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*Sensus Communis :*

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**E S S A Y**

O N T H E

**F R E E D O M**

O F

**Wit and Humour.**

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In a **LETTER** to a Friend.

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— *Hæc urget Lupus, hæc Canis* —

Horat. Sat. 2. Lib. 2.

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**L O N D O N,**

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A N  
E S S A Y, &c.

I HAVE been considering (my Friend!) what your Fancy was, to express such a Surprize as you did the other day, when I happen'd to speak to you in commendation of *Raillery*. Was it possible you shou'd suppose me so grave a Man as to dislike *all* Conversation of this kind? Or were you afraid I shou'd not stand the Trial, if you shou'd put me to it, by making the Experiment in *my own* Case?

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I must

I must confess, you had reason enough for your Caution ; if you cou'd imagine me at the bottom so true a *Zealot*, as not to bear the least Raillery on my own Opinions. 'Tis the Case, I know, with Many. Whatever they think grave or solemn, they suppose must never be treated out of a grave and solemn way : Tho what *Another* thinks so, they can be contented to treat otherwise ; and are forward to try the Edge of Ridicule against any Opinions besides *their own*.

The Question is, Whether this be fair or no ? and Whether it be not just, and wise, to make as free with our *own* Opinions, as with those of *other People* ? For to be sparing in this case, may be look'd upon as a piece of Selfishness. We may be charg'd perhaps with wilful Ignorance and blind Idolatry, for having taken Opinions upon Trust, and conse-

consecrated in our selves certain *Idol-Notions*, which we will never suffer to be unveil'd, or seen in open Light: They may perhaps be *Monsters*, and not *Divinitys*, or *Sacred Truths*, which are kept thus choicely, in some dark Corner of our Minds: The *Specters* may impose on us, whilst we refuse to turn 'em every way, and view their Shapes and Complexions in every Light. For that which can be shewn only in a certain Light, is questionable. Truth, 'tis suppos'd, may bear *all* Lights: and one of those in which Things are to be view'd, in order to a thorow Recognition, is that by which we discern whatever is liable to *Ridicule* in any Subject. At least, 'tis so allow'd by All, who at any time appeal to this *Criterion*. The gravest Gentlemen, even in the gravest Subjects, are suppos'd to acknowledg this: and can have no Right, 'tis thought,

to deny others the Freedom of this Appeal; whilst they are free to censure like other Men, and in their gravest Arguments make no scruple to ask, *Is it not ridiculous?*

Of this Affair, therefore, I design you shou'd know fully what my Thoughts are. And by this means you will be able to judg of me; whether I was sincere the other day in the Defence of *Raillery*, and can continue still to plead for those ingenious Friends of ours, who are often censur'd for their Humour of this kind, and for the Freedom they take in such an airy way of Conversation and Writing.

IN good earnest, when one considers what use is sometimes made of this kind of Wit, and to what an excess it has risen of late, in some Characters of the Age; one may be startled a little, and in doubt, what  
to

to think of the Practice, or whither this raillying Humour will at length carry us. It has pass'd from the Men of Pleasure to the Men of Business. Politicians have been infected with it: and the grave Affairs of State have been treated with an Air of *Irony* and *Banter*. The ablest Negotiators have been known the notablest *Buffs*: the most celebrated Authors, the greatest Masters of *Burlesque*.

There is indeed a kind of *defensive Raillery* (if I may so call it) which I am willing enough to allow in Affairs of whatever kind; when the Spirit of Curiosity wou'd force a Discovery of more Truth than can conveniently be told. For we can never do more injury to Truth, than by discovering too much of it, on some occasions. 'Tis the same with Understandings as with Eyes: To such a certain Size and Make just so

much Light is necessary; and no more. Whatever is beyond, brings Darknes and Confusion.

'Tis real Humanity and Kindness, to hide strong Truths from weak Eyes. And to do this by a pleasant Amusement, is easier, and civiller, than by a harsh Denial or remarkable Reserve. But to go about industriously to confound Men, in a mysterious manner; and to make advantage or draw pleasure from that Perplexity they are thrown into, by such uncertain Talk; is as unhand-som in a way of Raillery, as when done with the greatest Seriousness, or in the most solemn way of Deceit. It may be necessary, as well now as of old, for wise Men to speak in *Parables*, and with a double Meaning, that the Enemy may be amus'd; and those only *who have Ears to hear may hear*. But 'tis a mean, impotent and dull sort of War, which causes all  
alike,

alike, and leaves the most sensible Man, and even a Friend, equally in doubt, and at a loss, to know what one's real mind is, upon any Subject.

This is that gross sort of Raillery, which is so offensive in good Company. And indeed there is as much difference between one sort and another, as between fair Dealing and Hypocrisy; or between the genteelest Wit, and the most scurrilous Buffoonery. But by Freedom of Conversation, this illiberal kind of Wit will lose its Credit. For Wit is its own Remedy. Liberty and Commerce bring it to its true Standard. The only Danger is, the laying an Embargo. The same thing happens here, as in the Case of *Trade*. Impositions and Restrictions reduce it to a low Ebb. Nothing is so advantageous to it as a *Free Port*.

We have seen in our own time the Decline and Ruin of a false sort of

Wit, which so much delighted our Ancestors, that their Poems, and Plays, as well as Sermons, were full of it. All Humour had something of *the Quibble*. The very Language of the Court was *Punning*. But 'tis now banish'd the Town and all good Company : There are only some few Footsteps of it in the Country ; and it seems at last confin'd to the Nurserys of Youth, as the chief Entertainment of Pedants and their Pupils. And thus in other respects *Wit* will mend upon our hands ; and *Humour* will refine it self ; if we take care not to tamper with it, and bring it under Constraint, by severe Usage and rigorous Prescriptions. All Politeness is owing to Liberty. We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by this *amicable Collision*. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring a Rust upon Mens Understandings. 'Tis a destroying  
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of Civility, Good Breeding, and even Charity it self, under pretence of maintaining it.

TO describe true *Raillery* wou'd be as hard a matter, and perhaps as little to the purpose, as to define *Good Breeding*. None can understand the Speculation, but they who have the Practice. Yet every one thinks himself *well-bred*: and the formallest *Pendant* imagines he can railly with a good Grace. I have known some of those grave Gentlemen undertake to correct an Author for defending the Use of *Raillery*, and at the same time have upon every turn made use of that Weapon, tho they were naturally so very aukard at it. And this I believe may be observ'd in the Case of many Zealots, who have taken upon 'em to answer our modern Free Writers. The Tragical Gentlemen, with the grim Aspect  
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and Mein of true *Inquisitors*, have but an ill Grace when they vouchsafe to quit their Austerity, and be jocosse and pleasant with an Adversary, whom they wou'd chuse to treat in a very different manner. For to do 'em justice, had they their Wills, I doubt not but their Conduct and Mein wou'd be pretty much of a piece. They wou'd soon quit their Farce, and make a thorow Tragedy. But at present there is nothing so ridiculous as this JANUS-FACE of Writers, who with one Countenance force a Smile, and with another show nothing but Rage and Fury. Having enter'd the Lists, and agreed to the fair Laws of Combat by Wit and Argument, they have no sooner prov'd their Weapon, than you hear 'em crying aloud for help, and delivering over to the *Secular Arm*.

There can't be a more preposterous Sight than an Executioner and

a Merry *Andrew* acting their Part upon the same Stage. Yet I am persuaded any one will find this to be the real Picture of certain modern Zealots in their Controversial Writings. They are no more Masters of Gravity, than they are of good Humour. The first always runs into harsh Severity, and the latter into an aukard Buffoonery. And thus between Anger and Pleasure, Zeal and Drollery, their Writing has much such a Grace as the Play of humerfom Children, who almost, at the same instant, are both peevish and wanton, and can laugh and cry in one and the same Breath.

How agreeable such Writings are like to prove, and of what Effect towards the winning over or convincing those who are suppos'd to be in Error, I need not go about to explain. Nor can I wonder, on this account, to hear those publick Lamentations

mentations of Zealots, that whilst the Books of their Adversarys are so current, their Answers to 'em can hardly make their way into the World, or be taken the least notice of. *Pedantry* and *Bigotry* are Mill-Stones able to sink the best Book, that bears the least part of their dead weight. The Temper of the Pedagogue sutes not with the Age. And the World, tho it may be *taught*, will not be *tutor'd*. If a Philosopher speaks, Men hear him willingly while he keeps to his Philosophy. So is a Christian heard, while he keeps to his profess'd Charity and Meekness. In a Gentleman we allow of Pleasantry and Raillery, as being manag'd always with good Breeding; and never gross or clownish. But if a mere Scholastick, intrrenching upon all these Characters, and writing as it were by Starts and Rebounds from one of these to another,

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ther,

ther, appears upon the whole as little able to keep the Temper of Christianity, as to use the Reason of a Philosopher, or the Raillery of a Man of Breeding ; what wonder is it if the monstrous Product of such a jumbled Brain be ridiculous to the World ?

If you think (my Friend) that by this Description I have done wrong to any of these Zealot-Writers in religious Controversy ; read but a few Pages in any one of 'em (even where the Contest is not *Abroad*, but within their own *Pale*) and then pronounce.

AND now I have said thus much as to Authors and Writings, you shall hear my Thoughts, as you have desir'd, upon the Subject of *Conversation*, and particularly a late *One* of a free Kind, which you remember I was present at, with some  
Friends

Friends of yours, whom you fancy'd I shou'd in great Gravity have condemn'd.

'Twas, I must own, a very diverting one, and perhaps not the less so, for ending as abruptly as it did, and in a sort of Confusion; which almost brought all to nothing that had been advanc'd in the Discourse before. Some Particulars of this Conversation may not perhaps be so proper to commit to Paper. 'Tis enough that I put you in mind of what pass'd. A great many fine Schemes, it's true, were destroy'd; many grave Reasonings overturn'd: but this being done without Offence to the Partys concern'd, and with Improvement to the good Humour of the Company, it set the Appetite the keener to such Conversations. And I am persuaded, that had *Reason* her self been to judg of her own Interest, she wou'd have

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thought

thought she receiv'd more Advantage in the main from that easy and familiar way, than from the usual stiff Adherence to a particular Opinion.

But perhaps you may still be in the same Humour of not believing me in earnest. You may continue to tell me, I affect to be paradoxical, in commending a Conversation as advantageous to Reason, which ended in such an Uncertainty of all that Reason had seemingly so well establish'd.

To this I answer, That according to the Notion I have of *Reason*, neither the written Treatises of the Learned, nor the set Discourses of the Eloquent, are able of themselves to teach the use of it. 'Tis the Habit alone of Reasoning that can make a *Reasoner*. And Men can never be better invited to the Habit, than when they find Pleasure in it.

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A Freedom of Raillery, a Liberty in decent Language to question every thing, and an Allowance of unravelling or refuting any Argument, without offence to the Arguer, are the only Terms which can render such Speculative Conversations any way agreeable. For to say truth, they have been render'd burdensom to Mankind by the Strictness of the Laws prescrib'd to 'em, and by the prevailing Pedantry and Bigotry of those who reign in 'em, and assume to themselves to be Dictators in these Provinces.

*Semper ego Auditor tantum!* is as natural a Case of Complaint in Divinity, in Morals, and in Philosophy, as it was of old, *the Satyrists*, in Poetry. *Vicissitude* is a mighty Law of Discourse, and mightily long'd for by Mankind. In matter of Reason, more is done in a minute or two, by way of Question and  
Reply,

Reply, than by a continu'd Discourse of whole Hours. *Oration*s are fit only to move the Passions: And the Power of *Declamation* is to terrify, exalt, ravish, or delight, rather than satisfy or instruct. A free Conference is a close Fight. The other Way, in comparison to it, is but a Brandishing, or *Beating the Air*. To be obstructed therefore and manacled in Conferences, and to be confin'd to hear *Oration*s on certain Subjects, must needs give us a Distast, and render the Subjects so manag'd, as disagreeable as the Managers. Men had rather reason upon Trifles, so they may reason freely and without the Imposition of Authority, than on the usefullest and best Subjects in the World, where they are held under a Restraint, and Fear.

Nor is it a wonder that Men are generally such faint Reasoners, and care so little to argue strictly on any

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trivial Subject in Company ; when they dare so little exert their Reason in greater Matters, and are forc'd to argue lamely where they have need of the greatest Activity and Strength. And therefore the same thing happens here as in strong and healthy Bodys, which are debar'd their natural Exercise, and confin'd in a narrow Space. They are forc'd to use odd Gestures and Contortions. They have a sort of Action, and move still, tho with the worst Grace imaginable. For the animal Spirits in such sound and active Limbs cannot lie dead, or without Employment. And thus the natural free Spirits of ingenious Men, if imprison'd and controul'd, will find out other ways of Motion to relieve themselves in their *Constraint* : and whether it be in Burlesque, Mimickry or Buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be reveng'd on their *Constrainers*. If

If Men are forbid to speak their Minds seriously on certain Subjects, they will do it ironically. If they are forbid to speak at all upon such Subjects ; or if they find it really dangerous for 'em to do so ; they will then redouble their Disguise, involve themselves in Mysteriousness, and talk so as hardly to be understood, or at least not plainly interpreted, by those who are dispos'd to do 'em a Mischief. And thus *Raillery* is brought more in fashion, and runs into an Extreme. 'Tis the persecuting Spirit has rais'd the *bantering* one : And want of Liberty may account for want of a true Politeness, and for the Corruption or wrong Use of Pleasantry and Humour.

If in this respect we strain the just measure of what we call *Urbanity*, and are apt sometimes to take a Buffooning, Rustick Air, we may

thank the ridiculous Solemnity and sour Humour of our Pedagogues; or rather they may thank themselves, if they in particular meet with the heaviest of this kind of Treatment. For it will naturally fall heaviest, where the Constraint has been the severest. The greater the Weight is, the bitterer will be the Satyr. The higher the Slavery, the more exquisite the Buffoonery.

That this is really so, may appear by looking on those Countrys where the spiritual Tyranny is highest. For the greatest of Buffoons are the *Italians*: and in their Writings, in their freer sort of Conversations, on their Theatres, and in their Streets, Buffoonery and Burlesque are in the highest vogue. 'Tis the only manner in which the poor cramp'd Wretches can discharge a free Thought. We must yield to 'em the Superiority in this sort of Wit. For what wonder

wonder is it if we, who have more of Liberty, have less Dexterity in that egregious way of Raillery and Ridicule?

'TIS for this reason, I verily believe, that the Antients knew so little of this Spirit, and that there is hardly such a thing found as mere *Burlesque* in any Authors of the politer Ages. The manner indeed in which they treated the very gravest Subjects, was somewhat different from that of our Days. Their Treatises were generally in a free and familiar Stile. They chose to give us the Representation of real Discourse and Converse, by treating their Subjects in the way of *Dialogue* and free Debate. The Scene was usually laid at Table, or in the publick Walks or Meeting-Places; and the usual Wit and Humour of their real Discourses appear'd in those of their own composing.

posing. And this was fair. For without Wit and Humour, Reason can hardly have its Proof, or be distinguish'd. The Magisterial Voice and high Strain of the Pedagogue, commands Reverence and Awe. 'Tis of admirable use to keep Understandings at a distance, and out of reach. The other Manner, on the contrary, gives the fairest hold, and suffers an Antagonist to use his full Strength hand to hand, upon even ground.

'Tis not to be imagin'd what advantage the Reader has, when he can thus cope with his Author, who is willing to come on a fair Stage with him, and exchange the Tragick Buskin for an easier and more natural Gate and Habit. *Grimace* and *Tone* are mighty Helps to Imposture. And many a formal Piece of Sophistry holds proof under a severe Brow, which wou'd not pass under an easy one,

one. 'Twas the Saying of an ancient Sage, " That Humour was the  
" only Test of Gravity: and Gra-  
" vity of Humour. For a Subject  
" that wou'd not bear Raillery, was  
" suspicious; and a Jest that wou'd  
" not bear a serious Examination,  
" was certainly false Wit."

But some Gentlemen there are so full of the Spirit of Bigotry, and false Zeal, that when they hear Principles examin'd, Sciences and Arts inquir'd into, and Matters of Importance treated with this Frankness of Humour, they imagine presently that all Professions must fall to the ground, all Establishments come to ruin, and nothing orderly or decent be left standing in the World. They fear, or pretend to fear, that Religion it self will be endanger'd by this free Way; and are therefore as much alarm'd at this Liberty in private Conversation, and under pru-

dent Management, as if it were grossly us'd in publick Company, or before the solemnest Assembly. But the Case, as I apprehend it, is far different. For you are to remember (my Friend) that I am writing to you in defence only of the Liberty of *the Club*, and of that sort of Freedom which is taken amongst *Gentlemen and Friends*, who know one another perfectly well. And that 'tis natural for me to defend Liberty with this restriction, you may infer from the very Notion I have of Liberty it self.

'Tis surely a Violation of the Freedom of publick Assemblys, for any one to take the Chair who is not call'd to it. To start Questions, or manage Debates, which offend the Publick-Ear, is to be wanting in that Respect which is due to common Society. Such Subjects shou'd either not be treated at all in publick, or in  
such

such a manner as to occasion no Scandal or Disturbance. The Publick is not to be laugh'd at, to its Face; or so told of its Follies, as to make it think it self contemn'd. And what is contrary to good Breeding, is in this respect as contrary to Liberty. It belongs to Men of slavish Principles, to affect a Superiority over *the Vulgar*, and to despise *the Multitude*. The Lovers of Mankind, respect and honour Conventions and Societys of Men. And in mix'd Company and Places, where Men are met promiscuously, on account of Diversion or Affairs, 'tis an Imposition and Hardship to force 'em to hear what they dislike, and to treat of Matters in a Dialect, which many who are present have perhaps been never us'd to. 'Tis a breach of the Harmony of publick Conversation, to take things in such a high Key, as is above the common Reach,

Reach, puts others to silence, and robs them of their *Privilege of Turn*. But as to private Society, and what passes in select Companys, where Friends meet knowingly, and with that very design of exercising their Wit, and looking freely into all Subjects ; I see no pretence for any one to be offended at the way of Railery and Humour, which is the very Life of such Conversations ; the only thing which makes good Company, and frees it from the Formality of Business, and the Tutorage and Dogmaticalness of the Schools.

TO return therefore to our Argument. If the best of our modern Conversations are apt to run chiefly upon Trifles ; if rational Discourses (especially those of a deeper Speculation) have lost their Credit, and are in disgrace because of their *Formality* ; there is reason for more Allowance

Allowance in the way of *Humour* and *Gaiety*. An easier Method of treating these Subjects, will make 'em more agreeable and familiar. To dispute about 'em, will be the same as about other Matters. They need not spoil good Company, or take from the Ease or Pleasure of a polite Conversation. And the oftner these Conversations are renew'd, the better will be their Effect. We shall grow better *Reasoners*, by reasoning pleasantly, and at our ease; taking up, or laying down these Subjects as we fancy. So that upon the whole, I must own to you, I cannot be scandaliz'd at the Raillery you took notice of, nor at the Effect it had upon our Company. The Humour was agreeable, and the pleasant Confusion which the Conversation ended in, is at this time as pleasant to me upon Reflection; when I consider, that instead of being discourag'd  
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from resuming the Debate, we were so much the readier to meet again at any time, and dispute upon the same Subjects, even with more Ease and Satisfaction than before.

We had been a long while entertain'd, you know, upon the Subject of *Morality* and *Religion*. And amidst the different Opinions which were started and maintain'd by several of the Partys, with a great deal of Life and Ingenuity; one or other wou'd every now and then take the Liberty to appeal to COMMON SENSE. Every one allow'd the Appeal, and was willing to stand the Trial. No one but was assur'd *Common Sense* wou'd justify him. But when Issue was join'd, and the Cause examin'd at the Bar, there cou'd be no Judgment given. The Partys however were not less forward in renewing their Appeal, on the very next occasion that presented. No one wou'd  
offer

offer to call the Authority of the Court in question; till a Gentleman, whose good Understanding was never yet doubted of, desir'd the Company very gravely, that they wou'd tell him *what Common Sense was*.

If by the word *Sense* we were to understand Opinion and Judgment, and by the word *common* the Generality or any considerable part of Mankind, 'twou'd be hard, he said, to discover where the Subject of common Sense cou'd lie. For that which was according to the Sense of one Part of Mankind, was against the Sense of another. And if the Majority were to determine common Sense, it wou'd change as often as Men chang'd. That which was according to common Sense to day, wou'd be the contrary to morrow, or soon after.

But notwithstanding the different Judgments of Mankind in most Subjects,

jects, there were some however in which 'twas suppos'd they all agreed, and had the same Thoughts in common.— The Question was ask'd still *Where?* “ For whatever was of  
 “ any moment, 'twas suppos'd, might  
 “ be reduc'd under the head of *Re-*  
 “ *ligion, Policy, or Morals.*

“ Of the Differences in RELI-  
 “ GION there was no occasion to  
 “ speak: the Case was so well known  
 “ to all, and so feelingly understood  
 “ by Christians, in particular, among  
 “ themselves. They had made sound  
 “ Experiment upon one another;  
 “ each Party in their turn. No En-  
 “ deavours had been wanting on the  
 “ side of any particular Sect. Which-  
 “ ever chanc'd to have the Power,  
 “ fail'd not of putting all means in  
 “ execution, to make their private  
 “ Sense the publick one. But all in  
 “ vain. *Common Sense* was as hard  
 “ still to determine as *Catholick* or *Or-*  
 “ *thodox.*

“ *thodox*. What with one was in-  
“ conceivable Mystery, to another  
“ was of easy Comprehension. What  
“ to one, was Absurdity, to another  
“ was Demonstration.

“ As for POLICY; What Sense  
“ or whose cou’d be call’d common,  
“ was equally a Question. If plain  
“ *British* or *Dutch* Sense were right,  
“ *Turkish* and *French* Sense must cer-  
“ tainly be very wrong. And as  
“ mere Nonsense as Passive Obe-  
“ dience seem’d to some of us; we  
“ found it to be the common Sense  
“ of a great Party amongst our  
“ selves, a greater Party in *Europe*,  
“ and perhaps the greatest Part of  
“ all the World besides.

“ As for MORALS; the diffe-  
“ rence, if possible, was still wider.  
“ For without considering the Opi-  
“ nions and Customs of the many  
“ barbarous and illiterate Nations;  
“ we saw that even the few who had  
“ attain’d

“ attain’d to riper Letters, and to  
 “ Philosophy, cou’d never as yet  
 “ agree on one and the same System,  
 “ or acknowledg the same moral  
 “ Principles. And some even of our  
 “ most admir’d modern Philosophers  
 “ had fairly told us, that *Virtue* and  
 “ *Vice* had, after all, no other *Law*  
 “ or *Measure*, than mere *Fashion* and  
 “ *Vogue*.”

It might have appear’d perhaps  
 unfair in our Friends, had they treated  
 only the graver Subjects in this man-  
 ner; and suffer’d the lighter to es-  
 cape. For in the gayer Part of Life,  
 our Follies are as solemn as in the  
 more serious. The fault is, we car-  
 ry the Laugh but *half-way*. The false  
 Earnest is ridicul’d, but the *false Jest*  
 passes secure, and becomes as errant  
 Deceit as the other. Our Diversions,  
 our Plays, our Amusements become  
*solemn*. We dream of Happinesses,  
 and Possessions, and Injoyments in  
 † which

which we have no Understanding, no Certainty; and yet we pursue these as the best known and most certain things in the World. There is nothing so foolish and deluding as a *partial Scepticism*. For whilst the Doubt is cast only on one side, the Certainty grows so much stronger on the other. Whilst only one Face of Folly appears ridiculous, the other grows more solemn and deceiving.

But 'twas not thus with our Friends. They seem'd better *Criticks*, and more ingenious, and fair in their way of questioning receiv'd Opinions, and exposing the Ridicule of Things. And if you will allow me to carry on their Humour, I will venture to make the Experiment throughout; and try what certain Knowledg or Assurance of things may be recover'd, in that very way, by which all Certainty, you thought, was lost, and an endless *Scepticism* introduc'd.



side, might laugh perhaps at this Simplicity. But our ETHIOPIAN wou'd certainly laugh with better reason. 'Tis easy to see which of the two wou'd be ridiculous. For he who laughs, and is himself ridiculous, bears a double share of Ridicule. However, shou'd it so happen, that in the Transport of Ridicule our ETHIOPIAN, having his Head still running upon *Masks*, and knowing nothing of the *fair* Complexion and common Dress of the EUROPEANS, shou'd upon the sight of a natural Face and Habit, laugh just as heartily as before; wou'd not he in his turn become ridiculous, by carrying the Jest too far; when by a silly Presumption he took *Nature* for mere *Art*, and mistook perhaps a Man of Sobriety and Sense for one of those ridiculous *Mummers*?

There was a time when Men were accountable only for their Actions

and Behaviour. Their Opinions were left to themselves. They had Liberty to differ in these, as in their Faces. Every one took the Air and Look which was natural to him. But in process of time, it was thought decent to mend Mens Countenances; and render their intellectual Complexions uniform and of a sort. Thus the Magistrate became a *Dresser*, and in his turn was *dress'd* too; when he had given up his Power to a new Order of *Tire-men*. But tho it was agreed that there was only one *certain* and *true Dress*, one *single* peculiar *Air*, to which it was necessary all People shou'd conform; yet the Misery was, that neither the Magistrate, nor the *Tire-men* themselves, cou'd resolve, which of the various Modes was the *exact true one*. Imagine now, what the Effect of this must needs be; when Men became persecuted thus on every side about their *Air* and *Feature*,  
and

and were put to their shifts how to adjust and compose their *Mein*, according to the Mode; when a thousand Models, a thousand Patterns of Dress were current, and alter'd every now and then, upon occasion, according to *Fashion* and the Humour of the Times. Judg whether Mens Countenances were not like to grow constrain'd, and the natural Visage of Mankind, by this Habit, distorted, convuls'd, and render'd hardly knowable.

But as unnatural or artificial as the general Face of Things may have been render'd by this unhappy Care of Dress, and Over-Tenderness for the Safety of Complexions; we must not therefore imagine that all Faces are alike besmear'd or plaister'd. All is not *Fucus*, or mere Glos. Nor is the Face of Truth less fair and beautiful, for all the counterfeit Vizards which have been put upon her. We must remember the *Carnival*, and what

the Occasion has been of this wild Concourse and Medly: who were the Institutors of it: and to what end Men were thus set a work and amus'd. We may laugh sufficiently at the original Cheat; and, if pity will suffer us, we may make our selves diversion enough with the Folly and Madness of those who are thus caught, and practis'd on, by these Impostures. But we must remember withal our ETHIOPIAN, and beware, lest by taking plain Nature for a Vizard, we become more ridiculous than the People whom we ridicule.

Had it been your Fortune (my Friend!) to have liv'd in ASIA at the time when the MAGI by an egregious Imposture got possession of the Empire; no doubt but you wou'd have had a detestation of the Act: And perhaps the very Persons of the Men might have grown so odious to  
you,

you, that after all the Cheats and Abuses they had committed, you might have seen 'em dispatch'd with as relentless an eye as our later *European* Ancestors saw the Destruction of a like politick Body of Conjurers, the *Knights Templars*; who were almost become an Over-Match for the Civil Sovereign. Your Indignation perhaps might have carry'd you to propose the razing all Monuments and Memorials of these Magicians. You might have resolv'd not to leave so much as their Houses standing. But if it had happen'd that these Magicians, in the time of their Dominion, had made any Collection of Books, or had compil'd any themselves, in which they had treated of *Philosophy*, or *Morals*, or any other Science, or Part of *Learning*; wou'd you have carry'd your Resentment so far as to have extirpated these also, and condemn'd every Opinion

or Doctrine, which they had espous'd, for no other reason than merely *because they had espous'd it*? Hardly a SCYTHIAN, a TARTAR, or a GOTH, wou'd act or reason so absurdly. Much less wou'd you (my Friend!) have carry'd on this MARGORHONY, or *Priest-Massacre*, with such a barbarous Zeal. For, in good earnest, to destroy a Philosophy in hatred to a Man, is as errant a *Tartar-Notion*, as to destroy or murder a Man in order to plunder him of his Wit; and get the Inheritance of his Understanding.

I must confess indeed, that had the Institutions, the Statutes, and Regulations of this antient *Hierarchy*, been all of 'em resembling the fundamental one, of the *Order* it self, they might with a great deal of Justice have been suppress'd: For one can't without some abhorrence read that Law of theirs;

*Nam*

*Nam Magus ex Matre & Gnato nascatur oportet.*

But the Conjurers (as we'll rather suppose) having consider'd that they ought in their *Principle* to appear as fair as possible to the World, the better to conceal their *Practice*, found it highly for their Interest to espouse some excellent moral Rules, and establish the very best Maxims of this kind. They thought it for their advantage perhaps, on their first setting out, to recommend the greatest Purity of Religion, the greatest Integrity of Life and Manners. They may perhaps too, in general, have preach'd up Charity and Good-will. They may, for the most part, have set to view the fairest Face of Human Nature; and together with their By-Laws, and Political Institutions, they may have interwove the honestest

Morals

Morals and best Doctrine in the World.

How therefore shou'd we have behav'd our selves in this Affair? How shou'd we have carry'd our selves towards this Order of Men, at the time of the Discovery of their Cheat, and Ruin of their Empire? Shou'd we have fall'n to work instantly with their Systems, struck at all their Opinions and Doctrines without distinction, and erected a contrary Philosophy in their Teeth? Shou'd we have flown at every religious and moral Principle, deny'd every natural and social Affection, and render'd Men as much *Wolves* as was possible to one another, whilst we describ'd 'em such; and endeavor'd to make them see themselves by far more monstrous and corrupt, than with the worst Intentions it was ever possible for the worst of 'em to become?—This, you'll say, doubtless

less wou'd have been a very preposterous Part, and cou'd never have been acted but by mean Spirits, such as had been held in awe, and overfrighted by the M A G I.

And yet an able and witty Philosopher of our Nation was, we know, of late Years, so possess'd with a Horrour of this kind, that both with respect to Politicks and Morals, he directly acted in this Spirit of *Massacre*. The Fright he took upon the Sight of the then governing Powers, who unjustly assum'd the Authority of the People, gave him such an Abhorrence of all popular Government, and of the very Notion of Liberty it self; that to extinguish it for ever, he recommends the very extinguishing of Letters, and exhorts Princes not to spare so much as an antient R O M A N or G R E E K Historian.—Is not this in truth somewhat *Gothick*? And has not our Philoso-

Philosopher, in appearance, something of the *Savage*, that he shou'd use Philosophy and Learning as the *SCYTHIANS* are said to have us'd *ANACHARSIS* and others, for having visited the *Wife of GREECE*, and learnt the Manners of a polite People?

His Quarrel with *Religion* was the same as with *Liberty*. The same Times gave him the same Terror in this other kind. He had nothing before his Eyes but the Ravage of *Enthusiasm*, and the Artifice of those, who rais'd and conducted that Spirit. And the good sociable Man, as savage and unfociable as he wou'd make himself and all Mankind appear by his Philosophy, expos'd himself during his Life, and took the utmost Pains; that after his Death we might be deliver'd from the occasion of these Terrours. He did his utmost to shew us, that both in Religion and Morals we were impos'd

pos'd on by our Governors; that there was nothing which by Nature inclin'd us either way; nothing which naturally drew us to the Love of what was without, or beyond *our selves*. Tho' the Love of such great Truths and Sovereign Maxims as he imagin'd these to be, made him the most laborious of all Men in composing Systems of this kind for our Use; and forc'd him, notwithstanding his natural Fear, to run continually the highest risk of being a Martyr for our Deliverance.

Give me leave therefore (my Friend!) on this occasion, to prevent your Seriousness; and assure you, that there is no such mighty Danger as we are apt to imagine from these fierce Prosecutors of Superstition, who are so jealous of every religious or moral Principle. Whatever *Savages* they may appear in Philosophy, they are in their common Capacity

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as

as *Civil* Persons, as one can wish. Their free communicating of their Principles may witness for them. 'Tis the height of Sociableness to be thus friendly and communicative.

If the Principles indeed were conceal'd from us, and made a *Mystery*; they might become considerable. Things are often made so, by being kept as *Secrets* of a Sect or Party: and nothing helps this more than the *Antipathy* and *Shyness* of a contrary Party. If we fall presently into Horrors, and Consternation, upon the hearing Maxims which are thought *poisonous*; we are in no Disposition to use that familiar and easy Part of Reason, which is the best *Antidote*. The only *Poison* to Reason, is *Passion*. For false Reasoning is soon redress'd, where Passion is remov'd. But if the very hearing certain Propositions of Philosophy is sufficient to move our Passion; 'tis

'tis plain, the *Poison* has already gain'd on us, and we are effectually prevented in the use of our reasoning Faculty.

Were it not for the Prejudices of this kind; what shou'd hinder us from diverting our selves with the Fancy of one of these *modern Reformers* we have been speaking of? What shou'd we say to one of these *Anti-Zealots*, who, in the Zeal of such a cool Philosophy, shou'd assure us faithfully, "That we were  
" the most mistaken Men in the  
" World, to imagine there was any  
" such Thing as natural Faith or  
" Justice? For that it was only  
" Force and Power which constituted  
" Right. That there was no such  
" thing in reality as *Virtue*; no Prin-  
" ciple of Order in things above, or  
" below; no secret *Charm* or Force  
" of Nature, by which every one  
" was made to operate willingly or  
" unwillingly

“unwillingly towards publick Good,  
“and punish’d, and tormented if  
“he did otherwise.”—Is not this  
the very *Charm* it self? Is not the Gen-  
tleman at this instant under the power  
of it? — “Sir! The Philosophy  
“you have condescended to reveal to  
“us is most extraordinary. We are  
“beholden to you for your Instruc-  
“tion. But, pray, whence is this  
“Zeal in our behalf? What are *We*  
“to *You*? Are *You* our *Father*? Or  
“if *You* were, why this Concern  
“for *Us*? Is there then such a thing  
“as *natural Affection*? If not; why  
“all this Pains, why all this Dan-  
“ger on our account? Why not  
“keep this Secret to *Your* self? Of  
“what use is it to *You*, to take us  
“out of the Cheat? The more are  
“kept in it, the better. ’Tis direct-  
“ly against *Your* Interest to unde-  
“ceive *Us*, and let us know that  
“only private Interest governs *You*,  
“and

“ and that nothing nobler, or of a  
“ larger kind, shou’d govern us,  
“ whom you converse with. Leave  
“ us to our selves, and to that *Art*  
“ by which we are happily tam’d,  
“ and render’d thus mild and *sheepish*.  
“ ’Tis not fit we shou’d know that  
“ by *Nature* we are all *Wolves*. Is it  
“ possible that one who has really  
“ discover’d himself such, shou’d  
“ take pains to cummunicate such a  
“ Discovery ?”

I N reality (my Friend!) a severe  
Brow may well be spar’d on this oc-  
casion; when we are put thus upon  
the Defence of *common Honesty*, by  
such fair honest Gentlemen, who are  
in Practice so different from what  
they wou’d appear in Speculation.  
*Knaves* I know there are in *Notion*  
and *Principle*, as well as in *Practice*:  
who think all *Honesty* as well as  
*Religion* a mere Cheat; and, by a  
D very