh lighter than in this instance. What am I the worse if a vain Talkative Person think me too reserved? Of if he whose frolic levity is his disease, call me dull because I vapor not out all my spirits into froth? *Socrates*, when informed of some derogatory Speeches one had used of him behind his back, made only this facetious reply, *Let him beat me too when I am absent*. And he that gets not such an indifference to all the idle censures of men, will be disturbed in all his civil transactions, as well as his Christian; it being scarce possible to do any thing, but there will be descants made on it. And if a man will regard those winds, he must, as *Solomon* says, *never sow*, [Eccles. 11. 4](#). He must suspend even the necessary actions of common life, if he will not venture them to the being misjudged by others.

32. But there is a yet farther consideration in this matter: for he that upon such a despicable motive will violate his duty in one particular, lets Satan get a main point of him,

and can with no good Logic deny to do it in others. Detraction is not the only sin in fashion: Profaneness, and Obscenity, and all sorts of Luxury are so too, and threaten no less reproach to those who scruple at them. Upon the same grounds, therefore, that he discards his Charity to his neighbor, he may also his Piety, his Modesty, his Temperance, and almost all other virtues. And to speak the truth, there is not a more fertile womb of sin, than this dread of ill men's reproach. Other corruptions must be gratified with cost and industry, but in this the Devil hath no farther trouble than to laugh men out of their souls. So prolific a vice therefore had need be weeded out of men's hearts: for if it be allowed the least corner, if it be indulged to in this one instance, twill quickly spread itself farther.

33. Yet after all, this fear of reproach is a mere fallacy, started to disguise a more real cause of fear: for the greater danger of reproach does indeed lie on that other side. Common estimation puts an ill Character upon pragmatic, meddling people. For though the inquisitiveness and curiosity of the hearer may sometimes render such discourses grateful enough to him, yet it leaves in him no good impressions of the speaker. This is well observed by the son of Sirach, [Ecclus. 19. 8, 9](#). *Whether it be to friend or foe, talk not of other men's lives; and if thou canst without offense, reveal them not, for he heard and observed thee, and when time cometh he will hate thee.* In a word, all considering Persons will be on their guard in such company, as foreseeing that they will talk no less freely of them, than they do of others before them. Nor can the commonness of the guilt obviate the censure, there being nothing more frequent than for men to accuse their own faults in other Persons. Vice is like a dark Lantern, which turns its bright side only to him that bears it, but looks black and dismal in another's hand: and in this particular none has so much reason to fear a Defamer, as those who are themselves such: for (besides the common prudential motive) their own consciousness gives them an inward alarm, and makes them look for a retribution in the same kind. Thus, upon the whole matter we see, there is no real temptation, even to our vanity, to comply with this uncharitable custom, we being sure to lose more repute by it than we can propose to ourselves to gain. The being esteemed an ill man will not be balanced by being thought pleasant, ingenuous company, were one sure to be so. But tis odds that will not be acquired by it neither, for the most assiduous tale-bearers and bitterest revilers are often half-witted people: there being nothing more frequently observable, than such men's aptness to speak evil of things they understand not, [Jude. 1. 2](#).

34. O Let not then those that have repudiated the more inviting sins, shew themselves pilfered and bewitched by this, but instead of submitting to the ill example of others, set a good one to them, & endeavor to bring this unchristian custom out of fashion. I am sure if they do not, they will be more deeply chargeable than others: for the more command they have over their other corruptions, the more do they witness against themselves. Their remissness and willing subjection to this, besides their example when ill, is more ensnaring than other men's, and is apt to insinuate easy thought of the sin. Men are apt to think

themselves safe while they follow one of noted piety, and the authority of his Person often leads them blindfold into his failings. Thus when *Peter* dissembled, *St. Paul* tells us that the other *Jews*, and even *Barnabas* also was carried away with his dissimulation. [Gal. 2. 13](#). And I doubt not in this particular many are encouraged by the liberty they see even good men take. So that such have a more accumulative guilt, for they do not only commit, but patronize the fault: the consideration whereof has kept me, I confess, longer upon this head than is proportionable to the brevity of the rest; but I think no longer than agrees to the importance of the subject.

35. And now, since we have considered the malignity of this sin of Detraction, and yet withal find that tis a sin, which, as the Apostle speaks, *doth easily beset us*, tis but a natural Corollary that we enforce our vigilance against it. And where the importance and difficulty are both so great, twill be a little necessary to consider what are the likeliest means, the most appropriate Antidote against this so dangerous, and yet so Epidemic a disease.

36. And here the common rule of Physic is to be adverted too, *viz.* to examine the causes, that the remedies may be adapted to them. I shall therefore in the first place desire every man seriously to study his own constitution of mind, and observe what are his particular temptations to this sin of Detraction, whether any of those I have before mentioned, as Pride, Envy, Levity, &c. or any other which lies deeper, and is only discernible to his own inspection. Let him, I say, make the scrutiny, and then accordingly apply himself to correct the sin in its first principle. For as when there is an eruption of Humor in any part, tis not cured merely by outward application, but by such alterative Medicines as purify the blood; so this Leprosy of the Tongue will still spread farther, if it be not checked in its Spring and source, by the mortifying of those corrupt inclinations, which feed and heighten it.

37. This is an inquisition I must leave to every man's own Conscience, which alone can testify by what impulses he acts. Yet as the Rabbis were wont to say, that in every Signal Judgment which befell the Jews, there was some grain of the golden-calf; so I think I may venture to say, that in all Detraction, there is some mixture of Pride: and therefore I suppose, a Caution against that, will be so generally seasonable, that it may well lead the Van of all other advices in this matter. And here tis very observable, that God who has *made of one blood all Nations of the earth*. [Acts 17](#). has so equally distributed all the most valuable privileges of Human nature, as if He designed to preclude all insulting of one man over another. Neither has He only thus insinuated it by his Providence, but has enforced it by his commands. In the Levitical Law we find what a particular care He takes to moderate the rigor of Judicial correction, upon this very account, lest *thy Brother be despised in thine eyes*. [Deut. 25. 3](#). So unreasonable did He think it, that the crime or misery of one, should be the exultation of another. And *St. Paul* brands it as a great guilt of the *Corinthians* that they upon the occasion of the incestuous Person were *puffed up, when they should have mourned*. [1 Cor. 5. 2](#). When we see a dead Corpse, we are not apt to insult over it, or brag of our own health

and vigor; but it rather damps us, and makes us reflect, that it may (we know not how soon) be our own condition. And certainly the spectacles of Spiritual mortality should have the same operation. We have the same principles of Corruption with our lapsed Brethren, and have nothing but God's grace, to secure us from the same effects, and by these insulting reflections forfeit that too; for *He gives grace only to the humble.* [Jam. 4. 6.](#) St. Paul's advice, therefore, is very apposite to this case, [Gal. 6. 1.](#) *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such a one in the spirit of Meekness, considering thyself, least thou also be tempted.* In a word, the falls of others ought to excite our pity towards them, our caution as to ourselves and our thankfulness to God, if he hath hitherto preserved us from the like, *For who made thee to differ from another?* [1 Cor. 4. 7.](#) But if we spread our Sails, and triumph over these wrecks, we expose ourselves to worse. Other sins like Rocks may split us, yet the lading may be preserved; but Pride like a Gulf swallows us up; our very virtues when so leavened, becoming weights and plummetts to sink us to our deepest ruin. The counsel, therefore, of the Apostle is very pertinent to this matter. [Rom. 11. 20.](#) *Be not high minded, but fear.*

38. But God knows we can insult over others when we are not only under a possibility, but are actually involved in the same guilt; and then what are all our accusations and bitter censures of others, but indictments and condemnatory sentences against ourselves? And we may justly expect God should take us at our word, and reply upon us as the Prophet did upon *David, Thou art the man.* [2 Sam. 12. 7.](#) For though our officious vehemence against another's crime, may blind the eyes of men, yet God is not so mocked: as therefore when a thief or murderer is detected, it gives an alarm to the whole confederacy; so when we find our own guilts pursued in other men's Persons, tis not a time for us to join in the prosecution, but rather by humble and penitent reflections on ourselves to provide for our own safety. When therefore, we find ourselves (upon any misdemeanor of our brother) ready to mount the tribunal, and pronounce our sentence, let us first consider how competent we are for the office, calling to mind the decision Christ once made in the like case, *He that is without sin let him first cast a stone,* [John 8. 7.](#) And if we did this, many perhaps of our fiercest impeachers, would think fit to retire and leave the delinquent (as they themselves finally desire to be) to the merciful indulgence of a Savior. In short, would we but look into our own hearts, we should find so much work for our inquisitions and censure, that we should not be at leisure to ramble abroad for it. And therefore, as *Lycurgus* once said to one, who importuned him to establish a popular parity in the state, *Do thou,* says he, *begin it first in thine own family;* so I shall advise those that will be judging, to practice first at home. And if they will confine themselves to that, till there be nothing left to correct, I doubt not their neighbor will be well enough secured against their Detractions.

39. Another preservation against that sin is the frequent contemplation of the last and great judgment. This is indeed a Catholicon against all: but we find it particularly applied by *St. Paul* to this of judging and despising our Brethren. *Why dost thou judge thy brother?*

*or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? We shall all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ. Rom. 14. 10.* That is the great day of Revelation and retribution, and we are not to anticipate it by our private inquests or sentences: we have business enough to provide our own accounts against that day. And as it were a spiteful folly for the Malefactors that were going together to the bar, to spend their time in exaggerating each other's crimes: so surely it is for us, who are all going toward the dreadful tribunal, to be drawing up Charges against one another. And who knows but we may then meet with the fate of *Daniel's* accusers, see him we censured acquit, and ourselves doomed. The penitence of the criminal may have numbered him among the Saints, when our unretracted uncharitableness may send us to unquenchable Flames. I conclude this consideration with the words of *St. James, There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy, who are thou that judgest another? Jam. 4. 12.*

40. A Third expedient may be, to try to make a revulsion of the humor, to draw it into another channel. If we must needs be talking of other people's faults, let it not be to Defame, but to amend them, by converting our Detraction and backbiting into Admonition and fraternal correction. This is a way to extract medicine out of the viper, to consecrate even this so unhallowed a part of our temper, and to turn the ungrateful meddling of a busybody, into the most obliging office of a friend. And indeed, had we the zeal for virtue, which we pretend when we inveigh against vice, we should surely lay it out this way, for this only gives a possibility of reforming the offender. But alas, we order the matter so, as if we feared to lose the occasion of Clamor, and will tell all the world but him that it most concerns. Indeed, tis a deplorable thing to see how universally this necessary Christian duty is neglected; and to that neglect we may in a great degree impute that strange overflowing of Detraction among us. We know the receiving anything into our Charge, insensibly begets a love and tenderness to it (a nurse upon this account comes often to vie kindness with the mother:) and would we but take one another thus into our care, and by friendly vigilance thus watch over each other's souls, tis scarce imaginable what an endearment it would create: such certainly as would infallibly supplant all our unkind reportings, and severe descants upon our brethren; since those can never take place, but when there is at least an indifference, if not an enmity.

41. The next cure I shall propose for Detraction, is to subtract its nourishment, by suppressing all Curiosity and inquisitiveness concerning others. Were all Supplies thus cut off, it would at last be subdued. The King of Ethiopia in a vie of Wit with the King of Egypt, proposed it as a Problem to him, to drink up the Sea, to which he replied by requiring him first to stop the access of Rivers to it: and he that would drain this other Ocean, must take the same course, dam up the avenues of those Springs which feed it. He that is always upon the scent, hunting out some discovery of others, will be very apt to invite his neighbors to the quarry; and therefore twill be necessary for him, to restrain himself from that range: not

like jealous States, to keep Spies and pensioners abroad to bring him intelligence, but rather discourage all such officious pick-thanks: for the fuller he is of such informations, the more is his pain if he keep them in, and his guilt if he publish them. Could men be persuaded to affect a wholesome ignorance in these matters, it would conduce both to their ease and innocence: for tis this Itch of the ear which breaks out at the Tongue: and were not Curiosity the Purveyor, Detraction would soon be starved into a tameness.

42. But the most infallible recipe of all, is the frequent recollecting, and serious applying of the grand rule, of doing as we would be done to; for as Detraction is the violation of that, so the observation of that must certainly supplant Detraction. Let us therefore, when we find the humor fermenting within us, and ready to break out in Declamations against our brethren, Let us, I say, check it with this short question, *Would I myself be thus used?* This voice from within, will be like that from heaven to St. Paul, which stopped him in the height of his carrier, [Acts 9. 4](#). And this voice, every man may hear, that will not stop his ears, nor gag his conscience, it being but the Echo of that native Justice and equity which is planted in our hearts: and when we have our remedy so near us, and will not use it, God may well expostulate with us, as he did with the Jews, *Why will ye die, O house of Israel?* [Ezek. 33. 11](#).

These are some of those many recipes which may be prescribed against this spreading disease. But indeed, there is not so much need to multiply remedies, as to persuade men to apply them. We are in love with our Malady, and as loath to be cured of the Luxury of the Tongue, as *St. Augustine* was of his other Sensuality, against which he prayed with a Caveat, that he might not be too soon heard. But tis ill dallying, where our Souls are concerned: for alas, tis they that are wounded by those darts, which we throw at others. We take our aim, perhaps at our Neighbors, but indeed hit ourselves: herein verifying in the highest Sense that Axiom of the Wise-man, *He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it, and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him.* [Prov. 26. 27](#). If therefore, we have no tenderness, no relentings, to our Brethren, yet let us have some to ourselves, so much compassion, nay, so much respect to our precious immortal Souls, as not to set them at so despicable a price, to put them in balance with the satisfying of a petulant, peevish vanity. Surely the shewing ourselves ill natured (which is all the gain Detraction amounts to) is not so enamouring a design, that we should sacrifice to it our highest interest. Tis too much to spend our breath in such a pursuit, O let not our souls also exhale in the vapor; but let us rather pour them out in prayers for our brethren, than in accusations of them: for though both the one and the other will return into our own bosoms, yet God knows to far differing purposes, even, as differing as those wherein we utter them. The Charity of the one, like kindly exhalations will descend in showers of blessings, but the rigor and asperity of the other, in a severe doom upon ourselves: for the Apostle will tell us, *He shall have Judgement without mercy, that shewed no mercy,* [James 2. 13](#).



## Section VII. Of Scoffing and Derision.

There is also another fault of the Tongue injurious to our neighbor, and that is Derision and Mockery; the striving to render others as ridiculous and contemptible as we can. This in respect of the subject matter differs from the other of Detraction, as much as folly or deformity does from vice: yet since injuries as well as benefits are to be measured by common estimation, this may come in balance with the other. There is such a general aversion in the human nature to contempt, that there is scarce anything more exasperating. I will not deny but the excess of that aversion may be leveled against Pride, yet sure scorn and disdain never sprung from humility, and therefore, are very incompetent Correctors of the other; so that it may be said of that, as once it was of *Diogenes*, that he trampled on *Plato's* Pride with greater of his own.

2. Nor is this injury enhanced only by the refinement of the sufferer, but also by the way of inflicting it. We generally think those are the severest marks of infamy, which are the most indelible. To be burnt in the hand or pilloried, is a more lasting reproach than to be scourged or confined; and it is the same in this case, for here commonly Wit is the Lictor, which is armed with an edged tool, and leaves scars behind it. The reproach of rage and fury seem to be writ in Chalk or Lead, which a dispassionate hearer easily wipes out, but those of Wit are like the engraver's burn upon copper, or the corrodings of *Aquafortis*, engrave and indent the Characters that they can never be defaced. The truth of this daily experience attests. A dull contumely quickly vanishes, nobody thinking it worth remembering; but when tis steeled with Wit, it pierces deep, leaves such impressions in the fancy of the hearers, that thereby it gets rooting in the memory, and will scarce be eradicated: nay, sometimes it happens to survive both speaker and hearer, and conveys itself to posterity; it being not unusual for the sarcasms of Wit to be transmitted in story. And as it thus gives an edge, so also does it add wings to a reproach, makes it fly abroad in an instant. Many a poor man's infirmities had been confined to the notice of a few relations or neighbors, had not some remarkable strain of drollery scattered and dispersed them. The jest recommends the Defamation, and is commonly so incorporate with it, that they cannot be related apart. And even those who like it not in one respect, yet are many times so transported with it in the other, that they choose rather to propagate the contumely, than stifle the conceit. Indeed, Wit is so much the *Diana* of this age, that he who goes about to set any bounds to it must expect an *uproar*, [Acts 19. 28.](#) or at least to be judged to have imposed an envious inhibition on it, because himself has not stock enough to maintain the trade. But however sharp or unexpected the censure may be, yet tis necessary that plain, downright truth should sometimes be spoken, and I think that will bear me out, if I say, tis possible men may be as oppressive by their parts, as their power; and that God did no more design the meaner intellec-

tuals of some for triumphs to the Pride and vanity of the more acute, than he did the possessions of the less powerful, as a prey to the rapine and avarice of the mighty.

3. And this suggests a yet farther aggravation of this sin, as it is a perverting of God's design, and abuse of the talent he has committed to men in trust. Ingenuity and quickness of parts, is sure to be reckoned in the highest ranks of Blessings, an instrument proper for the most excellent purposes: and therefore we cannot suppose the Divine wisdom, so much short of Human, as not in His intention to assign it to uses worthy of it. Those must relate either to God, ourselves, or our neighbors. In respect of God, it renders us more capable of contemplating His Perfections, discerning the Equity and excellence of his Laws, and our obligations to obedience. In regard of ourselves, it makes us apprehend our own interest in that obedience; makes us tractable and persuadable, contrary to that Brutish stubbornness of the Horse and Mule, which the Psalmist reproaches, [Psa. 32. 9](#). Besides it accommodates us in all the concerns of Human life, forms itself into all those useful contrivances, which may make our being here more comfortable: especially it renders a man company to himself, and in the greatest dearth of Society, entertains him with his own thoughts. Lastly, as to our neighbors, it renders us useful and assistant. All those discoveries and experiments, those Arts and Science, which are now the common treasure of the world, took their first rise from the ingenuity of particular Persons: and in all Personal exigencies wherein any of us are at any time involved, we need not be told the usefulness of a wise adviser. Now all these are employments commensurable to the faculty from whence they flow, and that answer its excellence and value; and he that so bestows his talent, gives a good account of this trust. But I would fain know under which of these Heads Derision of our Neighbors comes in: certainly not under that of being assistant to him. It would be a sorry relief to a poor indigent wretch, to lavish out wit upon him, in upbraiding of his misery. And is not this a parallel case? Is it not the same Barbarism, to mock and reproach a man that wants the gifts of Nature, as him that wants those of Fortune? Nay, perhaps it may be more, for a Beggar may have impoverished himself by his own fault, but in Natural defects there is nothing to be charged, unless we will fly higher, and arraign, that Providence that hath so dispensed. In a word, as the Superfluities of the Rich are by God assigned as the store-house of the poor, so the Abilities of the Wise are of the ignorant: for tis a great mistake, to think ourselves Stewards in some of God's gifts, and proprietors in others. They are all equally to be employed, according to the designation of the Donor, and there is nothing more universally designed by him, than that mankind should be equally helpful to one another. Those therefore, whom God hath blessed with higher degrees of sagacity and quickness, ought not to look down on others as the objects of their contempt or scorn, but rather of their care and pity, endeavoring to rescue them from those mischiefs, to which their weakness may expose them, remembering still, that God might have changed the Scene, and made themselves what they see others. It is part of *Job's* justification of his integrity, that *he was eyes to*



*the Blind, and feet to the Lame, Job 29. 25.* (i.e.) he accommodated his assistances to all the wants and exigencies of others: and sure tis no less the part of a good man to do it in the Mental than in the Corporal defects.

4. But alas, many of us would rather put a stumbling block in the way of the Blind, pull away the Crutch from the Lame, that we may sport ourselves to see them tumble: such a sensuality we have in observing and improving the imperfections of others, that it is become the grand excellence of the Age to be Dexterous at it, and Wit serves some men for little else. We are got indeed into a merry world, Laughing is our main business; as if because it has been made part of the Definition of man, that he is Risible, his man-hood consisted in nothing else. But alas, if that be all the use men have of their understandings, they were given them to little purpose, since mere Idiots can laugh with as much pleasure and more innocence than they; and it is a great instance how extremes may be brought to meet, that the excess of Wit in the one, and of Folly in the other, serve but to produce the same effect.

5. Yet so voracious is this humor now grown, that it draws in everything to feed it. There is not game enough from the real folly of the world, and therefore, that which is the most distant from it must be stamped with its mark. Tis a known story of the Friar who on a fasting day bid his Capon be Carp, and then very canonically ate it; and by such a transubstantiating power our Wits bid all seriousness and consideration be formality and foppery, and then under that name endeavor to hunt it out of the world. I fear moral honesty fares not better with some of them than moral prudence. The old Philosophical virtues of Justice, Temperance, and Chastity are now hissed off the stage, as fit only for that Antiquated set of Actors; and he that appears in that equipage, is by many thought more ridiculous than he that walks the street in his Ancestor's trunk hose. Nay indeed, vice itself is scarce secure if it have not the grand accomplishment of impudence: a puny blushing sinner is to be laughed out of his Modesty, though not out of his sin; and to be proof against their scorns, he must first be so against all the regrets of his own mind.

6. And if mere Ethic virtue, or shame-faced vice have this treatment, Christian piety must expect worse: and so indeed, it finds its professors being, beyond all others, exposed to their scorn and contempt. Nor is it strange it should be so, such men being *made*, as it is *Wisd. 2. 14.* *to reprove their ways*, they think in their own defense they are to deride theirs. This is it indeed, which gives a secret sting and venom to their reproaches: other men they abuse as an exercise of their Wit but these in defense of the party. So *Julian* after his Apostasy, thought it a more effectual way to persecute the Christians by taunts and ironies than by racks and tortures, as thinking it more possible to shame than fright them out of their religion. And the stratagem seems to have been reassumed by many in this age, and I fear with too great success: for I doubt not there are divers who have herded themselves amongst these profane Scoffers, not that they are convinced by their reasons, but terrified by their contumelies; and as some Indians are said to worship the Devil, that he may not hurt them; so these

choose to be active, that they may not be passive in the contempts flung upon religion: such men forget the dreadful denunciation of Christ against those that shall *be ashamed of Him and His words*. [Matt. 8. 38](#).

7. As for those who, upon a juster estimate, find the advantages of piety worthy to be chosen, and take it with all its accessory ignominies, they have the encouragement of very good company in their sufferings. The Psalmist long ago had his share, when not only *Those that sat in the gate spake against him, but the drunkards made songs upon him*, [Psa. 69. 12](#). 'Twas also the Prophet *Jeremiah's* complaint, *I am in Derision daily, everyone mocketh at me*, [Jer. 20. 7](#). Nay, our blessed Lord himself was derided in his life by the Pharisees, [Luke 16. 14](#). mocked and reviled at His death by the Priests, the Elders, the Soldiers, nay, by casual passengers, [Matt. 27. 39](#). And shall the *servant think himself greater than his Lord*? Shall a Christian expect an immunity from what his Savior has borne before him? (He that does so, is too delicate a member for a crucified head.) No, sure let us rather animate ourselves, as the Apostle exhorts, by *considering Him who as well despised the shame, as endured the cross for us*, [Heb. 12. 3](#). and who has not only given an example, but proposed a reward, a Beatitude to those who are *reviled for righteousness sake*, [Matt. 5. 11](#). And when this is soberly pondered, twill sure make it easy for us to resolve with holy *David* in a like case, *I will yet be more vile*, [2 Sam. 6. 22](#).

8. But to return from this digression to those who thus unhappily employ their parts, let me propose to them, that they would borrow every day some few minutes from their mirth, and seriously consider whether this be (I need not say a Christian, but) a manly exercise of their faculties. Alas, when they have rallied out the day from one company to another, they may sum up their account at night in the wise man's simile, their *Laughter has been but like the crackling of Thorns under a pot*, [Ecclus. 6. 7](#). made a little brisk noise for the present, and with the sparkles perhaps annoyed their Neighbors, but what real good has it brought to themselves? All that they can fancy is but the repute of Wit: but sure that might be attainable some other way. We find the world affected to new things, and this of Derision and abuse to others is so beaten a road, that perhaps the very variety of a new way would render it acceptable. They are the lighter substances that still swim away with the stream, the greater and more Solid bodies do sometimes stop the current: and sure twere a noble essay of a man's parts to stem this tide, and by a more useful application of their own faculties, convince others that their might be better employed. 'Tis said of *Anacharsis*, that at a feast he could not be got to smile at the affected railleries of common Jesters, but when an ape was brought in he freely laughed, saying *an ape was ridiculous by nature, but men by art and study*. And truly, tis a great contempt of human nature to think their intellects were given them for no better end, than to raise that laughter which a brute can do as well or better.

9. I Would not be thought to recommend such a Stoical sourness, as shall admit of nothing of the cheerful, pleasant part of Conversation. God has not sure been more rigid to our Minds than to our Bodies: and as He has not so devoted the one to toil, but that He allows us some time to exercise them in recreation as well as labors, so doubtless He indulges the same relaxation to our Minds: which are not always to be screwed up to the height, but allowed to descend to those easinesses of Converse, which entertain the lower Faculties of the Soul. Nor do I think those are all employed in those little skirmishes of Wit, which pass familiarly between intimates and acquaintances, which besides the present divertissement, serve to whet and quicken the Fancy. Yet I conceive this liberty is to be bounded with some Cautions: as first in these encounters, the Charge should be Powder not Bullets; there should nothing be said, that should leave any ungrateful impressions, or give any umbrage of a spiteful intent. The world wants not experiments of the mischiefs have happened by too severe Railleries: in such Fencings jest has proven earnest, and Florets have often turned to Swords, and not only the Friendship, but the Men have fallen a Sacrifice to a Jest.

10. Secondly, this is to have the same restriction with all other recreations, that it be made a divertissement, not a trade. Tis an insinuating thing, and is apt to encroach too much upon our time, and God knows we have a great deal of business for this world, and much more for the next, which will not be done with laughing: and therefore, tis not for us to play away too much of that time, which is exacted by more serious concerns. Tis sure we shall die in Earnest, and it will not become us, to live altogether in Jest. But besides this stealth of our time, tis apt to steal away men's hearts too, make them dote so upon this kind of entertainment, that it averts them from anything more serious. I believe I may appeal to some who have made this their business, whether it go not against the hair with them to set to anything else, and having espoused this as their one excellence, they are willing to decry all others, that they may the more value themselves upon this. By this means it is, that the gift of Raillery has in this Age, like the lean Kine, devoured all the more solid worthy qualifications, and is counted the most reputable accomplishment. A strange, inverted estimate, thus to prefer the little ebullitions of Wit before solid reason and judgment. If they would accommodate either Diet at the same rate, they should eat the Husk, rather than the Kernel, and drink nothing but froth and bubbles. But after all, Wisdom is commonly at long running justified even of her Despisers; these great Idolaters of Wit often dashing themselves upon such Rocks, as make them too late wish their Sails had been less, and their Ballast more. For the preventing, therefore, of more such wrecks, I wish the present caution may be more adverted to, not to bestow an unproportionable part of our time or value on this slight exercise of man's slightest Faculty.

11. A Third Caution in this matter, is to confine ourselves to present Company, not to make absent Persons the Subject of our mirth. Those freedoms we use to a man's face, as they are commonly more moderate, so they are more equitable, because we expose ourselves

to the like from him; but the back blows are disingenuous, and give suspicion we intend not a fair trial of Wit, but a cowardly murder of a man's fame. 'Twas the precept of the Philosopher, *Deride not the absent*, and I think it may well be so of the Politician: there being nothing more imprudent as to our civil concerns than the contrary liberty. For those things never die in the company they are first vented in (nay, perhaps the hearer is not willing his wit should so soon expire;) and when they once take air, they quickly come to the notice of the derided Person, and then nothing in the world is more disobliging. 'Twas a sober precept given one, not so much as to laugh in compliance with him that derides another, for you will be hated by him he derides. And if an accessory be hated, sure much more the principal: and I think I may say, there are many can sooner forgive a solemn deep contrivance against them, than one of their jocular reproaches: for he that designs seems to acknowledge them considerable, but he that mocks them, seems to think them too low for anything but contempt: and we learn from Aristotle, that the measure of anger is entirely taken thence, men being so far provoked, as they imagine they were slighted or affronted. In mere secular wisdom it will therefore become men to consider, whether this trade be like to turn to account; or whether it be worth the while, at once to make a jest and an enemy.

12. And if it be imprudent to make man our enemy, tis much more to make God so, by leveling our blows at anything sacred: but of that I have already had occasion to speak, and shall not repeat; only give me leave to say, that besides the profaner sorts of jests, which more immediately reflect on Him, He is concerned in all the unjust reproaches of our brethren, our love to them being confirmed by the same divine Sanction with our reverence to Him: and sure nothing is more inconsistent with that love, than the exposing them to that contempt we are ourselves impatient of. In a word, what repute soever this practice now has of Wit, it is very far from wisdom to provoke God that we may also disoblige man: and if we will take the Scripture estimate, we shall find a Scorners is no such honorable Epithet as we seem to account it. *Solomon* does almost constantly set it in opposition to a Wise man: thus it is, [Prov. 9. 8.](#) and again [Chap. 13. 1.](#) and many other places; and on the other side, closely links it with the Fool: and that not only in title, but in punishment too, *Judgments are prepared for scornors, and stripes for the backs of fools*, [Prov. 19. 29.](#) So that if our Wits think not *Solomon* too dull for their Cabal, we see what a turn he will give to their present verdict.

13. And if these reproaches which aim also at ostentation of Wit, be so unjustifiable, what shall we say to those that are drawn with blacker lines, that are founded in Malice and Envy, or some undermining design? Every man that is to be supplanted cannot always be attacked with a downright battery: perhaps his integrity may be such, that, as 'twas said of *Daniel*, [Chap. 6. 4.](#) *they can find no occasion against him*: and when they cannot shake the main Fort, they must try if they can possess themselves of the out-works, raise some prejudice against his discretion, his humor, his carriage, and his most extrinsic adherents, and if by

representing him ridiculous in any of these they can but abate men's reverence to him, their confidence of him will not long hold out; bare honesty without some other adornment, being looked on as a leafless tree, nobody will trust himself to its shelter. Thus the enemies of *Socrates*, when they could no otherways suppress his reputation, hired *Aristophanes*, a Comic Poet, to personate him on the stage, and by the insinuations of those interludes, insensibly conveyed first a contempt, then a hatred of him into the hearts of the people. But I need not bring instances of former times in this matter, these being sufficiently versed in that mystery.

14. It is not strange that men of such designs, should summon all their Wit to the service, make their Railleries as picquant as they can, that they may wound the deeper: but methinks tis but a mean office they assign their Wit, to be (I will not say the Pander, that being in this age scarce a title of Reproach but) the executioner or hangman to their malice. Christ bids us *be wise as Serpents*, yet adds withal *harmless as Doves*, [Matt. 10. 18](#). But here the Serpent has quite eat up the Dove, and puts a Vulture in the place, a creature of such sagacity and diligence in pursuit of the prey, that tis hard for any art or innocence to escape its talons.

15. There is yet another sort of Contumelious Persons, who indeed are not chargeable with that circumstance, of ill employing their Wit, for they use none in it. These are people whose sole talent is Pride and Scorn; who perhaps have attained the Sciences of dressing themselves finely, and eating well, and upon the strength of those excellencies, look fastidiously, and disdainfully on any who want them, concluding if a man fall short of their Garniture at the Knees and Elbows, he is much inferior to them in the furniture of the Head. Such people think crying, *O Ridiculous!* is an ample Confutation of anything can be said, and so they can but despise enough, are contented not to be able to say why they do so. These are I confess, the most innocent kind of Deriders in respect of others, what they say having not edge enough to cause any smart. The greatest hurt they do is to themselves, who though they much need, yet are generally little capable of a rescue, and therefore I shall not clog the present discourse with any advice to them: I shall choose rather to conclude with enforcing my Suit to the former, that they would soberly and sadly weigh the account they must one Day give of the Employment of their Parts, and the more they have hitherto embezzled them, the more to endeavor to expiate that Unthriftiness, by a more careful Managery for the future; that so instead of that vain, empty, vanishing Mirth they have courted here, they may find a real, full, and eternal Satisfaction in the Joy of their Lord.

## Section VIII. Of Flattery.

The last of Verbal injuries to our Neighbor which I shall mention, is Flattery. This is indeed the fatalest wound of the Tongue, carries least Smart, but infinitely more of Danger, and is as much superior to the former, as a Gangrene is to a Gall or Scratch; this may be sore and vexing, but that stupifying and deadly. Flattery is such a Mystery, such a Riddle of iniquity, that its very softnesses are its cruelest rigor, its Balm corrodes, and (to comprise all in the Psalmist's excellent Description) *its words are smoother than oil, and yet be they very swords.* [Psa. 56. 21.](#)

2. But besides the mischiefs of it to the Patient, tis the most dishonoring, the most vilifying thing to the Agent. I shall not need to empanel a Jury either of Moralists or Divines, every man's own breast sufficiently instructing him in the unworthiness of it. Tis indeed a Collective, accumulative Baseness, its being in its Elements a compound and a complex of the most sordid, hateful qualities incident to Mankind. I shall instance in three *viz.* Lying, Servility, and Treachery, which being detestably deformed single must in conjunction make up a loathsome Monstrous guilt. Now, though Flattery has two Branches, yet these lie so at the Root as equally to influence both: for whether you take it as it is the giving of praise where it is not due, or the professing of kindness which is not real, these Properties are still is Constitutive parts.

3. And first we may take Lying to be the very corner Stone of the Fabric; for take it away, and the Whole falls to the ground. A Parasite would make but a lean trade of it, that should confine himself to truth. For though tis possible so to order the manner and circumstances, as to flatter even in the representing a man's real virtues to him, yet commonly if they do not falsify as to the kind, they are forced to do it as to the degree. Besides, as there are but few such subjects of Flattery, so neither are men of that Worth so receptive of it. Such sort of addresses are less dangerous to those who have the perspicuity to see through them: so that these Merchants are under a necessity of dealing with the more ignorant Chapmen, and with them their counterfeit wares will go off best. It is indeed strange to consider, with what gross impudent falsehoods men of this trade will court their Patrons. How many in former ages have not only amassed together all sublunary excellencies, but have even ransacked heaven to supply their Flattery, Deified their Princes, and persuaded them they were gods, who at last found *they were to die like men?* And though this strain be not out-dated, yet perhaps tis not that the vice is grown more modest, but that Atheism has robbed it of that Topic. Those that believe no God, would rather seem to annihilate than magnify the person to whom they should apply the title. But I do not find that the practice has any other bounds. A great man's vices shall still be called virtues, his deformities beauties, and his most absurd follies the height of ingenuity. Such a subtle Alchemist is this Parasite, that he

turns all he touches into gold, imaginary indeed as to the deluded Person, but oft-times real to himself. Nor is Lying less natural to the other part of Flattery, the Profession of service and kindness. This needs no evidencing, and to attempt it would be a self-Confutation: for if those Professions be true, they are not Flattery, therefore, if they be Flattery, they must needs be Lies. It will be almost as needless to expatiate on the Baseness and meanness of that sin; for though there is no Subject that affords more matter for Declamation, yet Lying is a thing that is ashamed of itself, and therefore may well be remitted to its own convictions. Tis *Aristotle's* observation, that all Elements but the Earth, had some Philosopher or other, that gave it his vote to be the first productive Principle of all things: and I think we may now say, that all Crimes have had their Abettors and fautors, somebody that would stand up in their defense; only Lying is so much the dregs and refuse of wickedness, that none had yet had Chemistry enough to sublimate it, to bring it into such a reputation, that any man will think fit to own it: the greater wonder that what is under so universal a reproach, should be so commonly admitted in practice. But by this we may make an estimate, what the whole body of Flattery is, when in one limb of it we find so much corruption.

4. A Second is Servility and Abjectness of humor: and of this there needs no other proof than has been already given; this charge being implicitly involved in the former of Lying, the condescending to that, being a mark of a disingenuous spirit. And accordingly, the nobler Heathens looked on it as the vice of Slaves and vassals, below the liberty of a free man, as well as an honest. But though I need no other evidence to make good the accusation, yet every Sycophant furnishes me with many supernumerary proofs. Look upon such a one, and you shall see his eyes immovably fixed on his Patron's face, watching each look, each glance, and in every change of his countenance (like a Star-gazer) reading his own destiny, his Ears chained (like galley-slaves at the oar) to his dictate, sucking in the most insipid discourses with as much greediness as if they were the Apothegms of the seven Sages, his Tongue turned only to Panegyrics and acclamations, his feet in winged motion upon every nod or other signification of his pleasure: in a word, his whole body (as if it had not other animal spirits than what it derived from him) varies its postures, its exercises, as he finds agreeable to the humor he is to serve. And can humanity contrive to debase itself more? Yes it can, and does too often, by enslaving its Diviner part too, taking up not only opinions, but even crimes also in compliance, playing the incarnate Devil, and helping to act those villainies which Satan can only suggest: and if this be not a state of abject slavery, sure there is none in the world. *Plutarch* tells us, that *Philoxenus* for despising some dully Poetry of *Dionysius*, was by him condemned to dig in the quarries: from whence being by the mediation of friends remanded, at his return *Dionysius* produced some other of his verses, which as soon as *Philoxenus* had read, he made no reply, but calling to the waiters, said, *Let them carry me again to the quarries*. And if a heathen Poet could prefer a corporeal slavery before a mental, what name of reproach is low enough for them, who can submit to both, in pursuit

of those poor sordid advantages they project by their Flatteries. Nor is this baseness more observable in these mean fawnings and observances, than it is in the protestations of kindness and Friendship. Love is the greatest gift any man has to bestow, and Friendship the sacreddest of all moral bonds: and to prostitute these to little pitiful designs, is sure one of the basest cheats we can put upon our common nature, in thus debasing her purest and most current coin, which by these frequent adulterations is become so Suspected, that scarce any man knows what he receives. But Christian Charity is yet worse used in this case: for that obliging to all sincerity, is hereby induced to give gold for dross, exhibit that *Love indeed and in truth*, which is returned only *in word and in Tongue*, [1 John 3. 18](#). And so it does in those who observe its rules: but in those who own, yet observe them not, tis yet a greater sufferer, by laboring under the scandal of all their dissimulations. It was one the Character give Christians, even by their Enemies, *Behold, how they love one another*: but God knows we may now be pointed out by a very differing mark, *Behold, how they deceive and delude one another*. And sure this violation we herein offer to our religion, does not allay but aggravate the baseness of this practice: for if in the other we fell ourselves, in this we fell our God too, sacrifice our interest in Him to get a surreptitious title to the favor of a man. And this, I conceive, does in the second place not much commend the Art of Flattery, which is built up of so vile materials.

5. And to complete this infamous composition, in the third place Treachery comes in; a crime of so odious a kind, that to name it is to implead it: yet how intrinsic a part this is of Flattery, will need no great skill to evidence, daily experience sufficiently doing it. Tis a common observation of Flatterers, that they are like the Heliotrope, open only towards the sun, but shut and contract themselves at night, and in cloudy weather. Let the object of their adoration be but eclipsed, they can see none of those excellencies which before dazzled their eyes: and how ever inconstant they may seem to others, they are indeed very constant to themselves, true to their fixed principle, of courting the greatness not the man; in pursuit whereof their old Idol is often made a sacrifice to their new: all malicious discovery is made of their falling friend, to buy an interest in the rising one. Of this there are such crowds of examples in Story, that it would be impertinent to single out any, especially in an age that is fitter to furnish presidents for the future, than to borrow of the past times. But supposing the Parasite not actually guilty of this base revolt, (which yet he seldom fails to be upon occasion) yet is he no less Treacherous even in the height of his Blandishments; and while he most courts a man, he does the most ruinously undermine him. For first he abuses him in his understanding, precludes him from that which wise men have judged the most essential part of Learning, the knowledge of himself, from which tis the main business of the Flatterer to divert him. And to this abuse there is another inevitably consequent: for this ignorance of his faults or follies, necessarily condemns him to the continuing in them, it being impossible for him to think of correcting either the one or the other, who is made believe he



has neither. This is like the treachery of a bribed officer in a Garrison, who will not let the weak parts be fortified, and lays the man as open to assaults, as that doth the Town. Yet this is not all, he does not only provide for the continuance, but the improving of his crimes and errors, which alas, are too prolific of themselves, but being cultivated and manured with perpetual soothings and encouragements, grow immeasurably luxuriant. And accordingly, we see that men used only to applauses are so fooled with them that their insolences are intolerable. And this they are sometimes taught to their cost, when they happen among free men, who will not submit to all they say, nor commend all they do. And finding these uneasy contradictions when they come abroad, they are willing to return to their most complaisant company: and so this Sycophant Devil having once got them within his circle, may enchant them as he pleases, lead them from one wickedness to another. And as *Caligula* and other voluptuous Emperors, by being adored as gods, sunk in their sensuality below the Nature of man, so these celebrated Persons are by that false veneration animated to all those reproachful practices, which may expose them to a real contempt: their follies, as well as their vices still get had, till they answer the description the Wise man give of the old Giants, *Who fell away in the strength of their foolishness. Eccclus. 16. 7.*

6. And sure he that betrays a man to all these mischiefs, may well be thought perfidious. But that which infinitely amplifies and enhances the Treachery is, that all this is acted under the notion and disguise of a friend; a relation so venerable, that methinks tis the nearest secular transcript of the treason, which is storied of those who have administered Poison in the Eucharist. The Name of a friend is such an endearment, as nothing human can equal. All other natural or civil ties take their greatest force from this. What signifies an unfriendly Parent, or Brother, or Wife? Tis friendship only that is the cement which really and effectively combines mankind: and therefore we may observe, that God reckoning up other relations, illustrates them by several notes of endearment, but when he come to that of friendship, tis *the friend who is as thine own soul, Deut. 13. 6.* nothing below the highest instance was thought expressive enough of that union. What a Legion of Fiends then possesseth man that can break these chains, *Matt. 5. 4.* nay, that can hammer and forge those very chains into Daggers and Stiletos, and make their friendship an engine of ruin? This is certainly the blackest color wherein we can view a Parasite, his false light makes the shadow the more dismal: as the Ape has a peculiar deformity above other brutes by that awkward and ungraceful resemblance he has to a man, so sure a Flatterer is infinitely the more hateful for being the ugly counterfeit of a Friend. And as this Treachery lies at the bottom of the Panegyrics, so also does it of all the caresses and exuberant kindness of a Flatterer, which if they aimed not at any particular end of circumvention must yet in the general be Treacherous by being false. A man looks on the love of his friend as one of the riches possessions (upon which account the Philosopher thought friends were to be inventoried as well as goods.) What a defeat and discomfiture is it to a man, when he comes to use this wealth, to find it all false

metal, such as will not answer any of those purposes of which he depended on it. There cannot sure be a greater Treachery, than first to raise a confidence and then deceive it. But besides this fundamental falseness, there are also many incidental Treacheries, which fall in upon occasion of particular designs. A pretence of kindness is the universal stale to all base projects: by this men are robbed of their fortunes, and women of their honor: in a word all the wolfish designs walk under this sheep's clothing, and as the world goes, men have more need to beware of those who call themselves friends, than those who own themselves enemies.

7. These are those lineaments of this vice of Flattery, which sure do together make up a face of most extreme deformity. I might upon a true account add another, and charge it with Folly too. I am sure according to the Divine estimate it is always so: and truly it does not seldom prove so in the secular also. Men of this art do sometimes drop their vizard before they have got the prize, and then there is nothing in the world that appears so contemptible, so silly; a barefaced Flatterer being everybody's scorn. The short is, wherever this game is played there is always a fool in the case: if the Parasite be detected, it falls to his share: if he be not, to his whom he deludes. But at the best tis but subtlety and cunning he can boast of; and if he can in his own fancy raise that to the opinion of true wisdom, tis a sign he is come round to practice his deceits upon himself, and is as much his own Flatterer as he has been others.

8. And now I know not whether it be more shame or wonder, to see that men can so put off ingenuity, and the native greatness of their kind, as to descend to so base, so ignoble a vice: yet alas, we daily see it done, and not only by the scum and refuse of the people, such as *Job* speaks of, who are viler than the earth. Chap. 30. 8. but by Persons of all conditions. Flattery, like a spring forced upward ascends, as cares are by the wise man said to descend, *Ecclus. 40. 4. from him that weareth a linen frock to him that weareth a crown*: all intermedial degrees are but like pipes, which as they suck from below, so transmit it still upwards. There are few so low but find somebody to cajole and Flatter them. Some interest or other may sometimes be to be served even upon the meanest, and those that fine themselves thus solicited for benefits, are easily taught by it how to address to their immediate superiors, from whom they expect greater: and as tis thus handed from one rank to another, the art still is more subtilized and refined. (God help poor Princes the while, who commonly meet with the Elixir, and quintessence of this venom.) And thus it passes through all states and conditions: as they are passive on the one side, and are Flattered by some, so they are active on the other, and Flatter others.

9. I Say all conditions, I do not say all Persons in those conditions, for no truly generous soul can stoop so low: but tis too evident to what a low ebb Generosity as well as Christianity is grown, by the numbers of those who thus degrade themselves, every little petty interest being thought worth these base submissions. And truly, it is hard to find by what Topic of

persuasion to assault such men. The meanness, or the sin will scarce be dissuasives to those who have reconciled themselves to both: if anything can be pertinently said to them, it must be upon the score of Interest, for that being their grand principle, they can with no pretence disclaim the inferences drawn thence.

10. Let them therefore, duly balance the advantages they project from this practice with the mischiefs and dangers of it. What they expect is commonly either Honor or wealth, these they hope may be acquired by their prostrations to those who can dispense or procure them. Tis true, as Honor signifies Greatness and power, it is sometimes attained by it, but then as it signifies Reputation and esteem, tis as sure to be lost. He that thus ascends, may be looked on with fear, but never with reverence. Now I think tis no good bargain to exchange this second notion of Honor for the first, for besides the difference in the intrinsic value, tis to be considered how tottering a Pinnacle unmerited Greatness is. He that raised him to satisfy his humor at one time, can (with more ease and equal justice) throw him down at another: and when such a man does fall, he falls without pity, so without remedy, has no foundation on which to rebuild his fortune. His Sycophanting arts being detected, that Game is not to be played the second time: whereas a man of a clear reputation, though his barque be split, yet he saves his Cargo, has something left towards setting up again, and so is in capacity of receiving benefit not only from his own industry, but the friendship of others. A sound piece of Timber, if it be not thought fit for one use, yet will be laid by for another: and an honest man will probably at one time or other be thought good for something.

11. As for the other aim, that of Wealth, tis very possible that may sometimes be compassed; and well it may, the Flatterer having several Springs to feed it by. For he that has a great Patron, has the advantage of his countenance and Authority, he has that of his bounty and liberality, and he has another (sometimes greater than both) that of his negligence and deceivableness. But yet all these acquisition are may times like Fairy money, what is brought one night, is taken away the next. Men of this mold seldom know how to bear prosperity temperately, and it is no new thing to see a Privado carry it so high, as to awaken the jealousy of his promoter, which being assisted by the busy industry of those who envy his fortune, twill be easy enough to find some flaw in his Gettings, by which to unravel the whole Web: an event that has been oft experimented not only in the private managery of Families, but in the most public administrations. And these are such hazards, that laid altogether would much recommend to any the Moral of *Horaces's* Fable, and make one choose the country Mouse's plain fare and safety, rather tan the delicacies of the City with so much danger. This then is the state of the prosperous Parasite: but alas, how many are there who never arrive to this but are kicked down ere they have climbed the two or three first rounds of the Ladder, whose designs be so humble, as not to aspire above a Major-Domo or some such domestic preferment, for in this trade there are adventurers of all sizes? But upon all these considerations, methinks it appears no very inviting one to any. At the long run an honest

freedom of speech will more recommend a man, than all these sneaking flatteries: we have a very wise man's word for it, *he that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favor, than he that flattereth with his lips.* [Prov. 28. 23.](#)

12. But after all that hath or can be said, the suppression of Flattery will most depend upon those Persons to whom it is addressed: if it be not repulsed there, nothing else will discourage it, and if it be, tis crushed in the egg, and can produce no viper. These Vultures prey only on carcasses, on such stupid minds, as have not life and vigor enough to fray them away. Let but Persons of quality entertain such customers with a severe brow, with some smart expression of dislike, those Leeches will immediately fall off. In *Sparta* when all laws against theft proved ineffectual, at last they fixed the penalty on them that were robbed, and by that did the business: and in the present case, if twere made as infamous to be flattered as tis to flatter, I believe it might have the like effect. Indeed, there is pretence enough to make it so: for first, as to Wit, the advantage is clear on the Flatterer's side: he must be allowed to have more of that (which in this age is more than a counterpoise to honesty;) and as for virtue, the balance (as to the principle motive;) seems to hang pretty even, tis the vice of Avarice that tempts the one to Flatter, and the vice of Pride that makes it acceptable to the other. The truth is, there is the bottom of the matter: tis that secret confederate within that exposes men to those assaults from without. We have generally such an appetite to praise, that we greedily such it in without staying to examine whether it belong to us or no, or whether it be designed as a kindness or an abuse. Other injuries rush upon us with violence, and give us notice of their approach: they may be said to come *like water into our bowels; but this like oil into our bones,* [Psa. 109. 18.](#) penetrates easily, undiscernibly, by help of that native propension we have to receive it. Tis therefore, the near concern of all, especially of those whose quality most exposes them, to keep a guard upon that treacherous inmate, not to let that step into the scale to make a base Sycophant out-weigh a true friend, and whenever they are attacked with extravagant Encomiums, let them fortify themselves with the Dilemma, Either they have those excellencies they are praised for, or they have not: if they have not, tis an apparent cheat and gull, and he is of a pitiful, forlorn understanding that delights to be fooled: but if they have, they are too good to be exposes to such worms who will instantly wither the fairest gourd, [Jonah 4. 7.](#)

For as it is said of the *Grand Signior*, that no grass grows where his horse once treads: so we may say of the Flatterer, no virtue ever prospers where he is admitted: if he finds any he hugs it till he stifles it, if he find none, he so indisposes the soil that no future seeds can ever take root. In fine, he is a mischief beyond the description of any Character. O let not men then act this part to themselves by being their own Parasites! and then twill be an easy thing to escape all others.

## Section IX. Of Boasting.

We have now seen some effects of an ungoverned Tongue, as they relate to God and our Neighbor. There is yet a third sort which reflect upon a man's self. So unboundedly mischievous is that petulant member, that heaven and earth are not wide enough for its range, but it will find work at home too: and like the viper, that after it had devoured its companions, preyed upon itself, so it corrodes inward, and becomes often as fatal to its owner, as to all the world besides.

2. Of this there are as many instances, as there are imprudent things said, for all such have the worst reflection upon the speaker: and therefore, all that have given rules for civil life, have in order to it, put very severe restraints upon the Tongue, that it run not before the judgment. Twas the advice of *Zeno* to *dip the tongue in the mind* before one should permit it to speak. *Theophrastus* used to say, *It was safer trusting to an unbridled horse, than to intemperate speech*. And daily experience confirms the Aphorism, for those that set no guard upon their tongues are hurried by them into a thousand indecencies, and very often into real considerable mischiefs. By this means men have proved their own delators, discovered their own most important secrets: and, whereas their heart should have kept a lock upon their Tongue, they have given their Tongue the key of their heart, and the event has been oft as unhappy as the proceeding was preposterous. There are indeed so many ways for men to lose themselves in their talk, that I should do the like if I should pretend to trace them. Besides, my subject leads me not to discourse Ethically but Christianly of the faults of the Tongue, and therefore I have all along considered the one no farther than it happens to be twisted with the other.

3. In the present case I shall insist only upon one fault of the tongue, which partakes of both kinds, and it is at once a vice and a folly, I mean that of Boasting and vaunting a man's self: a strain to which some men's tongues have a wonderful glibness. No discourse can be administered, but they will try to turn the Tide, and draw it all into their own Channel, by entertaining you with long stories of themselves: or if there be no room for that, they will at least screw in here and there some intimations of what they did or said. Yea, so stupid a vanity is this, that it works alike upon all materials: not only their greater and more illustrious acts or sentences, but even their most slight and trivial occurrences, by being theirs, they think acquire a considerableness, and are forcibly imposed upon the company; the very dreams of such people strait commence prophesy, and are as seriously related, as if they were undoubted revelations. And sure if we reflect upon our Savior's rule, that *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*, we cannot but think these men are very full of themselves, and to be so, is but another phrase of being very Proud. So, tis Pride in the heart,

which is the spring that feeds this perpetual current at the mouth, and under that notion we are to consider it.

4. And truly there is nothing can render it more infamous, Pride being a vice that of all others is the most branded in Scripture as most detestable to God, and is signalized by the punishment to be so. This turned *Lucifer* out of Heaven, *Nebuchadnezzar* out of his Throne, nay, out of Human society. And indeed, it seems still to have something of the same effect, nothing rendering a man so inconsiderable; for it sets him above the meaner sort of company, and makes him intolerable to the better, and to compete the parallel, he seldom comes to know himself till he be turned a-grazing, be reduced to some extremities.

5. But this Boasting, arrogant humor, though always bad, yet is more or less so according to the Subject on which it works. If it be only on Natural excellencies, as Beauty, Wit, or accidental acquisitions, as Honor, Wealth, or the like, yet even here tis not only a Theft, but a Sacrilege; the glory of those being due only to the Donor, not to the receiver, there being not so much as any predisposition in the subject to determine God's bounty. He could have made the most deformed Beggar as handsome and as rich as those who most pride themselves in their wealth and beauty. No man fancies himself to be his own Creator, and though some have assumed to be the Architects of their own fortunes, yet the frequent defeats of men's industry and contrivance, do sufficiently confute that bold pretense, and evince that there is something above them, which can either blast or prosper their attempts. What an invasion then is it of God's right, to engross the honor of those being done, which were not at all in their power to do? And sure the folly is as great in respect of men, as the sin is towards God. This boasting, like a heavy Nurse, overlays the Child, the vanity of that quite drowns the notice of the things in which tis founded; and men are not so apt to say a man is Handsome, Wise, or Great, as that he is proud upon the fancy of being so. In a word, he that celebrates his own excellencies, must be content with his own applauses, for he will get none of others, unless it be from those fawning Sycophants, whose praises are worse than the bitterest Detractions.

6. And yet so sottish a vice is Pride, that it can make even those insidious Flatteries matter of boast, which is a much more irrational object of it than the former. How eagerly do some men propagate every little Encomium their Parasites make of them? With what gust and sensuality will they tell how such a Jest of theirs took, or such a Magnificence was admired? Tis pleasant to see what little Arts and dexterities they have to wind in such things into discourse: when alas, it amounts to no more than this, that some have thought them fools enough to be flattered, and tis odds but the hearers will think them enough so to be laughed at.

7. But there is yet another Subject of Boasting more foolish, and more criminal too, than either of the former, and that is when men vaunt of their Piety; which if it were true, were yet less owing to themselves than any natural endowment. For though we do not at all assist

towards them, yet do we neither obstruct, but in the operations of Grace tis otherwise: we have there a principle of opposition, and God never makes us his own till He subdues that: and though He do it not by irresistible force, but by such sweet and gentle insinuations, that we are sometimes captivated ere we are aware: yet that does not impeach His right of conquest, but only shews Him the more gracious conqueror. Tis true in respect of the event we have great cause of exultance and joy, God's service being the most perfect freedom: yet in regard of the efficiency, we have as little matter of Boast, as the surprised City has in the triumphs of its victor.

8. But secondly, either this vaunted Piety is not real, and then tis good for nothing; or else by being vaunted becomes so. If it be not real, tis then the superadding Hypocrisy to the former sacrilege, an attempt at once to rob God and cheat men, and in the event usually renders them hateful to both: to God (who cannot be mocked) it does so at the instant, and seldom misses to do so at last to men. An Hypocrite has a long part to act, and if his memory fail him but in any one scene, his play is spoiled: so that his hazards are so great, that tis as little prudent as tis honest to set up the trade, especially in an age when Piety itself is at so low a price, that its counterfeit cannot pass much. But if the Piety be indeed true, the Boasting it blasts it, makes it utterly insignificant. This we are told by *Christ* Himself, who assure us, that even the most Christian actions of prayer, alms, and fasting, must expect no other reward (when boasted) than the sought-for applause of men. [Matt. 6](#). When a man shall make his own tongue the trumpet of his Alms, or the echo of his prayers, he carves, or rather snatches his own reward, and must not look God should heap more upon him: the recompense of his pride he may indeed look for from Him, but that of his virtue he has forestalled. In short, piety is like those Lamps of old, which maintained their light some Ages under ground, but as soon as they took air expired. And surely there cannot be a more deplorable folly, than thus to lose a rich Jewel, only for the pitiful pleasure of shewing it: it's the humor of Children and Idiots, who must be handling their birds till they fly away, and it ranks us with them in point of discretion, though not of innocence.

9. From the view of these particulars we may in the gross conclude, that this ostentation is a most foolish sin, such as never brought in advantage to any man. There is no vice so undermines itself as this does: tis glory it seeks, and instead of gaining that, it loses common, ordinary estimation. Everybody that sees a bladder puffed up, knows tis but wind that so swells it: and there is no surer argument of a light, frothy brain than this bubbling at the mouth. Indeed, there is nothing renders any man so contemptible, so utterly useless to the world; it excludes him almost from all commerce, makes him incapable of receiving or doing a benefit. No man will do him a good turn, because he foresees he will arrogate it to himself, as the effect of his merit: and none (that are not in some great exigence) will receive one from him, as knowing it shall be not only proclaimed, but magnified much above the true worth. There seems to be but one purpose for which he serves, and that is to be sport

for his company: and that he seldom fails to be, for in these gamesome days men will not lose such an opportunity of divertissement, and therefore, will purposely give him hints, which may put him upon his Rodomontades. I do not speak this by way of encouragement to them, but only to shew these vaporers, to what scorn they expose themselves, and what advantage they give to any that have a mind to abuse them: for they need not be at any pains for it, they do but swim with their stream; an approving nod or smile, serves to drive on the design, and make them display themselves more disadvantageously, more ridiculously, than the most Satirical Character could possibly do.

10. But besides these sportive projects, such a man lays himself open to more dangerous circumventions. He that shews himself so enamoured of praise, that (*Narcissus* like) dotes on his own reflections, is a fit prey for Flatterers, and such a Carcass will never want those Eagles: when his weak part is one discerned (as it must soon be when himself publishes it) he shall quickly be surrounded with assailants. The last Section has shewed the misery of a man so besieged, therefore, I shall not enlarge on it here, this mention being only intended to evince how apt this vainglorious humor is to betray men to it.

11. These are competent Specimens of the folly of this vice: but it has yet a farther aggravation, that it precludes all means of growing wiser: tis *Solomon's* assertion, *Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a Fool than of him.* *Prov. 26. 12.* And the reason is evident, for he discards the two grant instruments of instruction, Admonition and Observation. The former he thinks superseded by his own Perfections, and therefore, when any such friendly office is attempted towards him, he imputes it either to Envy, and a desire to eclipse his luster by finding some spot, or else to Ignorance and incapacity of estimating his worth: the one he entertains with Indignation, the other with disdainful Pity. As for Observation, he so circumscribes it within himself, that it can never fetch in anything from without. Reading of men has been by some thought the most facile and expedite Method of acquiring Knowledge; and sure for some kinds of Knowledge it is: but then a man must not only read one Author, much less the one worst he can pick out for himself. Tis an old and true saying, *He that is his own Pupil shall have a fool for his Tutor:* and truly he that studies only himself, will be like to make but a sorry Progress. Yet this is the case of arrogant men, they lose all the benefit of Conversation, and when they should be enriching their Minds with foreign treasure, they are only counting over their own store. Instead of adverting to those sober discourses which they hear from others, they are perhaps watching to interrupt them by some pompous Story of themselves, or at least in the abundance of their self-sufficiency, think they can say much better things, Magisterially obtrude their own notions, and fall a-teaching when tis fitter they should learn: and sure to be thus forward to lay out, and take no care to bring in, must needs end in a Bankrupt state. Tis true, I confess, the study of a man's self is (rightly taken) the most useful part of Learning, but then it much be such a Study as brings him to know himself, which none do so little as these men, who in this are



like those silly women the Apostle describes, *2 Tim. 3. 7. Who are ever learning yet never attain.* And tis no wonder, for they begin at the wrong end, make no inquiry into their faults or defects, but fix their Contemplation only on their more splendid qualities, with which they are so dazzled, that when you bring them to the darker parts of themselves, it fares with them as with those that come newly from gazing on the Sun, they can see nothing.

12. And now having dissected this swelling vice, and seen what it is that feeds the tumor, the cure suggests itself. If the disease be founded in Pride, the abating that is the most natural and proper remedy: and truly, one would think that mere weighing of the foregoing considerations might prove sufficient allays to it. Yet because where humors are turgent, tis necessary not only to purge them, but also to strengthen the infested part, I shall adventure to give some few advices by way of fortification and Antidote.

13. In the first place, that of the Apostle offers itself to my hand, *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Phil. 2. 4.* A counsel which in a distorted sense seems to be too much practiced. We are apt to apply it to worldly advantages, and in that notion not to look on our own things with thankfulness, but on other men's with envy. We apply it also to errors and sins, and look not on our own to correct and reform, but on others to despise and censure. Let us at last take it in the genuine sense, and not look on our own excellencies, but those of others. We see in all things how desuetude does contract and narrow our faculties, so that we may apprehend only those things wherein we are conversant. The droiling Peasant scarce thinks there is any world beyond his own Village, or the neighboring Markets, nor any gayety beyond that of a Wake or Morris, and men who are accustomed only to the admiration of themselves, think there is nothing beside them worthy of regard. These unbred minds must be a little sent abroad, made acquainted with those excellencies which God has bestowed on other men, and then they will not think themselves like *Gideon's* fleece to have sucked up all the dew of heaven: nay, perhaps they many find they rather answer the other part of the miracle, and are drier than their neighbors. Let them therefore put themselves in this course, observe diligently all the good that is visible in other men, and when they find themselves mounting into their altitudes, let them clog their wings with the remembrance of those who have out-soared them, not in vain opinion, but in true worth. Tis nothing but the fancy of singularity that puff us up. To breath, to walk, to hear, to see, are excellent powers, yet nobody is proud of them, because they are common to the whole kind: and therefore, if we would observe the great number of those that equal or exceed us, even in the more appropriate endowments, we should not put so excessive a price upon ourselves.

14. Secondly, if we will needs be reflecting upon ourselves, let us do it more ingeniously, more equally, let us take a true survey, and observe as well the barren as the fertile part of the soil: and if this were done, may men's value would be much short of what they are willing to suppose it. Did we but compare our crop of Weeds and Nettles, with that of our Corn,

we must either think our ground is poor, or ourselves very ill husbands. When therefore, the recollection of either real or fancied worth begins to make us airy, let us condense again by the remembrance of our sins and folly: tis the only possible service they can do us, and considering how dear they are to cost us, we had not need lose this one accidental advantage. In this sense *Satan may cast out Satan*, our vilest guilts help to eject our pride, and did we will manage this one stratagem against him, twould give us more cause of triumph, than most of those things for which we so spread our plumes: I do not say we should contract new guilts to make us humble, God knows we need not, we have all of us enough of the old stock if we would but thus employ them.

15. In the last place I should advise those who are apt to talk big things of themselves, to turn into some other road of discourse: for if they are their own theme, their tongues will as naturally turn into Eulogies, as a horse does into that Inn to which he is customed. All habits do require some little excess of the contrary to their cure: for we have not so just a scantling of ourselves, as to know to a grain what will level the scales, and place in the right Mediocrity. Let men therefore that have this infirmity, shun (as far as prudence and interest permits) all discourse of themselves, till they can sever it from that unhappy appendage. They will not be at all the less acceptable company, it being generally thought none of the best parts of breeding, to talk much of one's self: for though it be done so as not to argue pride, yet is does ignorance of more worthy subjects.

16. I Should here conclude this Section, but that there is another sort of vaunting Talk, which was not well reducible to any of the former Heads, the subject matter being vastly distant: for in those the Boasting was founded in some either real or supposed worth, but in this is all Baseness and villainy. There are a Generation of men, who have removed all the Land-marks which their Fathers (nay, even the Father of Spirits) have set, reversed the common notions of Humanity, and *call evil good, and good evil*, and those things which a moderate impudence would blush to be surprised in, they not only proclaim but boast of, blow the Trumpet as much before their crimes, as others before their good deeds. Nay, so much to they affect this inverted sort of Hypocrisy, that they own more wickedness than they act, assume to have made practical the highest Speculations of villainy, and like the Devil's Knights errant, pretend to those Romantic achievements, which the veriest Fiend incarnate could never compass. These are such Prodigies, such Monsters of villainy, that though they are objects of Grief and Wonder, they are not of Counsel. Men who thus rave, we many conclude their brains are turned, and one may as well read Lectures at Bedlam as treat with such. Yet we know that there sharp corrections recover crazed men to Sobriety; and then their Cure lies only in the hand of Civil Justice: if that would take them at their words, receive their brags as Confessions, and punish them accordingly, it may be a little real smart would correct this mad Itch, and teach them not *to glory in their shame*. [Phil. 3. 19.](#)

In the mean time, let others who are not yet arrived to this height consider betimes, that all indulgent practice of sin is the direct Road to it, and according to the degrees of that indulgence, they make more less haste. He that constantly and habitually indulges, rides upon the Spur, and will quickly overtake his Leaders. Nay, if it be but this one vice of vanity, it may finally bring him to their state. He that loves to brag, will scarce find exercise enough for that faculty in his virtues, and therefore, may at last be tempted to take in his vices also. But that which is more seriously considerable is, that Pride is so provoking to Almighty God, that it often causes him to withdraw His *Grace*, which is a Donative He has promised only *to the humble*. [Jam. 4. 6](#). And indeed, when we turn that Grace into wantonness, as the proud man does who is pampered by it into high conceits of himself, tis not probable God will any longer prostitute his favors to such abuse. The Apostle observes it of the Gentiles, who had in contradiction of their natural light abandoned themselves to vile Idolatries, that God *after gave them up to a reprobate mind and vile affections*. [Rom. 1. 25, 26](#). But the proud now stifle a much clearer light, and give up themselves to as base an Idolatry, the adoration of themselves. And therefore, tis but equal to expect God should desert them, and (as some Nations have Deified their diseases) permit them to celebrate even their foulest enormities. The application of all I shall sum up in the words of the Apostle. [Rom. 11. 21](#). *Take heed also that he spare not thee*.

## Section X. Of Querulousness.

To this of Boasting may not unfitly be subjoined another inordinancy of the Tongue, *viz.* murmuring and complaining. For though these faults seem to differ as much in their complexions, as Sanguine does from Melancholy, yet there is nothing more frequent than to see them united in the same person. Nor is this a conjunction of a later date, but is as old as *St. Jude's* days, who observes that *murmurers* and *complainers* are the very same with those who speak *great swelling words*, [Jude 16](#).

2. Nor are we to wonder to find them thus conjoined, if we consider what an original cognation and kindred they have, they being (however they seem divided) streams issuing from the same fountain. For the very same Pride which prompts a man to vaunt and over-value what he is, does so forcibly incline him to contemn and disvalue what he has; whilst measuring his enjoyments by that vast Idea he has formed of himself, tis impossible but he must think them below him.

3. This indeed is the true original of those perpetual complainings we hear from all sorts and conditions of men. For let us pass through all Degrees, all Ages, we shall rarely find a single person, much less any number of men, exempt from this Querulous, this sullen humor: as if that breath of life wherewith God originally inspired us, had been given us not to magnify his Bounty, but to accuse his illiberality, and like the more dismal sorts of instruments, could be tuned to no other Strains but those of Mourning and Lamentation. Every man contributes his note to this doleful Harmony, and after all that God has done to oblige and delight mankind, scarce any man is satisfied enough, I will not say to be thankful, but to be patient. For alas, what tragical complaints do men make of their infelicity, when perhaps their prosperity is as much the envious outcry of others? Every little defeat of a design, of an appetite, every little disregard from those above them, or less solemn observance from those below them, make their *Heart hot within them*, [Psa. 39. 3](#). and the tongue (that combustible part) quickly takes fire and *breaks out* into extravagant exclamations. It is indeed strange to see how weighty every the trivialest thing is when a passion is cast into the scale with it, how every the slightest inconvenience or petty want preponderates hundreds of great substantial blessings; when indeed, were it in an instance never so considerable, it could be no just Counterpoise. Yet so closely is this corruption interwoven with our constitution that it has sometimes prevailed even upon good men. *Jacob* though he had twelve sons, yet upon the supposed death of one despised the comforts of all the rest, and with an obstinate sorrow resolves to *go mourning to his Grave*. [Gen. 35. 37](#). *David* after that signal victory which had preserved his life, reinstated him in his Throne, and restored him to the Ark and Sanctuary, yet suffered the loss of his rebellious son, who was the Author of his

danger, to overwhelm the sense of his deliverance, and instead of Hymns and praises, breaks out into ejaculations and effeminate wailings. [2. Sam. 18. 33.](#)

4. But God knows the most of our complaints cannot pretend to such considerable motives: they are not the bowels of a Father, the impresses of Nature that excite our repinings, but the impulses of our lusts and inordinate appetites. Our discontents are usually such as *Ahab's* for his neighbor's vineyard, *Haman's* for *Mordecai's* obeisance, *Achitophel's* for having his counsel rejected. Every disappointment of our avarice, ambition, and pride, fills our hearts with bitterness and our mouths with clamors. For if we should examine the numerous complaints which sound in every corner, it would doubtless be found that the greatest part of them have some such original: and that whether the pretended grievances be public or private. For the first: many a man is a state malcontent merely because he sees another advanced to that honor or wealth which he thinks he has better deserved. He is always inveighing against such unequal distributions, where the best services (such you may be sure his own are) are the worst rewarded: nor does he ever cease to predict public ruins, till his private are repaired. But as soon as that is done, his Augury grows more mild: and as if the estate and he were like *Hippocrate's* twins, his recruits give new vigor to that, and till his next suit is denied everything is well administered. So full, alas, are men of themselves, that tis hard to find any the most splendid pretenses which have not something of that at the bottom: and would every man ransack his own heart, and resolve not to cast a stone till he had first cleared it of all sinister respects, perhaps the number of our complainers would be much abated.

5. Nor is it otherwise in private discontents. Men are apt to think themselves ill used by any man who will not serve their interest or their humor, nay, sometimes their vices; and are prone in all companies to arraign such an unpliant Person, as if he were an enemy to mankind, because he is not a slave to their will. How many have quarreled even with their dearest friends, because they would not assist them to their own ruin, or have striven to divert them from it: so forcible are our propensions to mutiny, that we equally take occasions from benefits or injuries.

6. But the highest and most unhappy instance of all is in our behavior toward God, whose allotments we dispute with the same, or rather greater boldness than we do those of men. What else mean those impatient murmurs at those things which are the immediate issues of Providence? Such are our native blemishes, disease, death of friends, and the like. Nay, what indeed are our displeasure even at those things which we pretend to fasten upon the Second Causes? For those being all under the subordination of the first, cannot move but by its permission. This holy *Job* well discerned, and therefore does not indite the *Chaldeans* or *Sabeans* for his plunder, but knowing they were but the instruments he submissively acknowledges that there was a higher agent in his loss, *The Lord has taken away*, [Job 1. 21.](#) When therefore, we ravingly execrate the rapine of one man, the deceit of another for

our impoverishment, when we angrily charge our defamation on the malice of our maligners, our disappointments on the treachery or negligence of our friends, we do interpretatively conclude either that there is no over-ruling providence which could have restrained those events, or else (which is equally horrid) we accuse it as not having done well in permitting them. So that against whomsoever we direct our clamors, their last rebound is against Heaven; this Querulous humor carrying always an implicit repugnance to God's disposals: but where it is indulged to, it usually is its own expositor, and explicitly avows it, charges God foolishly, and by impious murmurs blasphemes that power which it cannot resist. Indeed, the progress is very natural for our impatiences at men to swell into mutinies against God: for when the mind is once embittered, it distinguishes not of objects, but indifferently lets fly its venom. *He that frets himself*, the Prophet tells us, *will curse his King, nay his God*, [Isa. 8. 21](#). and he that quarrels at God's distributions is in the direct road to defy His Being.

7. By this we may estimate the danger of our discontents, which though at first they are introduced by the inordinate love of ourselves, yet are very apt to terminate in hatred and Blasphemies against God. He therefore, that would secure himself from the highest degree, just watch against the lowest; as he that would prevent a total Inundation must avert the smallest breach in his Banks. Not but that even the first beginnings are in themselves well worth our guarding: for abstracting from all the danger of this enormous increase, there murmurings (like a mortiferous Herb) are poisonous even in their first Spring, before they arrive to their full maturity. To be always moralizing the Fable of *Prometheus* upon one's self, playing the Vulture upon one's own entrails, is no desirable thing, though we were accountable to none but ourselves for it: to dip our tongues in gall, to have nothing in our mouths but the extract, and exhalation of our inward bitterness, is sure no greater Sensuality. So that did we consult only our own ease, we might from that single Topic draw arguments enough against our mutinies.

8. But besides our duty and ease, our credit and reputation make their plea also. Fortitude is one of the noblest of moral virtues, and has the luck to appear considerable even to those who despise all the rest. Now one of the most proper and eminent acts of that is, the bearing adverse events with evenness and temper. This passive valor is as much the mark of a great mind as the active, nay, perhaps more, the later being often owing to the Animal, this to the Rational part of man. And sure we must strangely have corrupted the principles of *Morality* as well as *Religion*, if every turbulent, unruly Spirit, that fills the world with blood and rapine, shall have his ferocity called gallantry; yet that sober courage that maintains itself against all the shocks of Fortune, that keeps its Post in spite of the rudest encounters, shall not be allowed at least as good a name. And then on the contrary we may conclude, that to sink under every cross accident, to be still whining and complaining, crying our upon every touch, is a note of a mean, degenerate soul, below the dignity of our reasonable nature. For certainly God never gave us reason for so unkind a purpose, as only to quicken and enhance

the resentment of our sufferings, but rather to control those disorders, which the more tumultuous part of us, our senses, are apt to raise in us: and we are so far men and no farther, as we use it to that end. Therefore, if the dictates of religion cannot restrain our murmurs, if we are not Christians enough to submit to the divine precepts of meekness and acquiescence: yet let us at least keep within those bounds which ingenious nature has set us, and not by our unmanly impatiences enter common with Brutes and Animals.

9. Nay, I may fuller add, if neither for God's nor our own sakes, yet for others, for humane society's sake, this querulous inclination should be suppressed; there being nothing that renders a man more unpleasant, more uneasy company. For (besides that tis very apt to vent itself upon those with whom he converses, rendering him capricious and exceptionous; and tis a harsh, a grating sound to hear a man always in complaining Key) no man would willingly dwell within the noise of shrieks and groans; and the exclamations of the discontented differ from those only by being more articulate. It is a very unwelcome importunity, to entertain a man's company with remonstrances of his own infelicities and misadventures, and he that will relate all his grievance to others, will quickly make himself one to them. For though he that is full of the inward sense of them, thinks it rather an ease than oppression to speak them out, yet the case is far otherwise with his Auditors: they are perhaps as much taken up with themselves, as he is, and as little at leisure to consider his concerns, as he theirs. Alas, we are not now in those primitive days, when there was as it were one common sense among Christians, when *if one member suffered, all the members suffered with it.* [1 Cor. 12. 26.](#) That Charity which gave that sympathetic motion to the whole, is now itself benumbed, flows rarely beyond the narrow compass of our personal interest; and therefore we cannot expect that men should be very patient of our complaints who are not concerned in the causes of them. The Priest answer to *Judas* does speak the sense of most men in the case *What is that to us? See thou to that.* [Matt. 27. 4.](#) I do not deny but that the discharging one's griefs into the bosom of a true friend, is both innocent and prudent: nay indeed, he that has such a treasure is unkind to himself if he use it not. But that which I would dissuade, is the promiscuous use of this liberty in common Conversation, the satisfying our Spleen, when we cannot ease our hearts by it, the loud declaimings at our misery, which is seldom severed from as severe reflections on those whom we suppose the causes of it; by which nothing can be acquired but the opinion of our Impatience, or perhaps some new grievance from some, who think themselves concerned to vindicate those whom we asperse. In a word, tis as indecent as it is unacceptable, and we may observe all men are willing to slink out of such company, the Sober for the hazards, and Jovial for the unpleasantness. So that the murmurer seems to be turned off to the company of those doleful Creatures which the Prophet mentions which were to *inhabit the ruins of Babylon,* [Isa. 13. 12.](#) For he is ill Conversation to all men, though the worst of all to himself.



10. And now upon the force of all these considerations, I may reasonably impress the Wise man's Counsel, *Therefore beware of murmuring*, [Wisd. 1. 11](#). And indeed, it is not the precept of the Wise man alone, but of all who have made any just pretence to that title. For when we consider those excellent lectures of contentation and acquiescence, wherewith the writings of Philosophers abound, tis hard to say whether they speak more of instruction or reproach to us. When their confused notions of a Deity had given them such impressions of His Wisdom and goodness, that they would not pretend to make any elections for themselves, how does it shame our more explicit knowledge, who dare not depend on Him in the smallest instance? who will not take His disposals for good unless our senses become His sureties? which amounts but to that degree of credit, which the most faithless man may expect from us, the trusting him as far as we see him. This is such a contumely to Him, as the Ethic world durst not offer Him, and is the peculiar insolence of us degenerated Christians, who sure cannot be thought in earnest when we talk of singing *Hallelujahs* in the next world to Him, whilst we entertain Him here only with the sullen noise of murmurs and repinings. For we are not to think that Heaven will Metamorphose us on a sudden, and turn our exclamations and wild clamors into Lauds and Magnificats. It does indeed perfect and crown those graces which were here inchoate and begun, but no man's conversion ever succeeded his being there: for Christ has expressly told us, *That except we be converted, we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven*; and if we go hence in our froward discontents, they will associate us with those with whom is *Weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*.



## Section XI. Of Positiveness.

Another very unhandsome circumstance in discourse is the being over confident and peremptory, a thing which does very much unfit men for conversation, it being looked on as the common birth-right of mankind, that every man is to opine according to the dictates of his own understanding, not another's. Now this Peremptoriness is of two sorts, the one a Magisterialness in matters of opinion and speculation, the other a Positiveness in relating matters of fact: in the one we impose upon men's understandings, in the other on their faith.

2. For the first, he must be much a stranger in the world who has not met with it: there being a generation of men, who as the Prophet speaks, *Are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight*, [Isa. 5. 21](#). Nay, not only so, but who make themselves the standards of wisdom, to which all are bound to conform, and whoever weighs not in their balance, be his reasons never so weighty, they write *Tekel* upon them. This is one of the most oppressive Monopolies imaginable: all others can concern only something without us, but this fastens upon our natures, yea, and the better part of it too, our reason, and if it meet with those who have any considerable share of that within them, they will often be tempted to rally it, and not too tamely resign this native liberty. Reason submits only to Reason, and he that assaults it with bare Authority (that which is Divine always excepted) may as well cut flame with his sword, or harden wax in the sun.

3. Tis true indeed, these great Dictators do sometimes run down the company, and carry their Hypothesis without contest: but of this there may be divers reasons besides the weight of their arguments. Some unspeculative men may not have the skill to examine their assertions, and therefore, an assent is their fastest course; others may be lazy and not think it worth their pains; a third sort may be modest and awed by a severe brow and an imperious nod: and perhaps the wiser may providently foresee the impossibility of convincing one who thinks himself not subject to error. Upon these or other like grounds tis very possible all may be silenced when never a one is convinced so that these great Masters may often make very false estimates of their conquests, and *sacrifice to their own nets*, [Heb. 1. 16](#). when they have taken nothing.

4. Nay indeed, this insolent way of proposing is so far from propagating their notions, that it gives prejudice against them. They are the gentle insinuations which pierce (as oil is the most penetrating of all liquors) but in these Magisterial documents men think themselves attacked, and stand upon their guard, and reckon they must part with Honor together with their Opinion, if they suffer themselves to be Hectored out of it. Besides, this imposing humor is so unamiable, that it gives an aversion to the Person; and we know how forcible personal prejudices are (though tis true they should not be) towards the biasing of Opinions. Nay indeed, men of this temper do cut themselves off from the opportunities of Proselyting

others, by averting them from their company. Freedom is the endearing thing in Society, and where that is controlled, men are not very fond of associating themselves. Tis natural to us to be uneasy in the presence of those who assume an Authority over us. Children care not for the company of their Parents or Tutors, and men will care less for theirs, who would make them children by usurping a Tutorage.

5. All these inconveniences are evidently consequent to this Dogmatizing, supposing men be never so much in the right: but if they happened to be in the wrong, what a ridiculous pageantry is it, to see such a Philosophical gravity set to man-out a Solecism? A concluding Face put upon no concluding Argument, is the most contemptible sort of folly in the world. They do by this sound a trumpet to their own defeat: and whereas a modest mistake might slip by undiscerned, these Rodomontade errors force themselves upon men's observations, and make it impossible for men not to see, as it is not to despise them when they do. For indeed, Pride is as ill linked with Error, as we usually say it is with Beggary, and in this as well as that, converts pity into contempt.

6. And then it would be considered, what security any man that will be imposing has, that this will not be his case. Human nature is very fallible, and as it is possible a man may err in a great many things, so tis certain every man does in something or other. Now who knows at the instant he is so positive, but this may be his erring turn? Alas, how frequently are we mistaken even in common ordinary things! for as the Wiseman speaks, *hardly do we judge aright even in things that are before us*, [Wisd. 9. 16.](#) our very senses do sometimes delude us. How then may we wander in things of abstruse speculation? The consideration of this hath with some so prevailed, that it has produced a Sect of Scepticism: and though I press it not for that purpose, yet sure it may reasonably be urged to introduce some modesty and calmness in our assertions. For when we have no other certainty of our being in the right, but our own persuasions that we are so; this may often be but making one error the gauge for another. For God knows confidence is so far from a certain mark of truth, that tis often the seducer into falsehood, none being so apt to lose their way as those who, out of an ungrounded presumption of knowing it, despise all direction from others.

7. Let all this be weighed, and the result will be, that this peremptoriness is a thing that can befit no form of understanding. It renders Wise men disobliging and troublesome, and fools ridiculous and contemptible. It casts a prejudice up on the most solid reasoning, and it renders the lighter more notoriously despicable. Tis pity good parts should be leavened by it, made a snare to the owners, and useless to others. And tis pity too that weak parts should by it be condemned to be always so, by despising those Aids which should improve them. Since therefore, tis so ill calculated for every Meridian, would God all Climes might be purged from it.

8. And as there are weighty objections against it in respect of its effects, so there are no inconsiderable prejudices in relation to its causes, of which we may reckon Pride to be the

most certain and universal: for whatever else casually occurs to it, this is the fundamental constitutive principle; nothing but a great overweening of a man's own understanding being able to inflate him in that imaginary empire over other men's. For here sure we may ask the Apostle's question, *Who made thee to differ from another?* When God has made Rationality the common portion of mankind, how came it to be thy inclosure? or what Signature has he set upon thine, what mark of excellency, that thine should be paramount? Doubtless if thou fanciest thou hast that part of *Jacob's* blessing, *To be Lord of thy brethren, and that all thy mother's sons should bow down to thee*, *Gen. 27. 29.* thou hast got it more surreptitiously than he did, and with less effect: for though *Isaac* could not retract his mistaken benediction, God will never ratify that fantastic thou hast pronounced to thyself, with his real effective one.

9. But there happens many times to be another ingredient besides Pride, and that is Ignorance: for those qualities however they may seem at war, do often very closely combine. He who has narrow notions, that knows but a few things, and has no glimpse of any beyond him, thinks there are no such: and therefore, as if he had (like *Alexander*) no want but that of worlds to conquer, he thinks himself the absolute Monarch of all knowledge. And this is of all others the most unhappy composition: for ignorance being of itself like stiff clay, and infertile soil, when Pride comes to scorch and harden it, it grows perfectly impenetrable: and accordingly we see none are so invincible as your half-witted people; who know just enough to excite their pride, but not so much as to cure their ignorance.

10. There remains yet a 2d kind of Peremptoriness which I am to speak to, and that is of those who can make no relation without an attestation of its certainty: a sort of hospitable people, who entertain all the idle vagrant reports, and send them out with passports and testimonials; who when they have once adopted a story, will have it pass for legitimate how spurious soever it originally was. These somewhat resemble those hospitals in *Italy*, where all bastards are sure of reception, and such a provision as may enable them to subsist in the world: and were it not for such men, many a Fatherless lie would be stifled in its birth. It is indeed strange to see, how suddenly loose rumors knit into formal stories, and from thence grow to certainties; but tis stranger to see that men can be of such profligated impudence, as knowingly to give them that advance. And yet tis no rarity to meet with such men who will pawn their honor, their souls, for that unworthy purpose: nay, and that too with as much impertinence as baseness, when no interest of their own, or perhaps any man's else is to be served by it.

11. This is so prodigious a thing, as seems to excite one's Curiosity to inquire the cause of so wonderful an effect. And here as in other unnatural productions, there are several concurrents. If we trace it from its original, its first Element seems to be Idleness: this diverting a man from serious useful entertainments, forces him upon (the usual refuge of vacant Persons) the inquiring after News; which when he has got, the venting of it is his next

business. If he be of a credulous Nature, and believe it himself, he does the more innocently impose it on others: yet then to secure himself from the imputation of Levity and too easy Faith, he is often tempted to lend some probable circumstance. Nay, if he be of a proud humor, and have that miserable vanity of loving to speak big, and to be thought a man of greater correspondence and intelligence than his neighbors, he will not bate an Ace of absolute certainty, but however doubtful or improbable the thing is, coming from him it must go for an indisputable truth. This seems to be the descent of this unhappy folly, which yet is often nursed up by a mean or imprudent Education. A man that has conversed only with that lower sort of company, who durst not dispute his veracity, thinks the same false Coin will pass over the world, which went current among his Father's Servants or Tenants: and therefore we may observe, that this is most usual in young men, who have come raw into company with good fortunes and ill breeding. But it is too true also that too many never lose the habit, but are as morosely positive in their Age, as they were childishly so in their Youth. Indeed, tis impossible they should be otherwise, unless they have the wit to disentangle themselves first from the love of Flattery, and after from the company of Flatterers: for (as I have before observed) no vice will ever wither under their shade. I think I shall do the Reader no ill office to let in a little light upon them, and shew him some of those many mischiefs that attend this unworthy practice.

12. First, it engages a man to oaths, and for ought he knows to perjuries. When he has launched out boldly into an incredible relation, he thinks he has put his Credit upon the forlorn hope, and must take care to relieve it: and there is no succor so constantly ready at hand as that of oaths and imprecations, and therefore whole vollies of them are discharged upon the doubtful. Thus do we make God a witness, and our Souls parties in the cause of every trifling rumor, as if we had modeled our Divinity by the Scheme of that Jesuitical Casuist, who legitimates the Killing of a man for an Apple.

13. A Second mischief is, that it betrays a man to quarrels. He that is peremptory in his own Story, may meet with another that is as peremptory in the contradiction of it, and then the two *Sir Positives* must have a skirmish indeed. He that has attested the truth of a false, or the certainty of a doubtful thing, has brought himself into the same trait with *Balaam's* Ass, he must either fall down flat or run upon a sword, [Num. 22. 27](#). For if his Hearers do but express a diffidence, either he must sink to a down-right confession that he was a Liar: or else he must huff and bluster till perhaps he raise a counter-storm, and as he fooled himself out of his truth, so be beaten out of his pretence to it. Indeed, there is scarce any quality that does so tempt and invite affronts as this does: for he that can descend to such a meanness, may reasonably enough be presumed to have little (as of true worth, so) even of that which the world calls Gallantry, and so every puny swordman will think him a good tame Quarry to enter and flesh himself upon.

14. In the third place, it exposes him to all the contempt and scorn which either good or ill men can fling upon him: the good abominate the sin, the ill triumph over the folly of it. The truth is, there can be nothing more wretchedly mean. To be Knight of the Post to every fabulous relation, is such a sordid thing, that there can scarce be any name of reproach too vile for it. And certainly he that can pawn his faith upon such miserable terms, will by those frequent mortgages quickly be snapped upon a forfeiture; or however will have his credit so impaired by it, that no man will think his word a competent gauge for the slightest concern.

15. And this may pass for a fourth consideration, That this Positiveness is so far from gaining credit to his present affirmation, that it destroys it for the future: for he that sees a man make no difference in the confidence of his asserting realities and fictions, can never take his measures by anything he avers, but according to the common Proverb, will be in danger of disbelieving him even when he speaks truth. And of this no man can want conviction, who will but consult his own observation. For what an allay do we find it to the credit of the most probable event, that it is reported by one who uses to stretch? Thus unhappily do such men defeat their own designs: for while they aver stoutly that they may be believed, that very thing makes them doubted, the world being not now to learn how frequently Confidence is made a supplement for truth. Nor let any man who uses this, flatter himself that he alone does (like *Job's* messenger) escape the common fate: for though perhaps he meet with some who in civility or pity will not dispute the probability of his narrations, or with others who for raillery will not discourage the humor with which they mean (in his absence) to divert themselves, yet he may rest assured he is discerned by all and derided for it.

16. It therefore concerns men who either regard their truth, or their reputation, not to indulge to this humor, which is the most silly way of shipwrecking both. For he that will lay those to stake upon every flying story, may as well wager his estate which way the wind will sit next morning, there being nothing less to be confided in, than the breath of fame, or the whispers of private tale-bearers. Wise men are afraid to report improbable truths: what a foolhardiness is it then to attest improbable falsities, as it often is the luck of these Positive men to do?

17. Certainly there is nothing which they design by this, which may not be obtained more effectually by a modest and unconcerned relation. He that barely relates what he has heard, and leaves the hearer to judge of the probability, does as much (I am sure more civilly) entertain that company, as he that throws down his gauntlet in attestation. He as much satisfies the itch of telling news; he as much persuades his hearers: nay, very much more (for these over earnest asseverations serve by to give men suspicion that the Speaker is conscious of his own falseness:) and all this while he has his retreat secure, and stands not responsible for the truth of his relation. Nay indeed, though men speak never so known and

certain truths, tis most advisable not to press them too importunately. For boldness, like the Bravoes and Banditti, is seldom employed but upon desperate services, and is so known a Pander for lying, that truth is but defamed by its attendance.

18. To conclude, modesty is so amiable, so insinuating a thing, that all the rules of Oratory cannot help men to a more agreeable ornament of discourse. And if they will try it in both the foregoing instances, they will undoubtedly find the effects of it: a modest proposal will soonest captivate men's reasons, and a modest relation their belief.

## Section XII. Of Obscene Talk.

There is another vice of the Tongue which I cannot but mention, though I knew not in which of the former Classes to place it: not that it comes under none, but that tis so common to all, that tis not easy to resolve to which peculiarly to assign it, I mean obscene, and immodest talk, which is offensive to the purity of God, damageable and infectious to the innocence of our Neighbors, and most pernicious to ourselves: and yet is now grown a thing so common, that one would think we were fallen into an Age of Metamorphosis, and that the Brutes did (not only Poetically and in fiction) but really speak. For the talk of many is so bestial, that it seems to be but the conceptions of the more libidinous Animals clothed in human Language.

2. And yet even this must pass for Ingenuity, and this vile descent below Humanity, must be counted among the highest strains of Wit. A wretched debasement of that sprightly Faculty, this to be made the interpreter to a Goat or Boar: for doubtless had those Creatures but the organs of Speech, their Fancies lie enough that way to make them as good company, as those who more studiously apply themselves to this sort of entertainment.

3. The crime is comprehensive enough to afford abundance of matter for the most Satyrical zeal, but I consider the dissecting of putrid Bodies may cast such pestilential fumes, as all the benefits of the scrutiny will not recompense. I shall therefore, in respect to the Reader dismiss this noisome Subject, and thereby give an example with what abhorrence he should always reject such kind of discourse, remembering the advice of *St. Paul*, *That all uncleanness should not be once named among those who would walk as becometh Saints*, [Eph. 5. 3.](#)

## The Close

I Have now touched upon those enormities of Speech which I principally designed to observe, wherein I have been far from making a full and exact Catalogue: therefore, I would have no man take this little Tract for a just Criterion, by which to try himself in reference to his words. Yet God grant that all that read it, may be able to approve themselves even by this imperfect essay: and he that does so, makes fair approaches towards being *that perfect man* *St. James* speaks of, [Jam. 3. 1.](#) these being such faults of the Tongue as are the harder to avoid, because they are every day exemplified to us in common practice, (nay, some of them recommended as reputable and ingenious). And it is a strange insinuating power which example and custom have upon us. We see it in every trivial secular instance, in our very habit: those dresses which we laugh at in our forefathers wardrobes or pictures, when by the circulation of time and vanity they are brought about, we think very becoming. Tis the same in our diet: our very palates conform to the fashion, and everything grows amiable to our fancies, according as tis more or less received in the world. And upon this account all sobriety and strict virtue lies now under a heavy prejudice, and no part of it more, than this of the Tongue, which custom has now enfranchised from all the bonds Moralists or Divines laid upon it.

2. But the greater the difficulties are, the more it ought to awake our diligence: if we lie loose and carelessly, tis odds we shall be carried away with the stream. We had need therefore fix ourselves, and by a sober recollection of the ends of which our Speech was given us, and the account we must one day give of it, impress upon ourselves the baseness and the danger of misemploying it. Yet a negative innocence will not serve our turns, twill but put us in the condition of him, *who wrapped up the talent he was commanded to employ*, [Matt. 25. 25.](#) Nay indeed, twill be impossible to preserve even that if we aspire no farther. The Tongue is a busy active Part, will scarce be kept from motion: and therefore, if that activity be not determined to good objects, twill be practicing upon bad. And indeed, I believe a great part of its licentiousness is owing to this very thing. There are so few good Themes of discourse in use, that many are driven to the ill for want of better. Learning is thought Pedantic, Agriculture Peasantlike, and Religion the most insufferable of all: so by excluding all useful Subjects of converse, we come together as *St. Paul* (in another case) says, *Not for better but for the worse.* [1 Cor. 11. 17.](#) And if the Philosopher thought he had lost that day wherein he had not learned something worthy of his notice, how many days do we worse than lose, by having them not only empty of solid useful acquisitions, but full of noxious and pernicious ones? And indeed, if they be the one, they will not miss to be the other also: for the mind is like the stomach, which if it be not supplied with wholesome nourishment, will at last suck in those humors with which the body most abounds. So that if in our converse we do not interchange sober useful notions, we shall at the best but traffic toys and baubles, and most



commonly infection and poison. He therefore, that would keep his tongue from betraying himself or others to sin, must tune it to a quite contrary Key, make it an instrument, an incentive to virtue, by which he shall not only secure the negative part of his duty, but comply with the positive also, employing it to those uses for which it was given him.

3. It would be too vast an undertaking to prescribe the particular subjects of such discourse, nay indeed, impossible, because many of them are occasional, such as cannot beforehand be reduced to any certain account. This only in the general we may rest upon, that all speech tending to the glory of God, or the good of man, is aright directed. Which is not to be understood so restrictively, as if nothing but Divinity or the necessary concerns of human life, may lawfully be brought into discourse: something is to be indulged to common civility, more to the intimacies and endearments of friendships, and a competency to those recreative discourses which maintain the cheerfulness of society; all which are, if moderately used, within the latitude of the rule, as tending (though in a lower degree) to the well-being of men, and by consequent to the honor of God, who indulges us those innocent refreshments. But if the subordinate uses come to encroach upon the higher, if we dwell here and look no farther, they then become very sinful by the excess which were not so in their nature. That inordinacy sets them in opposition to God's designation, in which they were allowed only a secondary place. We should therefore, be careful to improve all opportunities of letting our tongues pay their more immediate homage to God, in the duties of prayers, and praises, making them not only the interpreters of our pious affections, but the promoters of the like in others. And indeed, he can scarce be thought in earnest, who prays, *Hallowed by Thy Name*, and does not as much endeavor it with men, as he solicits it from God.

4. And if we answer our obligations in this point, we shall in it discharge the highest part of our duty to man also: for in whose heart we can implant a true reverential awe of God, we sow the seed of immortality, of an endless happy being, the greatest the most superlative good whereof he is capable. Besides, in the interim we do by it help to manumit and release him from those servile drudgeries to vice, under which those remain who live without God in the world. And these indeed, are benefits worthy the dignity of human nature to communicate. And it is both sad and strange to see among the multitude and variety of Leagues that are contracted in the world, how few there are of these pious combinations; how those who show themselves concerned in all the petty secular interests of their friends, never take this at all into their care; a pregnant evidence how little true friendship there is among men.

5. I Know some thing they sufficiently excuse themselves when they shift off this office to Divines, whose peculiar business they say it is. But this is as if one who sees a poor fainting wretch, should forbear to administer a Cordial he has at hand, for fear of entrenching on the Physician's Faculty. Man opportunities a Friend or Companion may have which a Divine

may want. He often sees a man in the very fit, and so may more aptly apply: for where there is an intimacy of Converse, men lay themselves open, discover those passions, those vices, which they carefully veil when a strange or severer eye approaches. Besides, as such a one may easier discern the disease, so he has better advantages for administering remedies: so Children will not take those Medicines from the Doctor's hand, which they will from a Nurse or Mother: and we are usually too Childish in what relates to our Souls, look on good counsel from an Ecclesiastic as a Divinity Potion, and set our stomachs against it; but a Familiar may insensibly insinuate it into us, and ere we are aware beguile us into health. Yet if Lay Persons will needs give the Clergy the enclosure of this office, they should at least withdraw those impediments they have laid in their way, by depositing those prejudices which will certainly frustrate their endeavor. Men have in these later days been taught to look on Preaching as a thing of form to the Hearers, and of profit only to the Speakers, a *craft whereby as Demetrius says They get their living. Acts. 19. 25.* But admit it were so in this last respect, yet it does not infer it should be so in the former. If it be a Trade, twas sure thought (as in all Ages but this) a very useful one, or else there would never have been such encouragement given to it. No State ever allotted public certain Salaries for a set of men that were thought utterly useless: and if there be use to be made of them, shall we lose our advantages merely because they gain theirs? We are in nothing else so senseless: no man will refuse counsel from a Physician, because he lives by the Profession. Tis rather an argument on his side, that because such an interest of his own depends on it, he has been the more industrious to fit himself for it. But not to run farther in this digression, I shall apply it to my purpose, by making this equitable proposal, that Lay men will not so moralize the common Fable, as neither to admonish one another themselves, nor suffer Ministers to do it without them. And truly tis hard if neither of these can be granted when both ought. I am sure all is little enough that can be done, though we should have as the Prophet speaks, *Precept upon precept, Line upon line, here a little and there a little. Isa. 28. 13.* Man's nature is so unattentive to good, that there can scarce be too many monitors. We see *Satan* though he have a much stronger party in our inclinations, dares not rely upon it, but is still employing his emissaries, to confirm and excite them, and if whilst he has so many Agents among us, God shall have none, we are like to give but an ill account of our zeal either to God or our neighbor, or of those tongues which were given us to glorify the one, and benefit the other. Indeed, without this, our greatest officiousness in the secular concerns of others is no kindness. When we strive to advance the fame, to increase the fortune of a wicked man, what do we do in it, but enable him to do the more mischiefs, by his wealth to foment his own luxuries, and by his reputation commend them to the practice of others? He only makes his friend truly rich and great, who teaches him to employ those advantages aright; and would men turn their tongues to this sort of Oratory, they would indeed shew they understood for what ends they were given them.

6. But as all good receives enhancement from its being more diffusive, so these attempts should not be confined to some one or two intimates or relatives, but be as extensive as the common needs, or at least as our opportunities. Tis a generous ambition to benefit many, to oblige communities: which can no way so well be done, as by endeavoring to subvert vicious customs, which are the pest and poisons of all societies. The heathens had many ceremonies of lustrations for their cities and countries, but he that could purify and refine their manners, would indeed attain to the substance of those shadows. And because the Apostle tells us that *Evil words corrupt good manners*, twould be a fundamental piece of reformation, to introduce a better sort of converse into the world: which is an instance so agreeable to my present subject, that I cannot Close more pertinently, than to commend the endeavor to the Reader, which if he have been by this Tract at all convinced of the sin and mischief of those Schemes of discourse deciphered in it, cannot be more just to his convictions, than by attempting to supplant them.

7. It were indeed a design worthy of a noble soul, to try to new model the Age in this particular, to make it possible for men, to be at once conversable and innocent. I know twill be objected, tis too vast a project for one or many single Persons to undertake: yet difficulties use to animate generous spirits, especially when (as here) the very attempt is laudable. But as *Christ* says of Wisdom, so may we of Courage, The Children of this world are more daring than the Children of light. The great corrupters of discourse have not been so distrustful of themselves: for tis visible to any that will reflect, that tis within man's memory since much of this monstrous exorbitancy of discourse grew in fashion, particularly the Atheistical and Blasphemous. The first propugners of it were but few, and durst then but whisper their black rudiments, yet the world now sees what a Harvest they have from their devilish industry.

8. And shall we give over our Clime as forlorn and desperate, and conclude that nothing which is not venomous will thrive in our Soil. Would some of parts and authority but make the experiment, I cannot think that all places are yet so vitiated, but that they may meet with many who would relish sober and ingenuous discourse, and by their example be animated to propagate it to others: but as long as Blasphemy, Ribaldry, and Detraction set up for Wit, and carry it without any competition, we do implicitly yield that title we dispute not: and tis hard to say, whether their triumphs be more owing to the boldness of ill men, or the pusillanimity of the good. What if upon the trial they should meet with the worser part of *St. Paul's* fate at Athens, *That some will mock, Acts 17. 32.* yet perhaps they may partake of the better also, and find others that would be willing *to hear them again*, and some few at least *may cleave unto them*. And sure they are too tender and delicate, that will run no hazard, nor be willing to bear a little share in that profane drollery, with which an Apostle was, and their God is daily assaulted: especially when by this exposing themselves, they may hope to give some check to that impious liberty. However besides the satisfaction of their own consciences, they may also gain this advantage by the attempt, that it may be a good test by

which to try their company. For those whom they find impatient of innocent and profitable converse, they may assure themselves can only ensnare not benefit them; and he is a very weak Gamester, that will be drawn to play upon such terms, as make it highly probable for him to lose, but impossible for him to win. Therefore, in that case the advice of *Solomon* is very proper, *Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of Knowledge.* [Prov. 14. 7.](#)

9. But he that will undertake so Heroic and enterprise, must qualify himself for it, by being true to his own pretensions. He must leave no uneven thread in his loom, or by indulging to any one sort of reprobable discourse himself, defeat all his endeavors against the rest. Those airy Speculators that have writ of the Philosopher's Stone have required many personal qualifications, strict abstinences and purities in those who make the experiment. The thing may have this sober application, that those who would turn this Iron Age into Gold, that would convert our rusty, drossy converse into a purer strain, must be perfectly clean themselves. For alas, what effect can that man hope from this most zealous reprehensions, who lays himself open to recrimination? He that hears a man bitterly inveigh against Blasphemy and profaneness, and yet (in that almost the same breath) hears his monitor inveigh bitterly against his Neighbor, will scarce think him a good guide of his tongue, that has but half the mastery of his own. Let every man, therefore, be sure to begin at the right end of his work, to wash his own mouth clean, before he prescribe Gargarisms to others. And to that purpose let him impartially reflect on all the undue liberties he has given his tongue, whether which have been here remarked, or those others which he may find in all Practical books, especially in (the most Practical of all books) his own Conscience. And when he has traced his talk through all its wild rambles, let him bring home his stray; not like the lost sheep with joy, but with tears of penitence and contrition, and keep a strict watch over it that it break not loose again; nay, farther require it to make some restitution for the trespass it has committed in its former excursions, to restore to God what it has robbed of his Honor, by devoting itself an instrument of His service; to his Neighbor what it has detracted from him, by wiping off that fullage it has cast upon his Fame; and to himself by defacing those ill Characters of vanity and folly it has imprinted on him. Thus may the Tongue cure its own sting, and by a kind of Sympathetic virtue, the wound may be healed by dressing the weapon. But alas, when we have done all, the Tongue is so slippery that it will often be in danger to deceive our watch: nay, it has a secret intelligence with the heart, which like a corrupted Gaoler is too apt to connive at its escape. Let us therefore strengthen our guards, call in Him who sees all the secret practices of our treacherous hearts, and commit both them and our tongues to His custody. Let us say with the Psalmist, *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart.* [Psa. 129. 23.](#) And with him again, *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips, O let not my heart be inclined to any evil thing,* [Psa. 141. 3.](#) And if *hand thus join in hand,* [Prov. 16. 6.](#) if God's grace be humbly invoked,

and our own endeavor honestly employed, even this *unruly evil* of the Tongue (as *St. James* calls it [Chap. 3. 8.](#)) may be in some degree tamed. If now and then it get a little out by stealth, yet it will not like the Demoniack be so raving, as quite to break all its chains. If we cannot always secure ourselves from inadvertence and surprise, but that a forbidden word may sometimes escape us, yet we may from deliberate willful offences of the Tongue. And thought we should all aspire higher, yet if we can but reach this, we ought not to excuse ourselves (upon remaining infirmities) from the Christian generous undertaking I was recommending, the reforming of others. Indeed, I had made a very impertinent exhortation to that, if this degree of fitness may not be admitted; for I fear there would be none on earth could attempt it upon other terms: the world must still remain as it is, and await only the Tongues of Angels to reduce it. Nor need we fear that censure of Hypocrisy which we find, [Matt. 7. 5.](#) for the case is very differing. Tis indeed as ridiculous as insolent an attempt, for one that has a Beam in his own eye, to pretend to cast a Mote out of his brother's: but it hold not on the contrary, that he that has a Mote in his own, should not endeavor to remove the Beam in his Brother's. Every speck does not blind a man, nor does every infirmity make one unable to discern, or incompetent to reprove the grosser faults of others.

10. Yet after all, let us as much as is possible clear our eyes even of this mote, and make our Copy as worth transcribing as we can: for certainly the best instrument of reformation is example: and though admonition may sometimes be necessary, yet there are many circumstances required to the right ordering of that, so that it cannot always be practicable, but a good example ever is. Besides, it has a secret magnetic virtue like the Loadstone, it attracts by a power of which we can give no account: so that it seems to be one of those occult qualities, those secrets in nature, which have puzzled the enquirers, only experience demonstrates it to us. I am sure it does (too abundantly) in ill examples, and I doubt not might do the like in good, if they were as plentiful experimented. And that they may be so, let every man be ambitious to cast in his mite: for the two make but a farthing, yet they may be multiplied to the vastest sum. However, if a man cannot reform, yet I am sure twill be worth his while, so to *save himself from this untoward generation*, [Acts. 2. 40.](#) I have now presented the Tongue under a double aspect, such as may justify the ancient Definition of it, that it is the worst and best part of man, the best in its original and design, and the worst in its corruption and degeneration. In David, the man after God's heart, it was his glory, [Psa. 57. 8.](#) *The best member that he had*, [Psa. 108. 1.](#) *But in the wicked it cuts like a sharp Razor*, [Psa. 52. 2.](#) *Tis as the venom of Asps*, 140. 3. The Tongues from heaven were *Cloven* [Acts. 2. 2.](#) to be the more diffusive of good: but those that are *fired from hell* are forked, [Jam. 3. 6.](#) to be the more impressive of mischief: it must be referred to every man's choice, into which of the forms he will mold his. Solomon tells us *Death and Life are in the power of the Tongue*, and that not only directly in regard of the good or ill we may do to others, but reflexively also, in respect of what may rebound to ourselves. Let *Moses* then make the inference

from *Solomon's* premises, *Therefore choose life*, [Deut. 30. 15](#). a proposal so reasonable, so agreeable to nature, that no flourishes can render it more inviting. I shall therefore leave it to the Reader's contemplation, and shall hope that if he please but to resolve it with that seriousness which the importance exacts, he will new set his tongue, compose it to those pious Divine strains, which may be a proper prelude to those Allelujahs he hopes eternally to sing.

**FINIS.**

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