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REFLECTIONS

UPON THE
CONDUCT

O. F.

Human Life;

With Reference to

Learning and Knowledge.

Extracted from Mr. NORRIS.

The THIRD EDITION.



L O N D O N :

Printed by H. Cock, and sold at the Foundry near
Upper Moor-Fields. MDCCLV.

[Price Three-Pence.]

The P R E F A C E

SINCE the great Happiness or Misery of Human Life depends wholly upon the right or wrong Conduct of it, be that shall point out any of its Irregularities or Mistakes, is a Universal Friend, a Promoter of the Publick Happiness. And the more severe his Censure is, provided it be just, the more serviceable it may be.

Especially, if the Irregularities he points out are not only important, frequent and inveterate, but such as lie secret and unobserv'd, and have all along pass'd under the Notion of Excellencies. He that reflects upon such Misconducts as these, obliges by his discovery as well as Reproof.

This Consideration has occasioned the following Reflections upon the Study of Learning and Knowledge; the greatest Faults of which, by a Kind of unaccountable Superstition are canoniz'd for Virtues.

The Truth is, the Light that divulges other Miscarriages will be sure to hide these. For beside that they are visible only to a few (since none can judge of the Faults of the Learned without Learning) those few that do discern them, have seldom Ingenuity enough to acknowledge them. For either they are so proud as not to be willing to own themselves to have been so long under a Mistake; or so ill-natur'd that they don't care others should be directed to a better Way than they themselves have travel'd in.

In the following Reflections I have endeavour'd to mark out some of these less observ'd Misconducts, wherewith I myself have been too long impos'd on, and which after all my Conviction (so deep are the Impressions of early Prejudice) I can hardly yet find Power to correct. For Education is the great Bias of Human Life, and there is this double Witchcraft in it, that 'tis a long Time before a Man can see any Thing amiss in a Way he is us'd to, and when he does, 'tis not very easy to change it.

I can easily divine how these Reflections will be received by some of the rigid Votaries of old Learning. But if they are of Service here and there to an ingenuous and unenslaved Spirit, I shall not much regard the Magisterial Censures of those, whose great and long Study has had no better Effect upon them, than to make them too wise for Conviction.

REFLEC.


REFLECTIONS

UPON THE

CONDUCT of HUMAN LIFE.

The First REFLECTION.

*Wherein the general Conduct of Human Life is taxed,
for placing Learning in such Things as are little or no-
thing perfective of the Understanding.*

1.  S there are two Faculties in Man, Understanding and Will; so there is a double Conduct of Human Life, Intellectual and Moral. The Moral Conduct of Men has been continually exposed, ever since Preaching and Writing have been in the World. But it has fared otherwise with the Intellectual, which stands not so fair a Mark, nor has been so often hit. Not that it is really less faulty, but because its faultiness is less notorious, lies further in, and must be drawn forth into View by a Chain of Consequences, which few have either Discernment enough to make, or Patience enough to attend to.

2 The chief Irregularities of it are three, respecting the End, the Means and the Degree of Affection.

First, The placing Learning in such Things as are little or nothing perfective of the Understanding.

Secondly, The undue and irregular Method of prosecuting what is really perfective of it; and

Thirdly, The too importunate Pursuit of Knowledge in general.

3. First, Men generally place Learning in such Things as are little or nothing perfective of the Understanding. This I confess, is a severe Charge, as it fastens an Imputation of Folly upon the Learned.

Order: And not only so, but in that very Thing wherein they think their Wisdom consists. Learned Men do indeed often, not only own but affect Ignorance in Things beside their Profession. But to censure them as defective in that one Thing they pretend to, to make that their blind Side where they think they see clearest, to maintain, that they are not only really knowing, but that generally they don't so much as know what true Knowledge is; this is so high a Charge, that even those who may be convinced of the Truth will scarce forgive the Boldness of it.

4. That the Truth of it may appear, I shall first briefly observe, what Knowledge is perfective of the Understanding, and then shew, that the generality of the World place Learning in that which is not so.

5. And, first, I grant the Knowledge of all those Truths is perfective of the Understanding, which are the Matter of those Arts and Sciences, that are built upon stable and immoveable Foundations, such as Divinity, Metaphysics, Geometry, together with all those unchangeable Rules and Measures of Reason and Consequence, which lead us to all other Knowledge, and are the Subject of that Art we term Logic. And accordingly I allow him to be a truly learned and knowing Man, who has furnished his Mind with bright and clear Ideas, lodged them orderly and regularly in his Head, and settled the Relations and Consequences of one to another. He that is able to think clearly (for so much a Man knows, as he understands distinctly, and no more) to judge truly and solidly, and to reason dependantly and consequentially.

6. But this is not the Measure which the generality of the World has thought fit to proceed by. Learning is generally placed in a Sort of Knowledge, widely different from this. The World does not esteem him a learned Man, whose Learning has cleared his Understanding, who is arrived at Distinctness of Conception, and is a thorough Master of Notion and Discourse. No, it will cost great Pains great Labour of Mind, and Closeness of Thinking to attain to this. This therefore must not be Learning, but something else must, that is easier to be attain'd, tho' little or
nothing

nothing perfective of the Understanding. And in such Knowledge it is generally placed.

7. For, first, It is reckon'd a notable Point of Learning to understand Variety of Languages. This alone gives a Man a Title to Learning, without one Grain of Sense; and on the other Side, let a Man be an Angel for Notion and Discourse, yet unless he can express the same Thought in Variety of Words, he may go for a rational, but will by no Means be esteem'd a learned Man. Now is it not a strange Thing, that so much Strefs should be laid on so very a Trifle; for what am I the better for being able to tell, what 'tis a-clock in twenty Languages? What does this signify to the Perfection of my Understanding? Words are purely in order to Sense; and are therefore of no farther Value, than as they help either to learn or to communicate it. Therefore, to affect them for themselves, is to turn the Means into the End, than which nothing is more absurd. And yet this vain Piece of Pedantry has prevail'd all the World over, and with some to that Degree, that they have confounded Ideas with Words, and have made all Science to terminate in the latter. Thus Mr. *Hobbes* makes Reason to be nothing else, but "*Sequela Nominum*, a well-order'd Train of Words." Never certainly was a plainer Argument of the great Degeneracy of Mankind. And tho' all the Multipliers of Tongues are not comprehended under this latter Charge, yet it may concern them to consider, how great a Folly it must be to place Learning in that, which is one of the greatest Curses upon Earth, and which shall utterly cease in Heaven.

8. Again, it passes for an extraordinary Part of Learning to understand History: That is, in other Words, to know what a Company of silly Creatures called Men have been doing for almost this six thousand Years. Now, what is my Understanding the Perfecter for this? I deny not, that there are some Matters of Fact, as the more remarkable Turns of Ecclesiastical History, and the greater Revolutions of the Civil World, which are of Moment to be known; because, by discovering to us the Conduct of divine
A 3 Providence.

Providence, they supply us with Occasions of acknowledging and adoring the Wisdom and Goodness of God. Neither do I deny, that there are many other Historical Passages, which may be of Moment to be known; tho' not as perfective of our Understanding, but as touching our Interest. And so it may be of Moment to me to know, the Clock has struck One, if I have made an Assignment at that Time: But sure the bare-naked Theory of the Clock's having struck One, will add but little to my Intellectual Perfection: 'The most trivial Matter of Fact in the World is worth knowing, if I have any Concern depending upon it: And the greatest without that, is utterly insignificant. So that 'tis not from the perfecting of our Understanding; but from the Relation they have to our Interest, that these Things deserve to be known.

9. I would desire the great Magnifiers of History only to answer me this one Question. Suppose such and such Matters of Fact, in the knowing which they perhaps glory more, than the Actors themselves did in the doing them, had never been done? Suppose *Fabius* had never weather'd out *Hannibal* by Delays, nor *Cyrus* took *Babylon* by draining the River into the Ditches; what Diminution would this have been to the Perfection of their Understanding? They cannot say it would have been any. And why then should the knowing them now they are done, be reckon'd an Addition to it? And yet we find it is so, and that Men study these Things, not only for their Use, (that we allow) but for their mere Theory, placing Learning in such History as has nothing to commend it, but only that it tells you, such and such Things were done. Of this impertinent Sort is the greatest Part of the *Roman* and *Grecian* History: Which, had not the World voted it for Learning, would no more concern a Man to know, than that a Bird has dropt a Feather upon the *Pyrenean* Mountains.

10. Again, it passes for a notable Piece of Learning to understand Chronology; to be able to adjust the Intervals and Distances of Time, when such a Man flourish'd, when such an Action was done, and the like. Now I deny not, but it may concern some to know these

these Things, who have any Interest depending upon it. It may concern some to know, for Instance, that there is a twofold Date of the Victory at *Actium*, the one reckon'd from the Fight there, the other from the taking of *Alexandria*. But however useful it may be to know this, yet certainly as to any Intellectual Perfection that accrues by it, it must needs be a very unedifying Staffage of the Head; altho' 'tis so generally accounted a great Accomplishment and Enrichment of it.

11. There are many other Things which the Humour of the World has turn'd up for Learning which Ignorance will never be the better for, and which Wisdom does not need. Thus 'tis counted Learning to have tumbled over a Multitude of Books, especially if great ones, and old ones and obscure ones; but most of all if Manuscripts, the Recovery of one of which is reckon'd so much added to the *Common-wealth of Learning*, as they call it. Hence a *well-read Man* signifies the very same as a *learned Man* in most Men's Dictionaries: And by *well-read* they don't mean one that has *read-well*, that has clear'd and improv'd his Understanding by his Reading, but only one that has *read much*, tho' perhaps he has puzzled and confounded his Notions by doing so. Thus again, it goes for Learning, to be acquainted with Men's Opinions, especially of the Ancients; to know what this or that Philosopher held, what this or that Author says, tho' perhaps he says nothing but what is either absurd, or obviously true. What, for Instance, can be more absurd, than that Fancy of *Empedocles*, that there are two Semicircles compassing the Earth betwixt them, one of Fire, the other of Air; and that the former makes Day, and the latter Night? And yet to know this is Learning! What can be more obviously true, than that grave Doctrine of *Aristotle*, that Privation must go before the Introduction of the Form in all Generation? Or, that a Thing must lose one Form before it can take another? And yet 'tis Learning to know that he taught this! To know the Thing is nothing: But to know that *Aristotle* taught it, that is Learning! Nay farther, tho' I am able to demonstrate the Circulation of the Blood, or the Motion of the Earth, yet
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I shall not be admitted into the Order of the Learned; unless I am able to tell, that *Copernicus* discover'd the one, and *Harvey* the other. So much more learned an Atchievment it is, to know Opinions than Things! And accordingly those are reckon'd the most learned Authors, who have given the greatest Specimens of this kind of Knowledge. Thus *Picus Mirandula* is more admired for his Examination of the Doctrine of the Pagans, than any of them were for what they deliver'd.

12. Now what an unreasonable Imposition is this, That tho' a Man can think and write like an Angel himself, yet he must not be accounted a Man of Learning, unless he can tell what every whimsical Writer hath said before him? And how hard will it fall upon those, whose Lot is to breathe in the last Ages of the World, who must be accountable for all the Whims and Extravagancies of so many Centuries? And yet this is made so great a Part of Learning, that the Learning of most Men lies in Books rather than in Things, and among Authors, where one writes upon Things, there are twenty write upon Books. Nay, some carry this Humour so far, that 'tis thought Learning to know the very Titles of Books and their Editions, with the Time and Place when and where they were printed. And many there are who value themselves not a little on this Mechanical Faculty, tho' they know no more of what is in them, than they do of what is written in the Rolls of Destiny.

13. From this placing of Learning in the Knowledge of Books, proceeds that ridiculous Vanity of multiplying Quotations, which is also reckon'd another Piece of Learning, tho' they are used so impertinently, that there can be no other End in them, but to shew, that the Author has read such a Book. And yet it is no such convincing Evidence of that neither. It being neither new nor difficult, for a Man that is resolv'd upon it, to quote such Authors as he never read nor saw. And were it not too odious a Truth, I could name several of those Author-Mongers who pass for Men of shrew'd Learning.

14. These and many other such Things (for 'twere endless to reckon up all) are by the Majority of the World

World voted for Learning, and in these we spend our Education, our Study and our Time, tho' they are no way perfective of our Understanding. So that in short, the Charge of this Reflection amounts to thus much, That Learning is generally placed in the Knowledge of such Things, as the Intellectual Perfection of Man is little or nothing concern'd in.

The Second REFLECTION.

Wherein the general Conduct of Human Life is taxed for using undue and irregular Methods, in prosecuting what is really perfective of the Understanding.

1. **I**N the preceding Reflection the Conduct of Human Life was censured for placing Learning in what is not perfective of the Understanding. In the present, it is charged with pursuing what is so, in an undue and irregular Manner. The other was an Error about the End; this is an Error about the Means: Which are the two Hinges upon which all Prudence and Imprudence turns.

2. That the Truth of this Charge may appear, we are first to determine, what is the right Method of prosecuting that Learning which is really perfective of our Understanding. And this, no doubt, must be an Application to him *from whom every good and perfect Gift descendeth*. This is the right and the only right Method of Enquiry after that Truth which is perfective of our Understanding. For God is the Region of Truth, and *in him are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*. This is that great and universal Oracle lodged in every Man's Breast, whereof the ancient *Urim and Thummim* was an expressive Emblem. This we all may and must consult, if we would enrich our Minds with such Knowledge as is perfective of the Understanding. This is the true Method of being truly wise. And it is no other Method than what we are advised to, by the substantial Wisdom of God. *Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither. I am the Light of the World: He that follows me, or* (as the Word
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more properly signifies) *he that keepeth Company with me, walketh not in Darknes.*

3. There are three Ways of doing this; the first is, by Attention; the second, by Purity of Heart and Life; the third, by Prayer. The first, Attention; *Malebranche* calls the natural Prayer of the Soul to God for farther Illumination. For indeed it is a silent Address and Application of the Soul to the Fountain of Light and Truth; 'Tis an Interrogation of the divine Oracle, the eternal Word of God; and a patient Waiting upon him for an Answer. 'Tis in a Word, an Act of Intellectual Devotion to the Father of Lights, and such as if unfolded, bespeaks him in the Words of the Royal Supplicant, *Give me Wisdom that sitteth by thy Throne!*

4. This is the same with Thinking or Meditating; and as it is the first, so it is the directest and most compendious Method of Science. For this is to go directly to the Spring-head, to the lucid Fountain of Good. 'Tis to fix the Eye of the Mind upon the Intellectual Sun, which must needs be the most ready Way to be enlighten'd. The more heedfully we attend to this, we shall not only discover the more, but also more clearly see what we do discover. So a Man that casts only a short careless Glance upon the milky Way, sees only a confused Whiteness. But when he fixes his Eye upon it; with steadiness and Delay of Application, he begins to discern it more distinctly, a new Star every Moment rises under his Inspection; and still the harder he looks, the more he discerns, 'till he is fatigued with the Brightness and Multitude of Light.

5. This was the Method of the Inventors of Arts and Sciences: They made their Way by mere Dint of Thinking. This is the Method that has been used ever since, by the greatest Improvers of them; such as *Bacon, Boyle, Harvey, Malebranche, &c.* And we may safely prophesy, if ever any extraordinary Advancement be made in them hereafter, it will be done by Thinking.

6. The second Way is, by Purity of Heart and Life: For as Vice not only proceeds from Ignorance, but also causes it, by besotting and clouding the Understanding, so Purity not only proceeds from Knowledge, but also produces.

produces it, making the Soul see more clearly and distinctly. And the same Method is recommended in Scripture, *Wisdom*, says the wise Man, *will not enter into a polluted Spirit*. So the Angel to *Daniel*, *Many shall be purified and made white, and none of the Wicked shall understand, but the Wise shall understand*. To this Purpose too, is that of our Lord, above repeated: *He that followeth me, walketh not in Darkness*; The Purity of his Heart is a Light to his Understanding.

7. But to represent this more clearly; There are two Ways whereby Purity of Heart serves to the Acquisition of Knowledge; by natural Efficacy, and by the divine Blessing. And first, by natural Efficacy, either by clearing the Medium, or by assisting the Faculty. As to the former, we are assured, not only that the Soul now sees through a Medium, and that this Medium is the Body, but likewise that the Grossness of this Medium hinders the Sight of the Soul. Whence it follows, that whatever helps this Medium helps the Sight of the Soul. And this Purity does; especially that eminent Part of it which consists in Chastity and Temperance. For first, it composes the Passions, especially that of Lust, by that the Animal Spirits, and by that the Blood. For the Motion of the Passions ferments the Spirits, and the Fermentation of the Spirits agitates the Blood, and by that Agitation raises all the feculent and drossy Parts of it, and makes it like a troubled Fountain, thick and muddy. And therefore it is, that Men in any Passion can't reason so clearly, as when they are in more Quiet and Silence of Spirit. But by Purity all this Disturbance is allayed, the Passions are becalmed, the Spirits fix'd, the Fountain of the Blood clear'd up, and so all the inner Part of the Glass, through which we see, becomes more bright and transparent, more apt to transmit the Rays of Light to the Soul, which consequently sees more clearly through it.

8. But this is not all; for Purity clears the outward Part of the Glass too. First by Consequence, because the finer the Spirits and Blood are, the finer will be the Threads of the outward Veil also. Then more directly; because Temperance refines and subtilizes the
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the Texture of the Body, and diminishes its Bulk and Grossness, and unloads the Soul of a good Part of that Burthen, which not only presses down her Aspirations, but also hinders her Sight.

9. And as Purity thus clears the Medium, so it also assists the Faculty. And that by the same general Way by composing the Passions, which otherwise not only trouble and thicken the Medium, but also divide and disperse the Faculty. For the more Things a Man desires, the more he will be engaged to think on; and the more he thinks on at once, the more languid and confused will his Conceptions be. But Purity, by composing the Passions, contracts the Desires, and by contracting these, it contracts also the Thoughts; whereby a Man is reduced to a greater Unity, Simplicity and Recollection of Mind; and having but few Thoughts to divide him, is the better able to think clearly.

10. Purity of Heart serves to the Acquirement of Knowledge, secondly, by the divine Blessing. It invites not only the Holy Spirit, but also the Father and the Son, even the whole Godhead, to come and dwell in the Soul. This we are assured of from our Lord's own Mouth: *He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.* And again, *If a Man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our Abode with him.* The chaste and good Soul shall not only be loved by God, but be also of his Council and Privacy. This is the beloved Disciple, who has the Privilege to lean upon the Bosom of his Lord, and to be admitted to his most secret Communications. And therefore, says the Psalmist, *The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.* And of Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who refused to defile themselves with the King's Meat, it is said, *That GOD gave them Knowledge and Skill in all Learning and Wisdom.*

11. The third and last Way of Consulting God is by Prayer. This also is a Method which the Scripture advises us to. *If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of GOD, who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.* And this we know was the Method whereby the wisest of Men obtained

tain'd his unparallel'd Wisdom. For as Wisdom was his Choice, so the Method of his seeking and gaining it was by Prayer.

12. Thus have I defin'd, and by Scripture and Reason prov'd, what is the right Method of prosecuting that Truth which is perfective of the Understanding. And now I think there need not many Words to shew, that as Learning is commonly placed in what is not perfective of it, so what is so is generally prosecuted by undue Methods. For whereas the first Method of acquiring it is by Attention or Thinking, this is generally so little regarded, that few Men think less, for the most Part, than they who are engaged in the profess'd Study of Knowledge. This they don't reckon any Part of Study, nor any Progress in the Stage of Learning, but only a graver Way of being idle. 'Tis then only they study, when they are hanging their Heads over an old musty Folio, and stuffing their Memories with grey Sentences and venerable Sayings. And thus they spend their Time and their Pains, and having scrambled through a Company of Books (most of which perhaps were written to as little Purpose as they are read) they think themselves learn'd Men, and the World is too often of their Opinion, tho' they have not made themselves Master of any Sense or Notion, nor are able to demonstrate one single Truth upon solid Principles, and in a consequential Process.

13. And this is the Method not only of those who misplace Learning, but also of the most of those who place it right. Even these do not generally think for it, but read for it; seek it not in their Souls, but in Books. I deny not that reading is one Way to Knowledge; but then 'tis only by Accident, as it is a Help to Thinking. And therefore Thinking is the only Thing to be regarded even in Reading (for Reading, as such, is nothing.) And then we read to most Purpose, when we are thereby most enabled to think. So that Thinking is the immediate End of Reading, as Understanding is of Thinking. And yet this Method is generally so much inverted, that the main Stress is laid upon Reading. Nothing but *read, read*, as long as Eyes and Spectacles will hold; no Matter whether the Head be *clear*, so it be but *full*.

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14. Again, whereas Purity of Heart and Life is another Method of attaining true Knowledge, 'tis a sad as well as just Observation, That this is not only neglected by those who sit down contentedly in Ignorance, but also by the generality of those few that addict themselves to the Improvement of their Minds. Nay, these, in Proportion to their Number, seem more guilty in this Respect than the others, and nothing is so common, as to see Men of famed Learning, who are yet very corrupt in their Tempers and Lives. Whence some have fancied Learning an Enemy to Religion, and cried up Ignorance as the Mother of Devotion. And tho' their Conclusion be notoriously absurd, yet it must be own'd, the Ground on which they build it is too true. Men famed for Learning are often as infamous for Living; and many that study hard to furnish their Heads, are yet very negligent in purifying their Hearts: Not considering, that there is a moral as well as a natural Communication between them; and that they are concerned to be pure in Heart and Life, not only upon the common Account in order to Happiness hereafter, but even in order to their own particular End here.

15. Then, Lastly, whereas another Method of Learning is Prayer; the generality of Students do not apply themselves to this at all. Pray indeed ('tis to be hoped) they do for other Things which they think lie more out of their Reach; but as for Learning, they think they can compass this well enough by their own Industry, and the Help of good Books, without being beholden to the Assistance of Heaven. But did they attentively consider, that God is Truth, 'tis not to be imagined they would be so indifferent in using Prayer, or any of the preceding Methods of consulting God for his own Light.

The Third REFLECTION.

Where in the general Conduct of Human Life is taxed with too importunate a Pursuit of Knowledge in general.

1. **H**AVING past the two first Stages of our Intellectual Conduct, that of the End and that of the Means,

Means, and reflected on the Irregularities of each. I come now to the Third and Last, which consists not in the Choice of the Object, or of the Method to it, but in the Degree of Affection wherewith it is prosecuted. And this Part of our Conduct is as irregular and faulty, if not more so, than either of the former : And the Fault of it is, a too importunate Pursuit of Knowledge in general.

2. This Charge is of a larger Extent than either of the preceding : Those concerning such only, as either misplace the Object, or mistake the Method of Learning. But not only they who err in the placing of Learning, or in the Way to it, but even they who are right in both come under this Censure ; they all agree in pursuing it too importunately.

3. In order to make out the Truth of this Charge it will be necessary first to consider, How far it becomes Man to employ himself in the Prosecution of Knowledge ; and then it will be easy to determine, Whether our general Pursuit of it be immoderate or no. Now for the Determination of the former, let us observe the present State of Man, the Posture wherein he now stands.

4. And, First, the utmost Knowledge Man can arrive at in this World, by his utmost Endeavours, is very inconsiderable.

God indeed has given us Reason enough to distinguish us from the Brute Creation, and we may improve it so far, as to distinguish ourselves from one another : And so one Man may deserve to be call'd Learned and Knowing, in Comparison of another that is less so. But absolutely speaking, the most that any or all of us either know or can know, is of little Consideration. What we know of God is but little ; for as the Apostle says, *We see through a Glass darkly* : What we know of ourselves perhaps is less, and what we know of the World about us, is not much. " We have seen but a few of God's Works," and we understand yet fewer. There are almost an infinite Number of Things which we never so much as thought of ; and most Things we conceive very darkly and uncertainly ; and there is not one Thing from the Greatest to the Least,

which we do or can understand throughly. Those that apply their whole Study to any one Thing, can never come to the End of that; for not only every Science, but every Particular of each has its unmeasurable Depths and Recesses 'Tis confest by a great Enquirer into the Nature of *Antimony* (as 'tis related by Mr. *Boyle*) "That 'tis impossible for one Man to understand throughly that single Mineral only." And if a Man can't understand *All* of so *Little*, how little must he understand of all? Suppose farther, That all the Knowledge of all the Learned were put together, 'twould weigh but light. For what one Art or Science is there that is brought to any tolerable Perfection? And if the common Stock be so little, how small a Pittance is it that must fall to every particular Man's Share? And where is that Man, who after all his Poring and Studying, is able to answer all the Questions, I will not say which God put to *Job*, but which may be ask'd him by the next Idiot he meets?

5. 'Tis superfluous, as well as endless, to display the Particulars of our Ignorance; tho' indeed, when all Accounts are cast up, that will be found to be our best Knowledge. This only in general, our Life is so short, our Progress in Learning so slow, and Learning itself so long and tedious, and what we do or can know so very little, that the Scepticks had much more Reason to conclude from the Disability of our Faculties, and the Slightness of our Attainments, than from the Uncertainty and Instability of Truth, that there is no Knowledge.

6. But, Secondly, If it were possible for us to attain a considerable Measure of Knowledge, yet our Life is so short and so encumber'd, that we could make but little of the Enjoyment of it. All the Morning of our Days is spent in the Preliminaries of Learning, in mastering Words and Terms of Art, wherein there is nothing but Toil and Drudgery. And before we can taste any of the Fruits of the Tree of Knowledge, before we can relish what is rational, our Sun is got into the Meridian, and then it presently begins to decline, and our Learning with it. Our Light, our Strength, and our Time make Haste to consume; No-
thing

thing increases now but the Shadows, that is our Ignorance and Darknes of Mind ; and while we consider and look about us, the Sun sets, and all is concluded in the dark Shadow of Death. But often the Sun is intercepted by a Cloud long before it sets, and we live backward again, grow weak and childish, silly and forgetful, and unlearn faster than we learn'd. Or if it chance to shine bright to the last, then we grow too wise for ourselves, and reject the greatest Part of what we had learn'd before, as idle and insignificant.

7. Thirdly, There is no Necessity of being so wonderfully learned and knowing here. 'Tis neither necessary, as enjoin'd by God, nor as a Means to any considerable End. We can be good and we can be happy without it. And lest any Advantages in our After-state should be alledged, this makes it more unnecessary than any Consideration besides. For tho' we are never so unlearned now, yet if we know enough to do our Duty, we shall in a short Time arrive at such a Degree of Knowledge as is requisite to our supreme Perfection, to which our present Learning cannot add, and which our present Ignorance will not diminish. Perhaps not immediately upon our Discharge from the Body, tho' even then there must be a vast Enlargement of our Understanding ; but doubtless, when we are admitted to the Vision of God, we shall then commence instantaneously wise and learned, and be fully possess of the Tree of Knowledge, as well as of the Tree of Life. For then that Glass, through which we now see darkly, shall be laid aside, and the Field of Truth shall be clearly displayed before us. And tho' even then there shall be Degrees of Knowledge, yet the Variety of this Dispensation shall not proceed by the Degree of our Knowledge in this Life, but by another Measure. For.

8. Fourthly, tho' there is no Necessity of our being so learned and knowing, yet there is of our being good and virtuous. This is necessary, both as commanded by God, and as a Means of our final Perfection. And besides, 'tis necessary now, there being no other Opportunity for it. If we don't know here, we may know hereafter, and infallibly shall, if we are but good here.

But if we are not good here, we shall neither be good, happy, nor knowing hereafter. The *main* Opportunity for Knowledge is *after* Life; the *only* Opportunity of being good is now: And if we take Care to improve this we are secure of the other; but if this is neglected, all is lost. This therefore is indispensibly necessary, and 'tis the only Thing that is so: And 'tis necessary now; necessary not only to our Happiness in general, but also to our intellectual Happiness in particular. For,

9. Lastly, Thus stands the Case between God and Man. Man was made in a State of Innocence and Perfection, in perfect Favour and Communion with God, his true Good, and in a Capacity so to continue. From this excellent State he wilfully fell, and by his Fall so disabled himself, that he could not by his own Strength repent, and so provoked God, that tho' he could have repented, yet he could not have been pardon'd, without Satisfaction made to the Divine Justice. This Satisfaction Man was not able to make, nor any other Creature for him. Whereupon God in great Mercy ordain'd a Mediator, his own Son God and Man, between himself and his lapsed Creature; who by the Sacrifice of himself should effect two Things, answerable to the double Necessity of Man: First, make Repentance available, which otherwise would not have been so; and, Secondly, merit Grace for him, that he might be able to repent. And this is what is meant by the Restoration or Redemption of Man, which thus far is universal and unconditionate.

10. But still, notwithstanding all that this Mediator hath done for him, Man is only so far restored, as to be put into a pardonable and reconcilable State: He is yet only in a Capacity or Possibility of Pardon and Reconciliation, which is then and then only, reduced to Act, when he truly believes, *i. e.* with such a Faith as is productive of all inward and outward Holiness; *with* which he may, *without* which he cannot be saved, notwithstanding Christ hath died to save him. For the Design of his Death was not to make Holiness *unnecessary*, but to make it *available*; not to procure a Privilege of being saved *without* it, but

but that we might be saved *with* it. If this Qualification be wanting, we shall be so far from being any Thing advantaged from the Redemption purchas'd by our Mediator, that we shall be accountable for it, to the great Aggravation both of our Guilt and Misery. It therefore highly concerns Man to improve with all Diligence this great and only Opportunity, of adorning his Mind with all Christian Perfections ; since *with* these, he may be happy, in all his Capacities, and *without* them, he shall not only fall into a State of unutterable Misery, but be also accountable for the Possibility he had of escaping it, for perversely neglecting so great Salvation, so glorious an Opportunity of being saved.

11. These Things being premised concerning the present State of Man : First, That he can know but very little ; Secondly, That the Enjoyment of that little in a short and encumber'd Life, is by no means answerable to the Labour of acquiring it ; Thirdly, That there is no Necessity of such a deal of Learning and Knowledge, either as to this World or the next, and that ere long he shall have his Fill of Knowledge in the Beatific Vision, one Glance whereof shall instruct him more than an eternal Poring on Books, and *undistinguish* the greatest Doctor from the most ignorant Peasant ; Fourthly, That there is an absolute Necessity of his being holy, this being the Condition not only of his Happiness in general, but also of the Accomplishment of his Understanding in particular : And that now is the only Opportunity for it : Lastly, That the Attainment of Happiness upon this Condition, was the Purchase of his Saviour's Death, who has also merited Grace for his Assistance in the Performance of it ; which if he neglect, he shall not only miss of Happiness, but also be answerable for so dear an Opportunity of gaining it : From these Premises, it will, I think, follow with no less than Mathematical Evidence.

12. First, That Knowledge is not the Thing for which God design'd Man in this Station, nor consequently the End of his bestowing upon him those intellectual Powers which he has.

Secondly, That the End for which God did design Man

Man in this Station, and the Reason why he bestow'd those Powers upon him was, That he might so serve him here, as to be rewarded with perfect Knowledge hereafter; And thirdly, That the principal Care and Concern of Man, both for his own Interest, and out of Compliance with the Design of God, ought to be, to live a Christian Life, to accomplish the moral Part of his Nature, to subdue his Passions, to wean himself from the Love of the World, to study Purity of Heart and Life, in one Word, "To perfect Holiness in the Fear and Love of God." And in particular, that he ought to pursue Knowledge no farther than as 'tis conducive to Virtue.

13. This therefore is the Measure to be always observ'd, in our Prosecution of Knowledge. We are to study only, that we may be good, and consequently to prosecute such Knowledge only as has an Aptness to make us so, that which the Apostle calls, *The Truth which is after Godliness*. Whatever Knowledge we prosecute beside this, or further than 'tis conducive to this End, tho' it be, absolutely consider'd, never so excellent and perfective of our Understanding, yet with respect to the present Posture and Station of Man, 'tis a culpable Curiosity, an unaccountable Vanity, and only a more solemn and laborious Way of being idle and impertinent.

14. And this will be found; if well examined, to be nothing different from the Censure of the wise Preacher, *I gave my Heart to know Wisdom, says he, and I perceived, that this also is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*. Not that he now first applied himself to the Study of Wisdom. No, he had been inspired with that before, and by the Help of it had discovered the Vanity of all other Things. But that Wisdom which saw through all other Things, did not as yet perceive the Vanity of itself. He therefore now gave his Heart to know Wisdom, that is, to reflect upon it, and to consider whether this might be excepted from his general Censure, and struck out of the Scroll of Vanities. And upon deep Reflection, he found that it could not, and that even this also was as much a Vanity as any of the rest. Not that his Proposition is to be understood absolutely,

absolutely, but only with respect to the present Posture of Man. Neither can it be understood of all Knowledge even in this Life; some Knowledge being necessary to qualify him for Happiness in the next. It must therefore be understood of all that Knowledge, which contributes not to that great End. So that with these two necessary Limitations, the Sense of it is plainly this, That to Man in this present Juncture, all Knowledge which does not contribute to the Interest of his After-state, is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit.

15. For to what Purpose should we study so much, since after all we can know so little? Since our Life is as much too short for enjoying that little Knowledge we *have*, as for compassing what we *would* have; and withal, since there lies no Manner of Obligation or Necessity upon us to do thus? But (which is what I would most of all inculcate) to what Purpose imaginable should we be so vehement in the Pursuit of Learning, of any Learning but what is of Use to the Conduct of Life, considering these two Things, first, That 'tis but to stay a little while, and we shall have all that Knowledge gratis, which we so unsuccessfully drudge for here, to the neglect of more important Exercises; and, Secondly, That there is such an absolute Necessity of being good, and that this short uncertain Life is the only Time for it, which if neglected, this great Work must be undone for ever. Upon the former Consideration, this studious Bookish Humour, is like laying out a great Sum of Money, to purchase an Estate which after one weak, dropping Life will of Course fall into Hand. Upon the latter, 'tis as if a Man that was riding Post upon Business of Life and Death, should, as he passes through a Wood, stand still to listen to the Singing of a Nightingale, and so forget the only Business of his Journey.

16. 'Tis most certain, the Cases here supposed are as great Instances of Folly as can well be conceived. And yet (however it comes to pass that we are not sensible of it) 'Tis equally certain that we do the very same, that we are too much concern'd in the Application; and that to most of us it may be truly said, *Thou art the Man!*

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17. For what Difference is there between him who now labours and toils for that Knowledge, which in a little Time he shall be easily and fully possessed of, and him that dearly buyes an Estate, which would otherwise come to him after a short Interval? Only this; That he who buys the Estate, tho' he might have spared his Money, however gets what he laid it out for. His Expence indeed was *needless*, but not in *vain*. Whereas he that drudges in the Pursuit of Knowledge, not only toils for that which in a short Time he shall have, and in Abundance, but which after all he can't compass and so undergoes a *vain* as well as *needless* Labour.

18. Again, What Difference is there between him, who when he is upon Business of Life and Death, shall alight from his Horse, and stand to hear a Nightingale sing, and him who having an Eternity of Happiness to secure, and only this Point of Time to do it in, shall yet turn Virtuoso, and set up for Learning and Curiosity? 'Tis true the Nightingale sings well, and 'twere worth while to stand still and hear her, were I disengaged from more concerning Affairs; but not when I am upon Life and Death. And so Knowledge is an excellent Thing, and would deserve my Study and Time, had I any to spare; but not when I have so great an Interest as that of my final State depending upon the good Use of it. My Business *now* is not to be learned, but to be Good.

19. For is my Life so long, am I so *overstock'd* with Time, or is my depending Interest so little, or so easily secured, that I can find Leisure for unnecessary Curiosities? Is this Conduct agreeable to the present Posture of Man, whose Entrance into this World, and whose whole Stay in it is purely in order to another State? Or would any one imagine this to be the Condition of Man by such a Conduct? Shall a Prisoner, who has but a few Days allow'd him to make a Preparation for his Trial, spend that little Opportunity in *cutting* and *carving*, and such like Mechanical Contrivances? Or would any one imagine such a Man to be in such a Condition, near a doubtful Trial of Life and Death, whom coming into a Prison he should find so employ'd? and yet is there any Thing more absurd

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in this, than to have a Man, who has so great a Concern upon his Hands, as the preparing for Eternity, all busy and taken up with Quadrants and Telescopes, Furnaces, Syphons and Air-Pumps ?

20. When we would expose any signal Impertinence, we commonly illustrate it by the Example of *Archimedes* ; who was busy in making Mathematical Figures on the Sands of *Syracuse*, while the City was storm'd by *Marcellus*, and so, tho' particular Orders were given for his Safety, lost his Life by his unseasonable Study. Now, I confess there was Absurdity enough in this Instance, to consign it over to Posterity : But had *Archimedes* been a Christian, I should have said, that the main of his Impertinence did not lie here, in being mathematically employed when the Enemy was taking the City, but in laying out his Thoughts and Time in so unconcerning a Study, while he had no less a Concern upon him, than the securing his eternal Interest, which must be done now or never. Nothing certainly is an Impertinence if this be not, to hunt after Knowledge in such a Juncture as this !

21. Many other Proceedings in the Conduct of Life, are condemn'd of Vanity and Impertinence, tho' not half so inconsistent with the Character of Man, nor so disagreeable to his present Posture. The Pens of moral Writers have been all along employ'd against them who spent their short and uncertain Lives, which ought to be spent in pursuing an infinitely higher Interest, in gaping up and down after Honour and Preferments, in long and frequent Attendances at Court, in raising Families, in getting Estates, and the like. These are condemn'd not only for their particular Viciousness, as Crimes of Ambition and Covetousness, but for what they have all in common, as they are misspendings of Time, and unconcerning Employments.

22. Now I would fain know, Whether any of these be more expensive of our Time, more remote from the main Business of Life, and consequently more impertinent, than to be busily employ'd in the Niceties and Curiosities of Learning ? And whether a Man that
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loiters away Six Weeks in Court-Attendances, be not every Whitt as *accountably* employ'd, as he that spends the same Time in solving a Mathematical Question, as Mr. *Des-Cartes* in one of his Epistles confesses himself to have done? Why should the Prosecution of Learning be the only Thing excepted from the Vanities and Impertinences of Life?

23. And yet so it is. All other unconcerning Employments are cried down merely for being so, as not consistent with the present State of Man, with the Character he now bears. This alone is not content with the Reputation of Innocence, but stands for positive Merit and Excellence. To say a Man is a Lover of Knowledge, and a diligent Enquirer after Truth, is thought almost as great an Encomium as you can give him; and the Time spent in the Study, tho' in the Search of the most impertinent Truth, is reckon'd almost as laudably employ'd as that in the Chapel. 'Tis Learning only that is allow'd (so inconsistent with itself is Human Judgment) not only to divide but to devour the greatest Part of our short Life; and is the only Thing that with Credit and publick Allowance stands in Competition with the Study of Virtue: Nay, by the most is prefer'd before it, who had rather be accounted Learned than Pious.

24. But is not this a strange Competition? We confess that Knowledge is a glorious Excellence. Yet Rectitude of Will is a far greater Excellence than Brightness of Understanding: And to be good, is a more glorious Perfection than to be wise and Knowing, this being if not the only, certainly the principal Difference between an Angel and a Devil. 'Tis *far better*, to use the Expression of Mr. *Poiret*, like an *Infant without much Reasoning, to love much, than like the Devil, to reason much without Love.*

25. But suppose Knowledge were a more glorious Excellence than it is; suppose it were a greater Perfection than Virtue; yet still this Competition would be utterly against Reason; since we can't have the former now in any *Measure*, and shall have it hereafter *without Measure*: But the latter we may have *now* (for we may *love much* tho' we can't *know much*) and can't have

have it *hereafter*. Now the Question is, whether we ought to be more solicitous for that Intellectual Perfection, which we can't have *here* and shall have *hereafter*; or that moral Perfection, which we may have *here*, and cannot have *hereafter*? And I think we need not consult an Oracle, or conjure up a Spirit to be resolv'd.

26. This Consideration alone is sufficient to justify the Measure we have prescribed for our intellectual Conduct, that we ought to prosecute Knowledge no farther than as it conduces to Virtue: and consequently, that whenever we study to any other Purpose, or in any other Degree than this, we are unaccountably, impertinently, I may add, sinfully imploy'd. For this is the Whole of Man, *To fear GOD and keep his Commandments*, the whole of Man in this Station particularly, and consequently this ought to be the Scope of all his Studies and Endeavours.

27. And accordingly it is observable, that the Scripture, whether it makes mention of Wisdom, with any Mark of Commendation, always means by it either Religion itself, or such Knowledge as has a direct Influence upon it. Remarkable to this Purpose is the 28th Chapter of *Job*; where having run thro' several Instances of natural Knowledge, he adds, *But where shall Wisdom be found, and where is the Place of Understanding?* As much as to say, That in none of the other things mentioned, did consist the Wisdom of Man. Then it follows, *Man knoweth not the Price thereof, neither is it found in the Land of the Living. The Depth saith, It is not in me, and the Sea saith, It is not in me. Not in the Depths of Learning, nor in the Recesses of Speculation, Seeing it is hid from the Eyes of all Living. Destruction and Death say we have heard of the Fame thereof with our Ears:* as much as to say, that after this Life, and then only, unless perhaps about the Hour of Death, Men begin to have a true Sense and lively Relish of this Wisdom. But in the mean time, *GOD understandeth the Way thereof, and he knoweth the Place thereof.* And unto Man he said, *Behold, the Fear of the Lord is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil, that is Understanding!* To Man he said: had it been to another creature, suppose an Angel, in a State of Security and

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Confirmation, he would perhaps have recommended for Wisdom the Study of Nature, and the Arcana of Philosophy. But having to do with Man, a probationary unfixed Creature, that shall be either happy or miserable eternally, according as he demeans himself, in this short Time of Trial, the only Wisdom he advises to such a Creature in such a Station, is to study Religion and a good Life.

28. From Authority let us descend to Example: and two I would particularly recommend, of Men both eminently wise and learned; I mean *Moses* and *St. Paul*. The latter professedly declares, *I determine to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified*. And the former complaining of the gross Ignorance of his People, breaks out into this passionate Wish. *O that they were wise! that they understood this, that they would consider their latter End!*

29. *Moses* had been bred a Scholar as well as a Courtier, and was well instructed in all the Secrets of Philosophy. And besides the Advantages of *Pharaoh's* Court, he had God himself for his Tutor; he had conversed personally with his Maker, and therefore must needs be suppos'd to know what was true Wisdom. But he does not make it consist in courtly Education or the Mysteries of Philosophy; but in considering our latter End. He wishes that his People were wise; and to this End he does not wish, that they were as well bred, or as learned as himself, but only that they understood this, this one Thing, that they would consider their latter End. This he makes the Summary and Abstract of all Wisdom. Not unlike *Plato*, who defines Philosophy, *the Theory of Death*.

30. And here, if a short Digression may be dispensed with, I would observe, how much *Plato* is in the right, and what an excellent Part of Wisdom it is, to consider Death seriously. To make this distinctly appear, shall shew first, that the Consideration of Death is the most proper Exercise for a wise Man, and secondly that it is the most compendious Way of making a Man wise that is not so.

31. First, it is the most proper Exercise for a wise Man. Wisdom consists in a due Estimation of Things; which then are duly estimated, when they are rated, both as they are in themselves, and as they are in relation to us. If they are great and extraordinary in themselves, they deserve to be consider'd for their own Sakes; if they nearly relate to us, they deserve to be consider'd for ours. And on both these Accounts, Death and its Consequences, are highly deserving a wise Man's Thoughts.

32. For, first, They are in themselves great and extraordinary Transactions, and as such, deserve the attentive Consideration, even of a stander by, of any other indifferent Being, suppose an Angel; even tho' he were no otherwise concerned in it, than as 'tis a great Event, a noble and wonderful Scene of Providence. On this single Account, Death is as fit a Subject for the Contemplation of a wise Man, as any in Nature.

33. Or if there be within the Sphere of Nature, Things of a greater Appearance, yet there is none wherein Man is so nearly concern'd. Since on this depends his eternal Happiness or Ruin. Nothing deserves so much to be consider'd by him. Whether therefore we regard the Greatness of the Thing in itself, or its Greatness with respect to us, the Consideration of Death is as proper an Exercise as a wise Man can be employ'd in.

34. And as 'tis so fit an Employment for him that is wise already, so, Secondly, it is the most compendious Way of making him wise that is not so. For all Wisdom is in order to Happiness; and to be truly wise, is to be wise unto Salvation. Whatever Knowledge contributes not to this, is quite beside the Mark. It is, as the Apostle calls it, *Science falsely so called*. The Knowledge itself is vain, and the Study of it impertinent.

35. Now the only Way to Happiness is a good Life; and consequently all Wisdom being in order to Happiness, that is the true, and the only true Wisdom, that serves to the promoting it, That therefore is the most compendious Way of making a Man wise, which soonest makes him good. And nothing does this so soon
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and so well, as the serious and habitual Consideration of Death. And therefore says the wise Man, *Remember Death and Corruption, and keep the Commandments*: The shortest Compendium of holy Living that ever was given. As if he had said, Many are the Admonitions of wise and good Men, for the moral Conduct of Life. But would you have a short and infallible Direction? Remember Death and Corruption. Do but remember this, and forget all other Rules if you *will*, and your Duty if you *can*.

36. And what is here remark'd by one wise Man, is consented to by all. Hence that common Practice among the Antients, of placing Sepulchres in their Gardens, and of using that celebrated Motto, *Memento Mori*. Hence that modern as well as ancient Custom, of putting Emblems of Mortality in Churches and other publick Places: by all which is implied, That the Consideration of Death is the greatest Security of a good Life. Indeed what other Considerations do by Parts, this does at a Blow. It at once defeats the World, the Flesh and the Devil. For how can the World captivate him, who seriously considers that he is a Stranger in it, and shall shortly leave it? How can the Flesh ensnare him who has his Sepulchre in his Eye, and reflects on the cold Lodging he shall have there? And how can the Devil prevail on him, who remembers that he shall die, and then enter on an unchangable State of Happiness or Misery, according as he has either resisted, or yielded to his Temptations? Of so vast Consequence is the constant thinking upon Death, above all other, even practical Meditation: and so great Reason had *Moses* for placing the Wisdom of Man in the Consideration of his latter End.

37. But to return. I now persuade myself, that from the Character of Man, and his present Circumstances, as well as from divine Authority, it evidently appears, that however natural our Desire of Knowledge is, this Appetite is to be governed, as well as those that are sensual; that we ought to indulge it only so far, as may tend to the conducting our Lives, and the fitting us for that Happiness which God hath promised, not to the Learned, but to the Good: and that

that if it be gratified to any other Purpose, or in any other Measure than this, our Curiosity is impertinent, our Study immoderate, and the Tree of Knowledge still a forbidden Plant.

38. And now having stated the Measure of our Affection to, and Enquiry after Learning and Knowledge, it remains to be consider'd, how much tis observed in the general Conduct of our Studies. Tis plain, it is not observ'd at all. For these two things are notorious: First, that very little of what is generally studied, has any Tendency to living *well* here or happily hereafter. And Secondly, That these very Studies which have no religious Influence upon Life, do yet devour the greatest Part of it. The best and most of our Time is devoted to dry Learning; this we make the Course of our Study, the rest is only by the by; and tis well if what is practical or devotional, can find us at Leisure upon a broken Piece of a Sunday or Holiday. The main Current of our Life runs in Studies of another Nature, that don't so much as glance one kind Aspect upon good Living. Nay, tis well if some of them don't hinder it. I am sure so great and so good a Man as St. *Austin* thought so, who speaking of the Institution and Discipline of his Youth, has these remarkable Words, *I learnt in those Things many useful Words; but the same might have been learnt in Matters that are not vain: and that indeed is the safe Way, wherein Children ought to be trained up. But Wo unto thee thou Torrent of Custom! Who is able to resist thee! How long will it be before thou art dried up? How long wilt thou roll along the Sons of Eve, into a great and formidable Sea, which they can hardly pass over? Have I not, in Obedience to thee, read of Jupiter thundering and fornicating at the same time? And yet, O thou bellish Torrent, the Sons of Men are still tossed in thee, and are invited by Rewards to learn these things! Thy Pretence indeed is, That this is the Way to learn Words, and to get Eloquence and the Art of Persuasion. As if we might not have known these Words, Golden Shower, Lap, the Temple of Heaven, without reading of Jupiter's being made a Precedent for Whoring? This Immorality does not at all help the Learning of the Words: but the Words greatly encourage the committing the*

Immorality. Not that I find Fault with the Words themselves; they are pure and choice Vessels: but with that Wine of Error, which in them is blended and commended to us by our sottish Teachers. And yet unless we drank of it, we were beaten, nor had we any sober Judge to appeal to. And yet, I, O my G O D, in whose Presence I now securely make this Recollection, willingly learnt these Things, and like a Wretch delighted in them; and for this I was call'd a good, hopeful Boy. By this you may see what the Judgment of this holy and venerable Person was in his private Retirements, and at the most serious Intervals of his Life, concerning the general Course of those Studies, which draw out the first Runnings of our Age, and which are of so great Credit and Authority in the World, as to go under the Name of ingenious and liberal Education. You see he not only disapproves them, but reckons them among those Sins and Irregularities of his Youth, whereof he thought himself obliged to make a particular Confession in this his great Penitential.

39. And here let me not be thought immodest, if upon great Consideration and full Conviction, I presume to tax the Management of our publick Schools. Many Miscarriages I might note, but I shall concern myself only with those, which the Principles here laid down lead me to consider. And these we may comprehend under two general Heads of Complaint.

I. That they take up so much of our Time.

II. That they teach us such frivolous and unprofitable Things as they do.

In relation to the First, I can't with any Patience reflect, that out of so short a Time as that of human Life, consisting, it may be of 50 or 60 Years (for where one lives longer, hundreds come short) 19 or 20 shall be spent between the Dictionary and the Lexicon, in hammering out a little *Latin* and *Greek*, and in learning a Company of Poetical Fictions and Fantastick Stories. Where these Things worth knowing, yet tis barbarous and inhuman, to make People spend so much of their little Stock of Time upon them. This is to *make a Cure* of human Ignorance, and to deal with

with the Infirmities of the Mind, as some ill Surgeons do with the Wounds of the Body. If one were to judge of the Life of Man by the Proportion of it spent at School, one would think that *Antideluvian* Marks were not yet out, and that we had a Prospect of at least 900 or 1000 Years before us. The Truth is, tis an intolerable Abuse it should be so; and were the Age as wise as it pretends to be, it would never suffer it: especially considering what late Examples we have had of more compendious Methods beyond the Seas. It does not become me to project a Scheme of School-Discipline; I leave this to abler Heads. Only in the mean time I may venture to say, that the common Way is a very great Tax upon human Life; so large a Portion of which can very ill be spared, to be lavish'd away in the first Elements of Learning.

But the greatest Complaint against these Seminaries is, the Frivolousness of the Things they teach. Not only the spending so much Time on the Things they teach is blame-worthy, but their teaching such Things at all. Setting Opinion and Fancy aside, what real Improvement is it to the Mind of a rational Creature, to be overlaid with Words and Phrases, and to be full charged with poetical Stories and Dreams? How many excellent and useful Things might be learnt, while Boys are *thumbing* and *murdering Hesiod* and *Homer*, which then they do not understand, and which when they do, they will throw by and despise; and that justly too: for of what Signification is such Stuff as this, to the Accomplishment of a reasonable Soul? What Improvement can it be to my Understanding, to know the Amours of *Pyramus* and *Thisbe*, or of *Hero* and *Leander*? Do Men retain any Value for these Things, when they grow up, or endeavour to preserve the Memory of them? And why must poor Boys be condemned to the Drudgery of learning what when they are Men they must and will unlearn? Why must they be forced with so great Expence of Time and Labour, to learn such Things as are of no standing Use? So far from that, that they are dangerous as well as unprofitable. For I appeal to the common Sense

Sense and Experience of Mankind, whether it be not dangerous in the highest Degree, to entertain the gay catching Fancies of Boys, with the amorous Scenes of the Poets? Whether it be safe, to season their green Imaginations with such Images as are there painted to the Life? Is not this rather the direct Way to corrupt them, to sow in their tender Minds the Seeds of Impurity, to increase their inbred Propensities to Evil, and lay a standing Foundation for Debauchery? Let any Man but consider human Nature as it comes down to us from *Adam*, and tell me whether he thinks a Boy is fit to be trusted with *Ovid*? I do not understand upon what Principle, either of Prudence or Piety, such Books as these should be read by any; but least of all by Boys, whose soft Minds are so susceptible of any ill Impression. Far better were it they should continue ignorant, than that their Understandings should be accomplish'd at the Hazard of their Morals; upon which such Studies as these can derive no very wholesome Influence. And yet to these our Youth is dedicated, and in these some of us employ our riper Years, and then when we die, this very Thing makes one Part of our Funeral Elogy, that we were so diligent and indefatigable in our Studies, and so inquisitive in the Search of Knowledge, perhaps that we procured an early Interment by it; when, according to the Principles before laid down, we were as impertinently, tho' not so innocently employ'd all the while, as if we had been so long picking Straws in *Bedlam*.

40. The Sum of all is this: the Measure of prosecuting Learning and Knowledge, is their Usefulness to a good Life. Consequently, all Prosecution of them beyond or beside this End, is impertinent and immoderate. But such is the general Prosecution of Learning and Knowledge, as is plain by appealing to the general Conduct of Study. It evidently follows, that the Intellectual Conduct of human Life is justly chargeable with an immoderate and impertinent Pursuit of Knowledge.

The CONCLUSION.

TO what a narrow Compass, by virtue of the preceding Reflections, are these three Things reduced, which use to take up so large a Room, *viz.* Learning itself, the Method of Learning, and the Desire and Prosecution of Learning? These indeed are great Retrenchments, but such as are just and necessary to the Regulation of our intellectual Conduct.

And now who can forbear making these two Observations, 1. That this Bookish Humour, which every where so prevails, is one of the spiritual Diseases of Mankind, one of the most malignant Relicks of original Depravation: it carrying in it the very Stamp and Signature of *Adam's* Transgression, which owed its Birth to an inordinate Desire of Knowledge. 2. That those who have Eyes, may in great Measure spare them, and they who have not, should not much lament the Want of them, upon Account of Learning.

For my own Part, I am so thoroughly convinced of the Certainty of the Principles here laid down, that I look upon myself as not only under a particular Obligation, but almost a Necessity of conducting my Studies by them. The last of which has left such a deep Impression upon me; that I now intend to follow the Advice of the Heathen, (*Marcus Antoninus,*) as I remember *Τὴν τῶν Βιβλίων δίψαν πρὶψον. Rid thyself of the Thirst after Books;* and to study nothing at all but what serves to the Advancement of Piety and a good Life.

I have now spent about 13 Years in the most celebrated University in the World; in pursuing both such Learning as the *Academical* Standard requires, and as my private Genius inclin'd me to. But in Truth, when I think on my past Intellectual Conduct, I am as little satisfied with it as with my Moral; being very conscious, that the greatest Part of my Time has been employ'd in unconcerning Curiosities, such as derive no Degree of moral Influence upon the Soul that contemplates them.

But

But I have now a very different Apprehension of Things, and intend to spend my uncertain Remainder of Time, in studying only what makes for the moral Improvement of my Mind, and Regulation of my Life: being not able to give an Account, upon any rational and consistent Principles, why I should study any thing else.

More particularly, I shall apply myself to read such Books as are rather persuasive than instructive; such as warm, kindle and enlarge the Affections, and awaken the divine Sense in the Soul; as being convinced by every Day's Experience, that I have more Need of Heat than of Light. Though were I for more Light, still I think this would prove the best Method of Illumination, and that when all is done, the Love of God is the best Light of the Soul. *A Man may indeed have Knowledge without Love; but he that loves, tho' he wants Sciences humanly acquired, yet he will know more than human Wisdom can teach him, because he has that Master within him who teaches Man Knowledge.*



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