AN ESSAY ON CONVERSATION.

Henry Fielding

Table of Contents

AN ESSAY ON CONVERSATION.

Henry Fielding

Man is generally represented as an animal formed for, and delighted in, society; in this state alone, it is said, his various talents can be exerted, his numberless necessities relieved, the dangers he is exposed to can be avoided, and many of the pleasures he eagerly affects enjoyed. If these assertions be, as I think they are, undoubtedly and obviously certain, those few who have denied man to be a social animal have left us these two solutions of their conduct; either that there are men as bold in denial as can be found in assertion and as Cicero says there is no absurdity which some philosopher or other hath not asserted, so we may say there is no truth so glaring that some have not denied it; or else that these rejectors of society borrow all their information from their own savage dispositions, and are, indeed, themselves, the only exceptions to the above general rule.

But to leave such persons to those who have thought them more worthy of an answer; there are others who are so seemingly fond of this social state, that they are understood absolutely to confine it to their own species; and entirely excluding the tamer and gentler, the herding and flocking parts of the creation, from all benefits of it, to set up this as one grand general distinction between the human and the brute species.

Shall we conclude this denial of all society to the nature of brutes, which seems to be in defiance of every day's observation, to be as bold as the denial of it to the nature of men? or, may we not more justly derive the error from an improper understanding of this word society in too confined and special a sense? in a word, do those who utterly deny it to the brutal nature mean any other by society than conversation?

Now, if we comprehend them in this sense, as I think we very reasonably may, the distinction appears to me to be truly just; for though other animals are not without all use of society, yet this noble branch of it seems, of all the inhabitants of this globe, confined to man only; the narrow power of communicating some few ideas of lust, or fear, or anger, which may be observable in brutes, falling infinitely short of what is commonly meant by conversation, as may be deduced from the origination of the word itself, the only accurate guide to knowledge. The primitive and literal sense of this word is, I apprehend, to turn round together; and in its more copious usage we intend by it that reciprocal interchange of ideas by which truth is examined, things are, in a manner, turned round and sifted, and all our knowledge communicated to each other.

In this respect man stands, I conceive, distinguished from, and superior to, all other earthly creatures; it is this privilege which, while he is inferior in strength to some, in swiftness to others; without horns or claws or tusks to attack them, or even to defend himself against them, hath made him master of them all. Indeed, in other views, however vain men may be of their abilities, they are greatly inferior to their animal neighbours.

With what envy must a swine, or a much less voracious animal, be surveyed by a glutton; and how contemptible must the talents of other sensualists appear, when opposed, perhaps, to some of the lowest and meanest of brutes! but in conversation man stands alone, at least in this part of the creation; he leaves all others behind him at his first start, and the greater progress he makes the greater distance is between them.

Conversation is of three sorts. Men are said to converse with God, with themselves, and with one another. The two first of these have been so liberally and excellently spoken to by others, that I shall at present pass them by and confine myself in this essay to the third only; since it seems to me amazing that this grand business of our

lives, the foundation of everything either useful or pleasant, should have been so slightly treated of, that, while there is scarce a profession or handicraft in life, however mean and contemptible, which is not abundantly furnished with proper rules to the attaining its perfection, men should be left almost totally in the dark, and without the least light to direct, or any guide to conduct them, in the proper exerting of those talents which are the noblest privilege of human nature and productive of all rational happiness; and the rather as this power is by no means self−instructed, and in the possession of the artless and ignorant is of so mean use that it raises them very little above those animals who are void of it.

As conversation is a branch of society, it follows that it can be proper to none who is not in his nature social. Now, society is agreeable to no creatures who are not inoffensive to each other; and we therefore observe in animals who are entirely guided by nature that it is cultivated by such only, while those of more noxious disposition addict themselves to solitude, and, unless when prompted by lust, or that necessary instinct implanted in them by nature for the nurture of their young, shun as much as possible the society of their own species. If therefore there should be found some human individuals of so savage a habit, it would seem they were not adapted to society, and, consequently, not to conversation; nor would any inconvenience ensue the admittance of such exceptions, since it would by no means impeach the general rule of man's being a social animal; especially when it appears (as is sufficiently and admirably proved by my friend the author of An Enquiry into Happiness) that these men live in a constant opposition to their own nature, and are no less monsters than the most wanton abortions or extravagant births.

Again; if society requires that its members should be inoffensive, so the more useful and beneficial they are to each other the more suitable are they to the social nature, and more perfectly adapted to its institution; for all creatures seek their own happiness, and society is therefore natural to any, because it is naturally productive of this happiness. To render therefore any animal social is to render it inoffensive; an instance of which is to be seen in those the ferocity of whose nature can be tamed by man. And here the reader may observe a double distinction of man from the more savage animals by society, and from the social by conversation.

But if men were merely inoffensive to each other, it seems as if society and conversation would be merely indifferent; and that, in order to make it desirable by a sensible being, it is necessary we should go farther and propose some positive good to ourselves from it; and this presupposes, not only negatively, our not receiving any hurt, but positively, our receiving some good, some pleasure or advantage, from each other in it, something which we could not find in an unsocial and solitary state; otherwise we might cry out with the right honourable poet [Footnote: The Duke of Buckingham.]

Give us our wildness and our woods,
Our huts and caves again.

The art of pleasing or doing good to one another is therefore the art of conversation. It is this habit which gives it all its value. And as man's being a social animal (the truth of which is incontestably proved by that excellent author of An Enquiry, &c., I have above cited) presupposes a natural desire or tendency this way, it will follow that we can fail in attaining this truly desirable end from ignorance only in the means; and how general this ignorance is may be, with some probability, inferred from our want of even a word to express this art by; that which comes the nearest to it, and by which, perhaps, we would sometimes intend it, being so horribly and barbarously corrupted, that it contains at present scarce a simple ingredient of what it seems originally to have been designed to express.

The word I mean is good breeding; a word, I apprehend, not at first confined to externals, much less to any particular dress or attitude of the body; nor were the qualifications expressed by it to be furnished by a milliner, a taylor, or a perriwig−maker; no, nor even by a dancing−master himself. According to the idea I myself conceive from this word, I should not have scrupled to call Socrates a well−bred man, though, I believe, he was very little instructed by any of the persons I have above enumerated. In short, by good−breeding (notwithstanding the

corrupt use of the word in a very different sense) I mean the art of pleasing, or contributing as much as possible to the ease and happiness of those with whom you converse. I shall contend therefore no longer on this head; for, whilst my reader clearly conceives the sense in which I use this word, it will not be very material whether I am right or wrong in its original application.

Good−breeding then, or the art of pleasing in conversation, is expressed two different ways, viz., in our actions and our words, and our conduct in both may be reduced to that concise, comprehensive rule in scripture Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you. Indeed, concise as this rule is, and plain as it appears, what are all treatises on ethics but comments upon it? and whoever is well read in the book of nature, and hath made much observation on the actions of men, will perceive so few capable of judging or rightly pursuing their own happiness, that he will be apt to conclude that some attention is necessary (and more than is commonly used) to enable men to know truly what they would have done unto them, or, at least, what it would be their interest to have done.

If therefore men, through weakness or inattention, often err in their conceptions of what would produce their own happiness, no wonder they should miss in the application of what will contribute to that of others; and thus we may, without too severe a censure on their inclinations, account for that frequent failure in true good−breeding which daily experience gives us instances of.

Besides, the commentators have well paraphrased on the above−mentioned divine rule, that it is, to do unto men what you would they (if they were in your situation and circumstances, and you in theirs) should do unto you; and, as this comment is necessary to be observed in ethics, so it is particularly useful in this our art, where the degree of the person is always to be considered, as we shall explain more at large hereafter.

We see then a possibility for a man well disposed to this golden rule, without some precautions, to err in the practice; nay, even good−nature itself, the very habit of mind most essential to furnish us with true good−breeding, the latter so nearly resembling the former, that it hath been called, and with the appearance at least of propriety, artificial good−nature. This excellent quality itself sometimes shoots us beyond the mark, and shews the truth of those lines in Horace:

Insani sapiens nomen ferat, sequus iniqui,
Ultra quam satis est, Virtutem si petal ipsam.

Instances of this will be naturally produced where we shew the deviations from those rules which we shall now attempt to lay down.

As this good−breeding is the art of pleasing, it will be first necessary with the utmost caution to avoid hurting or giving any offence to those with whom we converse. And here we are surely to shun any kind of actual disrespect, or affront to their persons, by insolence, which is the severest attack that can be made on the pride of man, and of which Florus seems to have no inadequate opinion when, speaking of the second Tarquin, he says; *in omnes superbid (qua crudelitate gravior est BONIS) grassatus*; He trod on all with insolence, which sits heavier on men of great minds than cruelty itself. If there is any temper in man which more than all others disqualifies him for society, it is this insolence or haughtiness, which, blinding a man to his own imperfections, and giving him a hawk's quicksightedness to those of others, raises in him that contempt for his species which inflates the cheeks, erects the head, and stiffens the gaite of those strutting animals who sometimes stalk in assemblies, for no other reason but to shew in their gesture and behaviour the disregard they have for the company. Though to a truly great and philosophical mind it is not easy to conceive a more ridiculous exhibition than this puppet, yet to others he is little less than a nuisance; for contempt is a murtherous weapon, and there is this difference only between the greatest and weakest man when attacked by it, that, in order to wound the former, it must be just; whereas, without the shields of wisdom and philosophy, which God knows are in the possession of very few, it wants no justice to point it, but is certain to penetrate, from whatever corner it comes. It is this disposition which inspires

the empty Cacus to deny his acquaintance, and overlook men of merit in distress; and the little silly, pretty Phillida, or Foolida, to stare at the strange creatures round her. It is this temper which constitutes the supercilious eye, the reserved look, the distant bowe, the scornful leer, the affected astonishment, the loud whisper, ending in a laugh directed full in the teeth of another. Hence spring, in short, those numberless offences given too frequently, in public and private assemblies, by persons of weak understandings, indelicate habits, and so hungry and foul−feeding a vanity that it wants to devour whatever comes in its way. Now, if good−breeding be what we have endeavoured to prove it, how foreign, and indeed how opposite to it, must such a behaviour be! and can any man call a duke or a dutchess who wears it well−bred? or are they not more justly entitled to those inhuman names which they themselves allot to the lowest vulgar? But behold a more pleasing picture on the reverse. See the earl of C , noble in his birth, splendid in his fortune, and embellished with every endowment of mind; how affable! how condescending! himself the only one who seems ignorant that he is every way the greatest person in the room.

But it is not sufficient to be inoffensive we must be profitable servants to each other: we are, in the second place, to proceed to the utmost verge in paying the respect due to others. We had better go a little too far than stop short in this particular. My lord Shaftesbury hath a pretty observation, that the beggar, in addressing to a coach with, My lord, is sure not to offend, even though there be no lord there; but, on the contrary, should plain sir fly in the face of a nobleman, what must be the consequence? And, indeed, whoever considers the bustle and contention about precedence, the pains and labours undertaken, and sometimes the prices given, for the smallest title or mark of pre−eminence, and the visible satisfaction betrayed in its enjoyment, may reasonably conclude this is a matter of no small consequence. The truth is, we live in a world of common men, and not of philosophers; for one of these, when he appears (which is very seldom) among us, is distinguished, and very properly too, by the name of an odd fellow; for what is it less than extreme oddity to despise what the generality of the world think the labour of their whole lives well employed in procuring? we are therefore to adapt our behaviour to the opinion of the generality of mankind, and not to that of a few odd fellows.

It would be tedious, and perhaps impossible, to specify every instance, or to lay down exact rules for our conduct in every minute particular. However, I shall mention some of the chief which most ordinarily occur, after premising that the business of the whole is no more than to convey to others an idea of your esteem of them, which is indeed the substance of all the compliments, ceremonies, presents, and whatever passes between well−bred people. And here I shall lay down these positions:

First, that all meer ceremonies exist in form only, and have in them no substance at all; but, being imposed by the laws of custom, become essential to good−breeding, from those high−flown compliments paid to the Eastern monarchs, and which pass between Chinese mandarines, to those coarser ceremonials in use between English farmers and Dutch boors.

Secondly, that these ceremonies, poor as they are, are of more consequence than they at first appear, and, in reality, constitute the only external difference between man and man. Thus, His grace, Right honourable, My lord, Right reverend, Reverend, Honourable, Sir, Esquire, Mr, &c., have in a philosophical sense no meaning, yet are perhaps politically essential, and must be preserved by good−breeding; because,

Thirdly, they raise an expectation in the person by law and custom entitled to them, and who will consequently be displeased with the disappointment.

Now, in order to descend minutely into any rules for good−breeding, it will be necessary to lay some scene, or to throw our disciple into some particular circumstance. We will begin them with a visit in the country; and as the principal actor on this occasion is the person who receives it, we will, as briefly as possible, lay down some general rules for his conduct; marking, at the same time, the principal deviations we have observed on these occasions.

When an expected guest arrives to dinner at your house, if your equal, or indeed not greatly your inferior, he should be sure to find your family in some order, and yourself dressed and ready to receive him at your gate with a smiling countenance. This infuses an immediate chearfulness into your guest, and persuades him of your esteem and desire of his company. Not so is the behaviour of Polysperchon, at whose gate you are obliged to knock a considerable time before you gain admittance. At length, the door being opened to you by a maid or some improper servant, who wonders where the devil all the men are, and, being asked if the gentleman is at home, answers she believes so, you are conducted into a hall, or back−parlour, where you stay some time before the gentleman, in a dishabille from his study or his garden, waits upon you, asks pardon, and assures you he did not expect you so soon.

Your guest, being introduced into a drawing−room, is, after the first ceremonies, to be asked whether he will refresh himself after his journey, before dinner (for which he is never to stay longer than the usual or fixed hour). But this request is never to be repeated oftener than twice, not in imitation of Calepus, who, as if hired by a physician, crams wine in a morning down the throats of his most temperate friends, their constitutions being not so dear to them as their present quiet.

When dinner is on the table, and the ladies have taken their places, the gentlemen are to be introduced into the eating−room, where they are to be seated with as much seeming indifference as possible, unless there be any present whose degrees claim an undoubted precedence. As to the rest, the general rules of precedence are by marriage, age, and profession. Lastly, in placing your guests, regard is rather to be had to birth than fortune; for, though purse−pride is forward enough to exalt itself, it bears a degradation with more secret comfort and ease than the former, as being more inwardly satisfied with itself, and less apprehensive of neglect or contempt.

The order in helping your guests is to be regulated by that of placing them; but here I must, with great submission, recommend to the lady at the upper end of the table to distribute her favours as equally and as impartially as she can. I have sometimes seen a large dish of fish extend no farther than to the fifth person, and a haunch of venison lose all its fat before half the table had tasted it.

A single request to eat of any particular dish, how elegant soever, is the utmost I allow. I strictly prohibit all earnest solicitations, all complaints that you have no appetite, which are sometimes little less than burlesque, and always impertinent and troublesome.

And here, however low it may appear to some readers, as I have known omissions of this kind give offence, and sometimes make the offenders, who have been very well−meaning persons, ridiculous, I cannot help mentioning the ceremonial of drinking healths at table, which is always to begin with the lady's and next the master's of the house.

When dinner is ended, and the ladies retired, though I do not hold the master of the feast obliged to fuddle himself through complacence (and, indeed, it is his own fault generally if his company be such as would desire it), yet he is to see that the bottle circulate sufficient to afford every person present a moderate quantity of wine if he chuses it; at the same time permitting those who desire it either to pass the bottle or to fill their glass as they please. Indeed, the beastly custom of besotting, and ostentatious contention for pre−eminence in their cups, seems at present pretty well abolished among the better sort of people. Yet Methus still remains, who measures the honesty and understanding of mankind by a capaciousness of their swallow; who sings forth the praises of a bumper, and complains of the light in your glass; and at whose table it is as difficult to preserve your senses as to preserve your purse at a gaming−table or your health at a b y−house. On the other side, Sophronus eyes you carefully whilst you are filling out his liquor. The bottle as surely stops when it comes to him as your chariot at Temple−bar; and it is almost as impossible to carry a pint of wine from his house as to gain the love of a reigning beauty, or borrow a shilling of P W .

But to proceed. After a reasonable time, if your guest intends staying with you the whole evening, and declines the bottle, you may propose play, walking, or any other amusement; but these are to be but barely mentioned, and offered to his choice with all indifference on your part. What person can be so dull as not to perceive in Agyrtes a longing to pick your pockets, or in Alazon a desire to satisfy his own vanity in shewing you the rarities of his house and gardens? When your guest offers to go, there should be no solicitations to stay, unless for the whole night, and that no farther than to give him a moral assurance of his being welcome so to do; no assertions that he shan't go yet; no laying on violent hands; no private orders to servants to delay providing the horses or vehicles like Desmophylax, who never suffers any one to depart from his house without entitling him to an action of false imprisonment.

Let us now consider a little the part which the visitor himself is to act. And first, he is to avoid the two extremes of being too early or too late, so as neither to surprise his friend unawares or unprovided, nor detain him too long in expectation. Orthrius, who hath nothing to do, disturbs your rest in a morning; and the frugal Chronophidus, lest he should waste some minutes of his precious time, is sure to spoil your dinner.

The address at your arrival should be as short as possible, especially when you visit a superior; not imitating Phlenaphius, who would stop his friend in the rain rather than omit a single bowe.

Be not too observant of trifling ceremonies, such as rising, sitting, walking first in or out of the room, except with one greatly your superior; but when such a one offers you precedence it is uncivil to refuse it; of which I will give you the following instance: An English nobleman, being in France, was bid by Louis XIV. to enter the coach before him, which he excused himself from. The king then immediately mounted, and, ordering the door to be shut, drove on, leaving the nobleman behind him.

Never refuse anything offered you out of civility, unless in preference of a lady, and that no oftener than once; for nothing is more truly good breeding than to avoid being troublesome. Though the taste and humour of the visitor is to be chiefly considered, yet is some regard likewise to be had to that of the master of the house; for otherwise your company will be rather a penance than a pleasure. Methusus plainly discovers his visit to be paid to his sober friend's bottle; nor will Philopasus abstain from cards, though he is certain they are agreeable only to himself; whilst the slender Leptines gives his fat entertainer a sweat, and makes him run the hazard of breaking his wind up his own mounts.

If conveniency allows your staying longer than the time proposed, it may be civil to offer to depart, lest your stay may be incommodious to your friend; but if you perceive the contrary, by his solicitations, they should be readily accepted, without tempting him to break these rules we have above laid down for him causing a confusion in his family and among his servants, by preparations for your departure. Lastly, when you are resolved to go, the same method is to be observed which I have prescribed at your arrival. No tedious ceremonies of taking leave not like Hyperphylus, who bows and kisses and squeezes by the hand as heartily, and wishes you as much health and happiness, when he is going a journey home of ten miles, from a common acquaintance, as if he was leaving his nearest friend or relation on a voyage to the East Indies.

Having thus briefly considered our reader in the circumstance of a private visit, let us now take him into a public assembly, where, as more eyes will be on his behaviour, it cannot be less his interest to be instructed. We have, indeed, already formed a general picture of the chief enormities committed on these occasions: we shall here endeavour to explain more particularly the rules of an opposite demeanour, which we may divide into three sorts, viz., our behaviour to our superiors, to our equals, and to our inferiors.

In our behaviour to our superiors two extremes are to be avoided; namely, an abject and base servility, and an impudent and encroaching freedom. When the well−bred Hyperdulus approaches a nobleman in any public place, you would be persuaded he was one of the meanest of his domestics; his cringes fall little short of prostration; and his whole behaviour is so mean and servile that an Eastern monarch would not require more humiliation from his

vassals. On the other side, Anaischyntus, whom fortunate accidents, without any pretensions from his birth, have raised to associate with his betters, shakes my lord duke by the hand with a familiarity savouring not only of the most perfect intimacy but the closest alliance. The former behaviour properly raises our contempt, the latter our disgust. Hyperdulus seems worthy of wearing his lordship's livery; Anaischyntus deserves to be turned out of his service for his impudence. Between these two is that golden mean which declares a man ready to acquiesce in allowing the respect due to a title by the laws and customs of his country, but impatient of any insult, and disdaining to purchase the intimacy with and favour of a superior at the expence of conscience or honour. As to the question, who are our superiors? I shall endeavour to ascertain them when I come, in the second place, to mention our behaviour to our equals: the first instruction on this head being carefully to consider who are such; every little superiority of fortune or profession being too apt to intoxicate men's minds, and elevate them in their own opinion beyond their merit or pretensions. Men are superior to each other in this our country by title, by birth, by rank in profession, and by age; very little, if any, being to be allowed to fortune, though so much is generally exacted by it and commonly paid to it. Mankind never appear to me in a more despicable light than when I see them, by a simple as well as mean servility, voluntarily concurring in the adoration of riches, without the least benefit or prospect from them. Respect and deference are perhaps justly demandable of the obliged, and may be, with some reason at least, from expectation, paid to the rich and liberal from the necessitous; but that men should be allured by the glittering of wealth only to feed the insolent pride of those who will not in return feed their hunger that the sordid niggard should find any sacrifices on the altar of his vanity seems to arise from a blinder idolatry, and a more bigoted and senseless superstition, than any which the sharp eyes of priests have discovered in the human mind.

All gentlemen, therefore, who are not raised above each other by title, birth, rank in profession, age, or actual obligation, being to be considered as equals, let us take some lessons for their behaviour to each other in public from the following examples; in which we shall discern as well what we are to elect as what we are to avoid. Authades is so absolutely abandoned to his own humour that he never gives it up on any occasion. If Seraphina herself, whose charms one would imagine should infuse alacrity into the limbs of a cripple sooner than the Bath waters, was to offer herself for his partner, he would answer he never danced, even though the ladies lost their ball by it. Nor doth this denial arise from incapacity, for he was in his youth an excellent dancer, and still retains sufficient knowledge of the art, and sufficient abilities in his limbs to practise it, but from an affectation of gravity which he will not sacrifice to the eagerest desire of others. Dyskolus hath the same aversion to cards; and though competently skilled in all games, is by no importunities to be prevailed on to make a third at ombre, or a fourth at whisk and quadrille. He will suffer any company to be disappointed of their amusement rather than submit to pass an hour or two a little disagreeably to himself. The refusal of Philautus is not so general; he is very ready to engage, provided you will indulge him in his favourite game, but it is impossible to persuade him to any other. I should add both these are men of fortune, and the consequences of loss or gain, at the rate they are desired to engage, very trifling and inconsiderable to them.

The rebukes these people sometimes meet with are no more equal to their deserts than the honour paid to Charistus, the benevolence of whose mind scarce permits him to indulge his own will, unless by accident. Though neither his age nor understanding incline him to dance, nor will admit his receiving any pleasure from it, yet would he caper a whole evening, rather than a fine young lady should lose an opportunity of displaying her charms by the several genteel and amiable attitudes which this exercise affords the skilful of that sex. And though cards are not adapted to his temper, he never once baulked the inclinations of others on that account.

But, as there are many who will not in the least instance mortify their own humour to purchase the satisfaction of all mankind, so there are some who make no scruple of satisfying their own pride and vanity at the expence of the most cruel mortification of others. Of this kind is Agroicus, who seldom goes to an assembly but he affronts half his acquaintance by overlooking or disregarding them.

As this is a very common offence, and indeed much more criminal, both in its cause and effect, than is generally imagined, I shall examine it very minutely, and I doubt not but to make it appear that there is no behaviour (to

speak like a philosopher) more contemptible, nor, in a civil sense, more detestable, than this.

The first ingredient in this composition is pride, which, according to the doctrine of some, is the universal passion. There are others who consider it as the foible of great minds; and others again who will have it to be the very foundation of greatness; and perhaps it may of that greatness which we have endeavoured to expose in many parts of these works; but to real greatness, which is the union of a good heart with a good head, it is almost diametrically opposite, as it generally proceeds from the depravity of both, and almost certainly from the badness of the latter. Indeed, a little observation will shew us that fools are the most addicted to this vice; and a little reflexion will teach us that it is incompatible with true understanding. Accordingly we see that, while the wisest of men have constantly lamented the imbecility and imperfection of their own nature, the meanest and weakest have been trumpeting forth their own excellencies and triumphing in their own sufficiency.

Pride may, I think, be properly defined, the pleasure we feel in contemplating our own superior merit, on comparing it with that of others. That it arises from this supposed superiority is evident; for, however great you admit a man's merit to be, if all men were equal to him, there would be no room for pride. Now if it stop here, perhaps there is no enormous harm in it, or at least no more than is common to all other folly; every species of which is always liable to produce every species of mischief: folly I fear it is; for, should the man estimate rightly on this occasion, and the ballance should fairly turn on his side in this particular instance; should he be indeed a greater orator, poet, general; should he be more wise, witty, learned, young, rich, healthy, or in whatever instance he may excel one, or many, or all; yet, if he examine himself thoroughly, will he find no reason to abate his pride? is the quality in which he is so eminent, so generally or justly esteemed? is it so entirely his own? doth he not rather owe his superiority to the defects of others than to his own perfection? or, lastly, can he find in no part of his character a weakness which may counterpoise this merit, and which as justly at least, threatens him with shame as this entices him to pride? I fancy, if such a scrutiny was made (and nothing so ready as good sense to make it), a proud man would be as rare as in reality he is a ridiculous monster. But suppose a man, on this comparison, is, as may sometimes happen, a little partial to himself, the harm is to himself, and he becomes only ridiculous from it. If I prefer my excellence in poetry to Pope or Young; if an inferior actor should, in his opinion, exceed Quin or Garrick; or a sign−post painter set himself above the inimitable Hogarth, we become only ridiculous by our vanity: and the persons themselves who are thus humbled in the comparison, would laugh with more reason than any other. Pride, therefore, hitherto seems an inoffensive weakness only, and entitles a man to no worse an appellation than that of a fool; but it will not stop here: though fool be perhaps no desirable term, the proud man will deserve worse; he is not contented with the admiration he pays himself, he now becomes arrogant, and requires the same respect and preference from the world; for pride, though the greatest of flatterers, is by no means a profitable servant to itself; it resembles the parson of the parish more than the squire, and lives rather on the tithes, oblations, and contributions it collects from others than on its own demesne. As pride therefore is seldom without arrogance, so is this never to be found without insolence. The arrogant man must be insolent in order to attain his own ends; and, to convince and remind men of the superiority he affects, will naturally, by ill−words, actions, and gestures, endeavour to throw the despised person at as much distance as possible from him.

Hence proceeds that supercilious look and all those visible indignities with which men behave in public to those whom they fancy their inferiors. Hence the very notable custom of deriding and often denying the nearest relations, friends, and acquaintance, in poverty and distress, lest we should anywise be levelled with the wretches we despise, either in their own imagination or in the conceit of any who should behold familiarities pass between us.

But besides pride, folly, arrogance, and insolence, there is another simple, which vice never willingly leaves out of any composition and this is ill−nature. A good−natured man may indeed (provided he is a fool) be proud, but arrogant and insolent he cannot be, unless we will allow to such a still greater degree of folly and ignorance of human nature; which may indeed entitle them to forgiveness in the benign language of scripture, because they know not what they do.

For, when we come to consider the effect of this behaviour on the person who suffers it, we may perhaps have reason to conclude that murder is not a much more cruel injury. What is the consequence of this contempt? or, indeed, what is the design of it but to expose the object of it to shame? a sensation as uneasy and almost intolerable as those which arise from the severest pains inflicted on the body; a convulsion of the mind (if I may so call it) which immediately produces symptoms of universal disorder in the whole man; which hath sometimes been attended with death itself, and to which death hath, by great multitudes, been with much alacrity preferred. Now, what less than the highest degree of ill−nature can permit a man to pamper his own vanity at the price of another's shame? Is the glutton, who, to raise the flavour of his dish, puts some birds or beasts to exquisite torment, more cruel to the animal than this our proud man to his own species?

This character then is a composition made up of those odious, contemptible qualities, pride, folly, arrogance, insolence, and ill−nature. I shall dismiss it with some general observations, which will place it in so ridiculous a light, that a man must hereafter be possessed of a very considerable portion either of folly or impudence to assume it.

First, it proceeds on one grand fallacy; for, whereas this wretch is endeavouring by a supercilious conduct to lead the beholder into an opinion of his superiority to the despised person, he inwardly flatters his own vanity with a deceitful presumption that this his conduct is founded on a general preconceived opinion of this superiority.

Secondly, this caution to preserve it plainly indicates a doubt that the superiority of our own character is very slightly established; for which reason we see it chiefly practised by men who have the weakest pretensions to the reputation they aim at; and, indeed, none was ever freer from it than that noble person whom we have already mentioned in this essay, and who can never be mentioned but with honour by those who know him.

Thirdly, this opinion of our superiority is commonly very erroneous. Who hath not seen a general behave in this supercilious manner to an officer of lower rank, who hath been greatly his superior in that very art to his excellence in which the general ascribes all his merit? Parallel instances occur in every other art, science, or profession.

Fourthly, men who excel others in trifling instances frequently cast a supercilious eye on their superiors in the highest. Thus the least pretensions to preeminence in title, birth, riches, equipages, dress, &c., constantly overlook the most noble endowments of virtue, honour, wisdom, sense, wit, and every other quality which can truly dignify and adorn a man.

Lastly, the lowest and meanest of our species are the most strongly addicted to this vice men who are a scandal to their sex, and women who disgrace human nature; for the basest mechanic is so far from being exempt that he is generally the most guilty of it. It visits ale−houses and gin−shops, and whistles in the empty heads of fidlers, mountebanks, and dancing−masters.

To conclude a character on which we have already dwelt longer than is consistent with the intended measure of this essay, this contempt of others is the truest symptom of a base and a bad heart. While it suggests itself to the mean and the vile, and tickles their little fancy on every occasion, it never enters the great and good mind but on the strongest motives; nor is it then a welcome guest, affording only an uneasy sensation, and brings always with it a mixture of concern and compassion.

We will now proceed to inferior criminals in society. Theoretus, conceiving that the assembly is only met to see and admire him, is uneasy unless he engrosses the eyes of the whole company. The giant doth not take more pains to be viewed; and, as he is unfortunately not so tall, he carefully deposits himself in the most conspicuous place; nor will that suffice he must walk about the room, though to the great disturbance of the company; and, if he can purchase general observation at no less rate, will condescend to be ridiculous; for he prefers being laughed at to being taken little notice of.

On the other side, Dusopius is so bashful that he hides himself in a corner; he hardly bears being looked at, and never quits the first chair he lights upon, lest he should expose himself to public view. He trembles when you bowe to him at a distance, is shocked at hearing his own voice, and would almost swoon at the repetition of his name.

The audacious Anedes, who is extremely amorous in his inclinations, never likes a woman but his eyes ask her the question, without considering the confusion he often occasions to the object; he ogles and languishes at every pretty woman in the room. As there is no law of morality which he would not break to satisfy his desires, so is there no form of civility which he doth not violate to communicate them. When he gets possession of a woman's hand, which those of stricter decency never give him but with reluctance, he considers himself as its master. Indeed, there is scarce a familiarity which he will abstain from on the slightest acquaintance, and in the most public place. Seraphina herself can make no impression on the rough temper of Agroicus; neither her quality nor her beauty can exact the least complacence from him; and he would let her lovely limbs ach rather than offer her his chair: while the gentle Lyperus tumbles over benches and overthrows tea−tables to take up a fan or a glove; he forces you, as a good parent doth his child, for your own good; he is absolute master of a lady's will, nor will allow her the election of standing or sitting in his company. In short, the impertinent civility of Lyperus is as troublesome, though perhaps not so offensive, as the brutish rudeness of Agroicus.

Thus we have hinted at most of the common enormities committed in public assemblies to our equals; for it would be tedious and difficult to enumerate all: nor is it needful; since from this sketch we may trace all others, most of which, I believe, will be found to branch out from some of the particulars here specified.

I am now, in the last place, to consider our behaviour to our inferiors, in which condescension can never be too strongly recommended; for, as a deviation on this side is much more innocent than on the other, so the pride of man renders us much less liable to it. For, besides that we are apt to overrate our own perfections, and undervalue the qualifications of our neighbours, we likewise set too high an esteem on the things themselves, and consider them as constituting a more essential difference between us than they really do. The qualities of the mind do, in reality, establish the truest superiority over one another: yet should not these so far elevate our pride as to inflate us with contempt, and make us look down on our fellow−creatures as on animals of an inferior order; but that the fortuitous accident of birth, the acquisition of wealth, with some outward ornaments of dress, should inspire men with an insolence capable of treating the rest of mankind with disdain, is so preposterous that nothing less than daily experience could give it credit. If men were to be rightly estimated, and divided into subordinate classes according to the superior excellence of their several natures, perhaps the lowest class of either sex would be properly assigned to those two disgraces of the human species, commonly called a beau and a fine lady; for, if we rate men by the faculties of the mind, in what degree must these stand? nay, admitting the qualities of the body were to give the pre−eminence, how many of those whom fortune hath placed in the lowest station must be ranked above them? If dress is their only title, sure even the monkey, if as well dressed, is on as high a footing as the beau. But perhaps I shall be told they challenge their dignity from birth; that is a poor and mean pretence to honour when supported with no other. Persons who have no better claim to superiority should be ashamed of this; they are really a disgrace to those very ancestors from whom they would derive their pride, and are chiefly happy in this, that they want the very moderate portion of understanding which would enable them to despise themselves.

And yet who so prone to a contemptuous carriage as these? I have myself seen a little female thing which they have called my lady, of no greater dignity in the order of beings than a cat, and of no more use in society than a butterfly; whose mien would not give even the idea of a gentlewoman, and whose face would cool the loosest libertine; with a mind as empty of ideas as an opera, and a body fuller of diseases than an hospital I have seen this thing express contempt to a woman who was an honour to her sex and an ornament to the creation.

To confess the truth, there is little danger of the possessor's ever undervaluing this titular excellence. Not that I would withdraw from it that deference which the policy of government hath assigned it. On the contrary, I have

laid down the most exact compliance with this respect, as a fundamental in good−breeding; nay, I insist only that we may be admitted to pay it, and not treated with a disdain even beyond what the eastern monarchs shew to their slaves. Surely it is too high an elevation when, instead of treating the lowest human creature, in a Christian sense, as our brethren, we look down on such as are but one rank in the civil order removed from us as unworthy to breathe even the same air, and regard the most distant communication with them as an indignity and disgrace offered to ourselves. This is considering the difference not in the individual, but in the very species; a height of insolence impious in a Christian society, and most absurd and ridiculous in a trading nation.

I have now done with my first head, in which I have treated of good−breeding, as it regards our actions. I shall, in the next place, consider it with respect to our words, and shall endeavour to lay down some rules, by observing which our well−bred man may, in his discourse as well as actions, contribute to the happiness and well−being of society.

Certain it is, that the highest pleasure which we are capable of enjoying in conversation is to be met with only in the society of persons whose understanding is pretty near on an equality with our own; nor is this equality only necessary to enable men of exalted genius and extensive knowledge to taste the sublimer pleasures of communicating their refined ideas to each other; but it is likewise necessary to the inferior happiness of every subordinate degree of society, down to the very lowest. For instance; we will suppose a conversation between Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and three dancing−masters. It will be acknowledged, I believe, that the heel sophists would be as little pleased with the company of the philosophers as the philosophers with theirs.

It would be greatly, therefore, for the improvement and happiness of conversation, if society could be formed on this equality; but, as men are not ranked in this world by the different degrees of their understanding, but by other methods, and consequently all degrees of understanding often meet in the same class, and must *ex necessitate* frequently converse together, the impossibility of accomplishing any such Utopian scheme very plainly appears. Here therefore is a visible but unavoidable imperfection in society itself.

But, as we have laid it down as a fundamental that the essence of good−breeding is to contribute as much as possible to the ease and happiness of mankind, so will it be the business of our well−bred man to endeavour to lessen this imperfection to his utmost, and to bring society as near to a level at least as he is able.

Now there are but two ways to compass this, viz., by raising the lower, and by lowering what is higher.

Let us suppose, then, that very unequal company I have before mentioned met; the former of these is apparently impracticable. Let Socrates, for instance, institute a discourse on the nature of the soul, or Plato reason on the native beauty of virtue, and Aristotle on his occult qualities What must become of our dancing−masters? Would they not stare at one another with surprise, and, most probably, at our philosophers with contempt? Would they have any pleasure in such society? or would they not rather wish themselves in a dancing−school, or a green−room at the playhouse? What, therefore, have our philosophers to do but to lower themselves to those who cannot rise to them?

And surely there are subjects on which both can converse. Hath not Socrates heard of harmony? Hath not Plato, who draws virtue in the person of a fine woman, any idea of the gracefulness of attitude? and hath not Aristotle himself written a book on motion?

In short, to be a little serious, there are many topics on which they can at least be intelligible to each other.

How absurd, then, must appear the conduct of Cenodoxus, who, having had the advantage of a liberal education, and having made a pretty good progress in literature, is constantly advancing learned subjects in common conversation? He talks of the classics before the ladies, and of Greek criticisms among fine gentlemen. What is this less than an insult on the company over whom he thus affects a superiority, and whose time he sacrifices to

his vanity?

Wisely different is the amiable conduct of Sophronus; who, though he exceeds the former in knowledge, can submit to discourse on the most trivial matters, rather than introduce such as his company are utter strangers to. He can talk of fashions and diversions among the ladies; nay, can even condescend to horses and dogs with country gentlemen. This gentleman, who is equal to dispute on the highest and abstrusest points, can likewise talk on a fan or a horse−race; nor had ever any one who was not himself a man of learning, the least reason to conceive the vast knowledge of Sophronus, unless from the report of others.

Let us compare these together. Cenodoxus proposes the satisfaction of his own pride from the admiration of others; Sophronus thinks of nothing but their amusement. In the company of Cenodoxus every one is rendered uneasy, laments his own want of knowledge, and longs for the end of the dull assembly; with Sophronus all are pleased, and contented with themselves in their knowledge of matters which they find worthy the consideration of a man of sense. Admiration is involuntarily paid the former: to the latter it is given joyfully. The former receives it with envy and hatred; the latter enjoys it as the sweet fruit of goodwill. The former is shunned; the latter courted by all.

This behaviour in Cenodoxus may, in some measure, account for an observation we must have frequent occasion to make; that the conversation of men of very moderate capacities is often preferred to that of men of superior talents; in which the world act more wisely than at first they may seem; for, besides that backwardness in mankind to give their admiration, what can be duller or more void of pleasure than discourses on subjects above our comprehension? It is like listening to an unknown language; and, if such company is ever desired by us, it is a sacrifice to our vanity, which imposes on us to believe that we may by these means raise the general opinion of our own parts and knowledge, and not from that cheerful delight which is the natural result of an agreeable conversation.

There is another very common fault, equally destructive of this delight, by much the same means, though it is far from owing its original to any real superiority of parts and knowledge; this is discoursing on the mysteries of a particular profession, to which all the rest of the company, except one or two, are utter strangers. Lawyers are generally guilty of this fault, as they are more confined to the conversation of one another; and I have known a very agreeable company spoilt, where there have been two of these gentlemen present, who have seemed rather to think themselves in a court of justice than in a mixed assembly of persons met only for the entertainment of each other.

But it is not sufficient that the whole company understand the topic of their conversation; they should be likewise equally interested in every subject not tending to their general information or amusement; for these are not to be postponed to the relation of private affairs, much less of the particular grievance or misfortune of a single person. To bear a share in the afflictions of another is a degree of friendship not to be expected in a common acquaintance; nor hath any man a right to indulge the satisfaction of a weak and mean mind by the comfort of pity at the expence of the whole company's diversion. The inferior and unsuccessful members of the several professions are generally guilty of this fault; for, as they fail of the reward due to their great merit, they can seldom refrain from reviling their superiors, and complaining of their own hard and unjust fate.

Farther, as a man is not to make himself the subject of the conversation, so neither is he to engross the whole to himself. As every man had rather please others by what he says than be himself pleased by what they say; or, in other words, as every man is best pleased with the consciousness of pleasing, so should all have an equal opportunity of aiming at it. This is a right which we are so offended at being deprived of, that, though I remember to have known a man reputed a good companion, who seldom opened his mouth in company, unless to swallow his liquor, yet I have scarce ever heard that appellation given to a very talkative person, even when he hath been capable of entertaining, unless he hath done this with buffoonery, and made the rest amends by partaking of their scorn together with their admiration and applause.

A well−bred man, therefore, will not take more of the discourse than falls to his share; nor in this will he shew any violent impetuosity of temper, or exert any loudness of voice, even in arguing; for the information of the company, and the conviction of his antagonist, are to be his apparent motives; not the indulgence of his own pride, or an ambitious desire of victory; which latter, if a wise man should entertain, he will be sure to conceal with his utmost endeavour; since he must know that to lay open his vanity in public is no less absurd than to lay open his bosom to an enemy whose drawn sword is pointed against it; for every man hath a dagger in his hand ready to stab the vanity of another wherever he perceives it.

Having now shewn that the pleasure of conversation must arise from the discourse being on subjects levelled to the capacity of the whole company; from being on such in which every person is equally interested; from every one's being admitted to his share in the discourse; and, lastly, from carefully avoiding all noise, violence, and impetuosity; it might seem proper to lay down some particular rules for the choice of those subjects which are most likely to conduce to the cheerful delights proposed from this social communication; but, as such an attempt might appear absurd, from the infinite variety, and perhaps too dictatorial in its nature, I shall confine myself to rejecting those topics only which seem most foreign to this delight, and which are most likely to be attended with consequences rather tending to make society an evil than to procure us any good from it.

And, first, I shall mention that which I have hitherto only endeavoured to restrain within certain bounds, namely, arguments; but which, if they were entirely banished out of company, especially from mixed assemblies, and where ladies make part of the society, it would, I believe, promote their happiness; they have been sometimes attended with bloodshed, generally with hatred from the conquered party towards his victor; and scarce ever with conviction. Here I except jocose arguments, which often produce much mirth; and serious disputes between men of learning (when none but such are present), which tend to the propagation of knowledge and the edification of the company.

Secondly, slander; which, however frequently used, or however savoury to the palate of ill−nature, is extremely pernicious, as it is often unjust and highly injurious to the person slandered, and always dangerous, especially in large and mixed companies, where sometimes an undesigned offence is given to an innocent relation or friend of such person, who is thus exposed to shame and confusion, without having any right to resent the affront. Of this there have been very tragical instances; and I have myself seen some very ridiculous ones, but which have given great pain, as well to the person offended, as to him who hath been the innocent occasion of giving the offence.

Thirdly, all general reflections on countries, religions, and professions, which are always unjust. If these are ever tolerable, they are only from the persons who with some pleasantry ridicule their own country. It is very common among us to cast sarcasms on a neighbouring nation, to which we have no other reason to bear an antipathy than what is more usual than justifiable, because we have injured it; but sure such general satire is not founded on truth; for I have known gentlemen of that nation possessed with every good quality which is to be wished in a man or required in a friend. I remember a repartee made by a gentleman of this country, which, though it was full of the severest wit, the person to whom it was directed could not resent, as he so plainly deserved it. He had with great bitterness inveighed against this whole people; upon which one of them who was present very coolly answered, I don't know, sir, whether I have not more reason to be pleased with the compliment you pay my country than to be angry with what you say against it; since, by your abusing us all so heavily, you have plainly implied you are not of it. This exposed the other to so much laughter, especially as he was not unexceptionable in his character, that I believe he was sufficiently punished for his ill−mannered satire.

Fourthly, blasphemy, and irreverent mention of religion. I will not here debate what compliment a man pays to his own understanding by the profession of infidelity; it is sufficient to my purpose that he runs the risque of giving the cruelest offence to persons of a different temper; for, if a loyalist would be greatly affronted by hearing any indecencies offered to the person of a temporal prince, how much more bitterly must a man who sincerely believes in such a being as the Almighty, feel any irreverence or insult shewn to His name, His honour, or His institution? And, notwithstanding the impious character of the present age, and especially of many among those

whose more immediate business it is to lead men, as well by example as precept, into the ways of piety, there are still sufficient numbers left who pay so honest and sincere a reverence to religion, as may give us a reasonable expectation of finding one at least of this stamp in every large company.

A fifth particular to be avoided is indecency. We are not only to forbear the repeating of such words as would give an immediate affront to a lady of reputation, but the raising of any loose ideas tending to the offence of that modesty which, if a young woman hath not something more than the affectation of, she is not worthy the regard even of a man of pleasure, provided he hath any delicacy in his constitution. How inconsistent with good−breeding it is to give pain and confusion to such, is sufficiently apparent; all *double−entendres* and obscene jests are therefore carefully to be avoided before them. But suppose no ladies present, nothing can be meaner, lower, and less productive of rational mirth, than this loose conversation. For my own part, I cannot conceive how the idea of jest or pleasantry came ever to be annexed to one of our highest and most serious pleasures. Nor can I help observing, to the discredit of such merriment, that it is commonly the last resource of impotent wit, the weak strainings of the lowest, silliest, and dullest fellows in the world.

Sixthly, you are to avoid knowingly mentioning anything which may revive in any person the remembrance of some past accident, or raise an uneasy reflection on a present misfortune or corporal blemish. To maintain this rule nicely, perhaps, requires great delicacy; but it is absolutely necessary to a well−bred man. I have observed numberless breaches of it; many, I believe, proceeding from negligence and inadvertency; yet I am afraid some may be too justly imputed to a malicious desire of triumphing in our own superior happiness and perfections; now, when it proceeds from this motive it is not easy to imagine anything more criminal.

Under this head I shall caution my well−bred reader against a common fault, much of the same nature; which is, mentioning any particular quality as absolutely essential to either man or woman, and exploding all those who want it. This renders every one uneasy who is in the least self−conscious of the defect. I have heard a boor of fashion declare in the presence of women remarkably plain, that beauty was the chief perfection of that sex, and an essential without which no woman was worth regarding; a certain method of putting all those in the room, who are but suspicious of their defect that way, out of countenance.

I shall mention one fault more, which is, not paying a proper regard to the present temper of the company, or the occasion of their meeting, in introducing a topic of conversation, by which as great an absurdity is sometimes committed, as it would be to sing a dirge at a wedding, or an epithalamium at a funeral.

Thus I have, I think, enumerated most of the principal errors which we are apt to fall into in conversation; and though, perhaps, some particulars worthy of remark may have escaped me, yet an attention to what I have here said may enable the reader to discover them. At least I am persuaded that, if the rules I have now laid down were strictly observed, our conversation would be more perfect, and the pleasure resulting from it purer and more unsullied, than at present it is.

But I must not dismiss this subject without some animadversions on a particular species of pleasantry, which, though I am far from being desirous of banishing from conversation, requires, most certainly, some reins to govern, and some rule to direct it. The reader may perhaps guess I mean raillery; to which I may apply the fable of the lap−dog and the ass; for, while in some hands it diverts and delights us with its dexterity and gentleness, in others, it paws, daubs, offends, and hurts.

The end of conversation being the happiness of mankind, and the chief means to procure their delight and pleasure, it follows, I think, that nothing can conduce to this end which tends to make a man uneasy and dissatisfied with himself, or which exposes him to the scorn and contempt of others. I here except that kind of raillery, therefore, which is concerned in tossing men out of their chairs, tumbling them into water, or any of those handicraft jokes which are exercised on those notable persons commonly known by the name of buffoons; who are contented to feed their belly at the price of their br ch, and to carry off the wine and the p ss of a great man

together. This I pass by, as well as all remarks on the genius of the great men themselves, who are (to fetch a phrase from school, a phrase not improperly mentioned on this occasion) great dabs at this kind of facetiousness.

But, leaving all such persons to expose human nature among themselves, I shall recommend to my well−bred man, who aims at raillery, the excellent character given of Horace by Persius:

Omne vafer vitium ridenti Flaccus amico
Tangit, et admissus circum praecordia ludit,
Callidus excusso populum suspendere naso.

Thus excellently rendered by the late ingenious translator of that obscure author:

Yet could shrewd Horace, with disportive wit,
Rally his friend, and tickle while he bit;
Winning access, he play'd around the heart,
And, gently touching, prick'd the tainted part.
The crowd he sneer'd; but sneer'd with such a grace,
It pass'd for downright innocence of face.

The raillery which is consistent with good−breeding is a gentle animadversion on some foible; which, while it raises a laugh in the rest of the company, doth not put the person rallied out of countenance, or expose him to shame and contempt. On the contrary, the jest should be so delicate that the object of it should be capable of joining in the mirth it occasions.

All great vices therefore, misfortunes, and notorious blemishes of mind or body, are improper subjects of raillery. Indeed, a hint at such is an abuse and an affront which is sure to give the person (unless he be one shameless and abandoned) pain and uneasiness, and should be received with contempt, instead of applause, by all the rest of the company.

Again; the nature and quality of the person are to be considered. As to the first, some men will not bear any raillery at all. I remember a gentleman who declared he never made a jest, nor would ever take one. I do not, indeed, greatly recommend such a person for a companion; but at the same time, a well−bred man, who is to consult the pleasure and happiness of the whole, is not at liberty to make any one present uneasy. By the quality, I mean the sex, degree, profession, and circumstances; on which head I need not be very particular. With regard to the two former, all raillery on ladies and superiors should be extremely fine and gentle; and with respect to the latter, any of the rules I have above laid down, most of which are to be applied to it, will afford sufficient caution.

Lastly, a consideration is to be had of the persons before whom we rally. A man will be justly uneasy at being reminded of those railleries in one company which he would very patiently bear the imputation of in another. Instances on this head are so obvious that they need not be mentioned. In short, the whole doctrine of raillery is comprized in this famous line:

Quid de *quoque* viro, et *cui* dicas, saepe
caveto.
Be cautious *what* you say, *of whom* and *to whom*

And now, methinks, I hear some one cry out that such restrictions are, in effect, to exclude all raillery from conversation; and, to confess the truth, it is a weapon from which many persons will do wisely in totally abstaining; for it is a weapon which doth the more mischief by how much the blunter it is. The sharpest wit therefore is only to be indulged the free use of it, for no more than a very slight touch is to be allowed; no hacking, nor bruising, as if they were to hew a carcase for hounds, as Shakspeare phrases it.

Nor is it sufficient that it be sharp, it must be used likewise with the utmost tenderness and good−nature; and, as the nicest dexterity of a gladiator is shewn in being able to hit without cutting deep, so is this of our railler, who is rather to tickle than wound.

True raillery indeed consists either in playing on peccadilloes, which, however they may be censured by some, are not esteemed as really blemishes in a character in the company where they are made the subject of mirth; as too much freedom with the bottle, or too much indulgence with women, &c.

Or, secondly, in pleasantly representing real good qualities in a false light of shame, and bantering them as ill ones. So generosity may be treated as prodigality; oeconomy as avarice; true courage as foolhardiness; and so of the rest.

Lastly, in ridiculing men for vices and faults which they are known to be free from. Thus the cowardice of A le, the dulness of Ch d, the unpoliteness of D ton, may be attacked without danger of offence; and thus Lyt n may be censured for whatever vice or folly you please to impute to him.

And, however limited these bounds may appear to some, yet, in skilful and witty hands, I have known raillery, thus confined, afford a very diverting, as well as inoffensive, entertainment to the whole company.

I shall conclude this essay with these two observations, which I think may be clearly deduced from what hath been said.

First, that every person who indulges his ill−nature or vanity at the expense of others, and in introducing uneasiness, vexation, and confusion into society, however exalted or high−titled he may be, is thoroughly ill−bred.

Secondly, that whoever, from the goodness of his disposition or understanding, endeavours to his utmost to cultivate the good−humour and happiness of others, and to contribute to the ease and comfort of all his acquaintance, however low in rank fortune may have placed him, or however clumsy he may be in his figure or demeanour, hath, in the truest sense of the word, a claim to good−breeding.