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The Double-Dealer

by William Congreve

February, 1998 [Etext #1191]

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THE DOUBLE-DEALER--A COMEDY

by William Congreve

Interdum tamen et vocem Comoedia tollit.--HOR. Ar. Po.
Huic equidem consilio palmam do: hic me magnifice
effero, qui vim tantam in me et potestatem habeam
tantae astutiae, vera dicendo ut eos ambos fallam.

SYR. in TERENCE. Heaut.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CHARLES MONTAGUE,
ONE OF THE LORDS OF THE TREASURY.

Sir,--I heartily wish this play were as perfect as I intended it,
that it might be more worthy your acceptance, and that my dedication
of it to you might be more becoming that honour and esteem which I,
with everybody who is so fortunate as to know you, have for you. It
had your countenance when yet unknown; and now it is made public, it
wants your protection.

I would not have anybody imagine that I think this play without its
faults, for I am conscious of several. I confess I designed
(whatever vanity or ambition occasioned that design) to have written
a true and regular comedy, but I found it an undertaking which put
me in mind of SUDET MULTUM, FRUSTRAQUE LABORET AUSUS IDEM. And now,
to make amends for the vanity of such a design, I do confess both
the attempt and the imperfect performance. Yet I must take the
boldness to say I have not miscarried in the whole, for the
mechanical part of it is regular. That I may say with as little
vanity as a builder may say he has built a house according to the
model laid down before him, or a gardener that he has set his
flowers in a knot of such or such a figure. I designed the moral
first, and to that moral I invented the fable, and do not know that
I have borrowed one hint of it anywhere. I made the plot as strong
as I could because it was single, and I made it single because I
would avoid confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three
unities of the drama. Sir, this discourse is very impertinent to
you, whose judgment much better can discern the faults than I can
excuse them; and whose good nature, like that of a lover, will find
out those hidden beauties (if there are any such) which it would be
great immodesty for me to discover. I think I don't speak
improperly when I call you a LOVER of poetry; for it is very well
known she has been a very kind mistress to you: she has not denied
you the last favour, and she has been fruitful to you in a most
beautiful issue. If I break off abruptly here, I hope everybody
will understand that it is to avoid a commendation which, as it is
your due, would be most easy for me to pay, and too troublesome for

you to receive.

I have since the acting of this play harkened after the objections which have been made to it, for I was conscious where a true critic might have put me upon my defence. I was prepared for the attack, and am pretty confident I could have vindicated some parts and excused others; and where there were any plain miscarriages, I would most ingenuously have confessed 'em. But I have not heard anything said sufficient to provoke an answer. That which looks most like an objection does not relate in particular to this play, but to all or most that ever have been written, and that is soliloquy. Therefore I will answer it, not only for my own sake, but to save others the trouble, to whom it may hereafter be objected.

I grant that for a man to talk to himself appears absurd and unnatural, and indeed it is so in most cases; but the circumstances which may attend the occasion make great alteration. It oftentimes happens to a man to have designs which require him to himself, and in their nature cannot admit of a confidant. Such for certain is all villainy, and other less mischievous intentions may be very improper to be communicated to a second person. In such a case, therefore, the audience must observe whether the person upon the stage takes any notice of them at all or no. For if he supposes any one to be by when he talks to himself, it is monstrous and ridiculous to the last degree. Nay, not only in this case, but in any part of a play, if there is expressed any knowledge of an audience, it is insufferable. But otherwise, when a man in soliloquy reasons with himself, and PRO'S and CON'S, and weighs all his designs, we ought not to imagine that this man either talks to us or to himself; he is only thinking, and thinking such matter as were inexcusable folly in him to speak. But because we are concealed spectators of the plot in agitation, and the poet finds it necessary to let us know the whole mystery of his contrivance, he is willing to inform us of this person's thoughts; and to that end is forced to make use of the expedient of speech, no other better way being yet invented for the communication of thought.

Another very wrong objection has been made by some who have not taken leisure to distinguish the characters. The hero of the play, as they are pleased to call him (meaning Mellefont), is a gull, and made a fool, and cheated. Is every man a gull and a fool that is deceived? At that rate I'm afraid the two classes of men will be reduced to one, and the knaves themselves be at a loss to justify their title. But if an open-hearted honest man, who has an entire confidence in one whom he takes to be his friend, and whom he has obliged to be so, and who, to confirm him in his opinion, in all appearance and upon several trials has been so: if this man be deceived by the treachery of the other, must he of necessity commence fool immediately, only because the other has proved a villain? Ay, but there was caution given to Mellefont in the first act by his friend Careless. Of what nature was that caution? Only to give the audience some light into the character of Maskwell before his appearance, and not to convince Mellefont of his

treachery; for that was more than Careless was then able to do: he never knew Maskwell guilty of any villainy; he was only a sort of man which he did not like. As for his suspecting his familiarity with my Lady Touchwood, let 'em examine the answer that Mellefont makes him, and compare it with the conduct of Maskwell's character through the play.

I would beg 'em again to look into the character of Maskwell before they accuse Mellefont of weakness for being deceived by him. For upon summing up the enquiry into this objection, it may be found they have mistaken cunning in one character for folly in another.

But there is one thing at which I am more concerned than all the false criticisms that are made upon me, and that is, some of the ladies are offended. I am heartily sorry for it, for I declare I would rather disoblige all the critics in the world than one of the fair sex. They are concerned that I have represented some women vicious and affected. How can I help it? It is the business of a comic poet to paint the vices and follies of humankind; and there are but two sexes, male and female, MEN and WOMEN, which have a title to humanity, and if I leave one half of them out, the work will be imperfect. I should be very glad of an opportunity to make my compliment to those ladies who are offended; but they can no more expect it in a comedy than to be tickled by a surgeon when he's letting 'em blood. They who are virtuous or discreet should not be offended, for such characters as these distinguish THEM, and make their beauties more shining and observed; and they who are of the other kind may nevertheless pass for such, by seeming not to be displeased or touched with the satire of this COMEDY. Thus have they also wrongfully accused me of doing them a prejudice, when I have in reality done them a service.

You will pardon me, sir, for the freedom I take of making answers to other people in an epistle which ought wholly to be sacred to you; but since I intend the play to be so too, I hope I may take the more liberty of justifying it where it is in the right.

I must now, sir, declare to the world how kind you have been to my endeavours; for in regard of what was well meant, you have excused what was ill performed. I beg you would continue the same method in your acceptance of this dedication. I know no other way of making a return to that humanity you shewed, in protecting an infant, but by enrolling it in your service, now that it is of age and come into the world. Therefore be pleased to accept of this as an acknowledgment of the favour you have shewn me, and an earnest of the real service and gratitude of,

Sir, your most obliged, humble servant,

WILLIAM CONGREVE.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND MR. CONGREVE,
ON HIS COMEDY CALLED THE DOUBLE-DEALER.

Well then, the promised hour is come at last;
The present age of wit obscures the past.
Strong were our sires; and as they fought they writ,
Conqu'ring with force of arms and dint of wit.
Theirs was the giant race, before the flood;
And thus, when Charles returned, our empire stood.
Like Janus he the stubborn soil manured,
With rules of husbandry the rankness cured,
Tamed us to manners, when the stage was rude,
And boist'rous English wit with art indued.
Our age was cultivated thus at length;
But what we gained in skill we lost in strength.
Our builders were with want of genius curst;
The second temple was not like the first:
Till you, the best Vitruvius, come at length,
Our beauties equal, but excel our strength.
Firm Doric pillars found your solid base,
The fair Corinthian crowns the higher space;
Thus all below is strength, and all above is grace.
In easy dialogue is Fletcher's praise:
He moved the mind, but had no power to raise.
Great Johnson did by strength of judgment please
Yet doubling Fletcher's force, he wants ease.
In diff'ring talents both adorned their age;
One for the study, t'other for the stage.
But both to Congreve justly shall submit,
One matched in judgment, both o'er-matched in wit.
In him all beauties of this age we see,
Etherege his courtship, Southern's purity,
The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherly.
All this in blooming youth you have achieved,
Nor are your foiled contemporaries grieved;
So much the sweetness of your manners move,
We cannot envy you, because we love.
Fabius might joy in Scipio, when he saw
A beardless consul made against the law,
And join his suffrage to the votes of Rome;
Though he with Hannibal was overcome.
Thus old Romano bowed to Raphael's fame,
And scholar to the youth he taught became.

O that your brows my laurel had sustained,
Well had I been deposed if you had reigned!
The father had descended for the son,
For only you are lineal to the throne.
Thus when the state one Edward did depose,
A greater Edward in his room arose.
But now, not I, but poetry is cursed;

For Tom the Second reigns like Tom the First.
But let 'em not mistake my patron's part,
Nor call his charity their own desert.
Yet this I prophesy: Thou shalt be seen
(Though with some short parenthesis between)
High on the throne of wit; and seated there,
Not mine (that's little) but thy laurel wear.
Thy first attempt an early promise made;
That early promise this has more than paid.
So bold, yet so judiciously you dare,
That your least praise is to be regular.
Time, place, and action may with pains be wrought,
But genius must be born, and never can be taught.
This is your portion, this your native store,
Heav'n, that but once was prodigal before,
To Shakespeare gave as much; she could not give him more.

Maintain your post: that's all the fame you need;
For 'tis impossible you should proceed.
Already I am worn with cares and age,
And just abandoning th' ungrateful stage:
Unprofitably kept at heav'n's expense,
I live a rent-charge on his providence.
But you, whom every muse and grace adorn,
Whom I foresee to better fortune born,
Be kind to my remains; and oh, defend,
Against your judgment, your departed friend!
Let not th' insulting foe my fame pursue;
But shade those laurels which descend to you:
And take for tribute what these lines express:
You merit more; nor could my love do less.

JOHN DRYDEN.

PROLOGUE--Spoken by Mrs. Bracegirdle.

Moors have this way (as story tells) to know
Whether their brats are truly got or no;
Into the sea the new-born babe is thrown,
There, as instinct directs, to swim or drown.
A barbarous device, to try if spouse
Has kept religiously her nuptial vows.

Such are the trials poets make of plays,
Only they trust to more inconstant seas;
So does our author, this his child commit
To the tempestuous mercy of the pit,
To know if it be truly born of wit.

Critics avaunt, for you are fish of prey,
And feed, like sharks, upon an infant play.
Be ev'ry monster of the deep away;
Let's have a fair trial and a clear sea.

Let nature work, and do not damn too soon,
For life will struggle long e'er it sink down:
And will at least rise thrice before it drown.
Let us consider, had it been our fate,
Thus hardly to be proved legitimate:
I will not say, we'd all in danger been,
Were each to suffer for his mother's sin:
But by my troth I cannot avoid thinking,
How nearly some good men might have 'scaped sinking.
But, heav'n be praised, this custom is confined
Alone to th' offspring of the muses kind:
Our Christian cuckolds are more bent to pity;
I know not one Moor-husband in the city.
I' th' good man's arms the chopping bastard thrives,
For he thinks all his own that is his wives'.

Whatever fate is for this play designed,
The poet's sure he shall some comfort find:
For if his muse has played him false, the worst
That can befall him, is, to be divorced:
You husbands judge, if that be to be cursed.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

MEN.

MASKWELL, a villain; pretended friend to Mellefont, gallant to Lady Touchwood, and in love with Cynthia,--Mr. Betterton

LORD TOUCHWOOD, uncle to Mellefont,--Mr. Kynaston

MELLEFONT, promised to, and in love with Cynthia,--Mr. Williams

CARELESS, his friend,--Mr. Verbruggen

LORD FROTH, a solemn coxcomb,--Mr. Bowman

BRISK, a pert coxcomb,--Mr. Powell

SIR PAUL PLYANT, an uxorious, foolish old knight; brother to Lady Touchwood, and father to Cynthia,--Mr. Dogget

WOMEN.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, in love with Mellefont,--Mrs. Barry

CYNTHIA, daughter to Sir Paul by a former wife, promised to Mellefont,--Mrs. Bracegirdle

LADY FROTH, a great coquette; pretender to poetry, wit, and learning,--Mrs. Mountfort

LADY PLYANT, insolent to her husband, and easy to any pretender,--Mrs. Leigh

CHAPLAIN, BOY, FOOTMEN, AND ATTENDANTS.

THE SCENE: A gallery in the Lord Touchwood's house, with chambers adjoining.

THE DOUBLE-DEALER--ACT I.--SCENE I.

A gallery in the Lord Touchwood's home, with chambers adjoining.

Enter CARELESS, crossing the stage, with his hat, gloves, and sword in his hands; as just risen from table: MELLEFONT following him.

MEL. Ned, Ned, whither so fast? What, turned flincher! Why, you wo' not leave us?

CARE. Where are the women? I'm weary of guzzling, and begin to think them the better company.

MEL. Then thy reason staggers, and thou'rt almost drunk.

CARE. No, faith, but your fools grow noisy; and if a man must endure the noise of words without sense, I think the women have more musical voices, and become nonsense better.

MEL. Why, they are at the end of the gallery; retired to their tea and scandal, according to their ancient custom, after dinner. But I made a pretence to follow you, because I had something to say to you in private, and I am not like to have many opportunities this evening.

CARE. And here's this coxcomb most critically come to interrupt you.

SCENE II.

[To them] BRISK.

BRISK. Boys, boys, lads, where are you? What, do you give ground? Mortgage for a bottle, ha? Careless, this is your trick; you're always spoiling company by leaving it.

CARE. And thou art always spoiling company by coming in o't.

BRISK. Pooh, ha, ha, ha, I know you envy me. Spite, proud spite, by the gods! and burning envy. I'll be judged by Mellefont here, who gives and takes raillery better than you or I. Pshaw, man, when I say you spoil company by leaving it, I mean you leave nobody for the company to laugh at. I think there I was with you. Ha, Mellefont?

MEL. O' my word, Brisk, that was a home thrust; you have silenced him.

BRISK. Oh, my dear Mellefont, let me perish if thou art not the soul of conversation, the very essence of wit and spirit of wine. The deuce take me if there were three good things said, or one understood, since thy amputation from the body of our society. He, I think that's pretty and metaphorical enough; i'gad I could not have said it out of thy company. Careless, ha?

CARE. Hum, ay, what is't?

BRISK. O MON COEUR! What is't! Nay, gad, I'll punish you for want of apprehension. The deuce take me if I tell you.

MEL. No, no, hang him, he has no taste. But, dear Brisk, excuse me, I have a little business.

CARE. Prithee get thee gone; thou seest we are serious.

MEL. We'll come immediately, if you'll but go in and keep up good humour and sense in the company. Prithee do, they'll fall asleep else.

BRISK. I'gad, so they will. Well, I will, I will; gad, you shall command me from the Zenith to the Nadir. But the deuce take me if I say a good thing till you come. But prithee, dear rogue, make haste, prithee make haste, I shall burst else. And yonder your uncle, my Lord Touchwood, swears he'll disinherit you, and Sir Paul Plyant threatens to disclaim you for a son-in-law, and my Lord Froth won't dance at your wedding to-morrow; nor, the deuce take me, I won't write your Epithalamium--and see what a condition you're like to be brought to.

MEL. Well, I'll speak but three words, and follow you.

BRISK. Enough, enough. Careless, bring your apprehension along with you.

SCENE III.

MELLEFONT, CARELESS.

CARE. Pert coxcomb.

MEL. Faith, 'tis a good-natured coxcomb, and has very entertaining follies. You must be more humane to him; at this juncture it will do me service. I'll tell you, I would have mirth continued this day at any rate; though patience purchase folly, and attention be paid with noise, there are times when sense may be unseasonable as well as truth. Prithee do thou wear none to-day, but allow Brisk to have wit, that thou may'st seem a fool.

CARE. Why, how now, why this extravagant proposition?

MEL. Oh, I would have no room for serious design, for I am jealous of a plot. I would have noise and impertinence keep my Lady Touchwood's head from working: for hell is not more busy than her brain, nor contains more devils than that imaginations.

CARE. I thought your fear of her had been over. Is not to-morrow appointed for your marriage with Cynthia, and her father, Sir Paul Plyant, come to settle the writings this day on purpose?

MEL. True; but you shall judge whether I have not reason to be alarmed. None besides you and Maskwell are acquainted with the secret of my Aunt Touchwood's violent passion for me. Since my first refusal of her addresses she has endeavoured to do me all ill offices with my uncle, yet has managed 'em with that subtilty, that to him they have borne the face of kindness; while her malice, like a dark lanthorn, only shone upon me where it was directed. Still, it gave me less perplexity to prevent the success of her displeasure than to avoid the importunities of her love, and of two evils I thought myself favoured in her aversion. But whether urged by her despair and the short prospect of time she saw to accomplish her designs; whether the hopes of revenge, or of her love, terminated in the view of this my marriage with Cynthia, I know not, but this morning she surprised me in my bed.

CARE. Was there ever such a fury! 'Tis well nature has not put it into her sex's power to ravish. Well, bless us, proceed. What followed?

MEL. What at first amazed me--for I looked to have seen her in all the transports of a slighted and revengeful woman--but when I expected thunder from her voice, and lightning in her eyes, I saw her melted into tears and hushed into a sigh. It was long before

either of us spoke: passion had tied her tongue, and amazement mine. In short, the consequence was thus, she omitted nothing that the most violent love could urge, or tender words express; which when she saw had no effect, but still I pleaded honour and nearness of blood to my uncle, then came the storm I feared at first, for, starting from my bed-side like a fury, she flew to my sword, and with much ado I prevented her doing me or herself a mischief. Having disarmed her, in a gust of passion she left me, and in a resolution, confirmed by a thousand curses, not to close her eyes till they had seen my ruin.

CARE. Exquisite woman! But what the devil, does she think thou hast no more sense than to get an heir upon her body to disinherit thyself? for as I take it this settlement upon you is, with a proviso, that your uncle have no children.

MEL. It is so. Well, the service you are to do me will be a pleasure to yourself: I must get you to engage my Lady Plyant all this evening, that my pious aunt may not work her to her interest. And if you chance to secure her to yourself, you may incline her to mine. She's handsome, and knows it; is very silly, and thinks she has sense, and has an old fond husband.

CARE. I confess, a very fair foundation for a lover to build upon.

MEL. For my Lord Froth, he and his wife will be sufficiently taken up with admiring one another and Brisk's gallantry, as they call it. I'll observe my uncle myself, and Jack Maskwell has promised me to watch my aunt narrowly, and give me notice upon any suspicion. As for Sir Paul, my wise father-in-law that is to be, my dear Cynthia has such a share in his fatherly fondness, he would scarce make her a moment uneasy to have her happy hereafter.

CARE. So you have manned your works; but I wish you may not have the weakest guard where the enemy is strongest.

MEL. Maskwell, you mean; prithee why should you suspect him?

CARE. Faith I cannot help it; you know I never liked him: I am a little superstitious in physiognomy.

MEL. He has obligations of gratitude to bind him to me: his dependence upon my uncle is through my means.

CARE. Upon your aunt, you mean.

MEL. My aunt!

CARE. I'm mistaken if there be not a familiarity between them you do not suspect, notwithstanding her passion for you.

MEL. Pooh, pooh! nothing in the world but his design to do me service; and he endeavours to be well in her esteem, that he may be

able to effect it.

CARE. Well, I shall be glad to be mistaken; but your aunt's aversion in her revenge cannot be any way so effectually shown as in bringing forth a child to disinherit you. She is handsome and cunning and naturally wanton. Maskwell is flesh and blood at best, and opportunities between them are frequent. His affection to you, you have confessed, is grounded upon his interest, that you have transplanted; and should it take root in my lady, I don't see what you can expect from the fruit.

MEL. I confess the consequence is visible, were your suspicions just. But see, the company is broke up, let's meet 'em.

SCENE IV.

[To them] LORD TOUCHWOOD, LORD FROTH, SIR PAUL PLYANT, and BRISK.

LORD TOUCH. Out upon't, nephew. Leave your father-in-law and me to maintain our ground against young people!

MEL. I beg your lordship's pardon. We were just returning.

SIR PAUL. Were you, son? Gadsbud, much better as it is. Good, strange! I swear I'm almost tipsy; t'other bottle would have been too powerful for me,--as sure as can be it would. We wanted your company, but Mr. Brisk--where is he? I swear and vow he's a most facetious person, and the best company. And, my Lord Froth, your lordship is so merry a man, he, he, he.

LORD FROTH. Oh, foy, Sir Paul, what do you mean? Merry! Oh, barbarous! I'd as lieve you called me fool.

SIR PAUL. Nay, I protest and vow now, 'tis true; when Mr. Brisk jokes, your lordship's laugh does so become you, he, he, he.

LORD FROTH. Ridiculous! Sir Paul, you're strangely mistaken, I find champagne is powerful. I assure you, Sir Paul, I laugh at nobody's jest but my own, or a lady's, I assure you, Sir Paul.

BRISK. How? how, my lord? what, affront my wit! Let me perish, do I never say anything worthy to be laughed at?

LORD FROTH. Oh, foy, don't misapprehend me; I don't say so, for I often smile at your conceptions. But there is nothing more unbecoming a man of quality than to laugh; 'tis such a vulgar expression of the passion; everybody can laugh. Then especially to laugh at the jest of an inferior person, or when anybody else of the same quality does not laugh with one--ridiculous! To be pleased with what pleases the crowd! Now when I laugh, I always laugh alone.

BRISK. I suppose that's because you laugh at your own jests, i'gad, ha, ha, ha.

LORD FROTH. He, he, I swear though, your raillery provokes me to a smile.

BRISK. Ay, my lord, it's a sign I hit you in the teeth, if you show 'em.

LORD FROTH. He, he, he, I swear that's so very pretty, I can't forbear.

CARE. I find a quibble bears more sway in your lordship's face than a jest.

LORD TOUCH. Sir Paul, if you please we'll retire to the ladies, and drink a dish of tea to settle our heads.

SIR PAUL. With all my heart. Mr. Brisk, you'll come to us, or call me when you joke; I'll be ready to laugh incontinently.

SCENE V.

MELLEFONT, CARELESS, LORD FROTH, BRISK.

MEL. But does your lordship never see comedies?

LORD FROTH. Oh yes, sometimes; but I never laugh.

MEL. No?

LORD FROTH. Oh no; never laugh indeed, sir.

CARE. No! why, what d'ye go there for?

LORD FROTH. To distinguish myself from the commonalty and mortify the poets; the fellows grow so conceited, when any of their foolish wit prevails upon the side-boxes. I swear,--he, he, he, I have often constrained my inclinations to laugh,--he, he, he, to avoid giving them encouragement.

MEL. You are cruel to yourself, my lord, as well as malicious to them.

LORD FROTH. I confess I did myself some violence at first, but now I think I have conquered it.

BRISK. Let me perish, my lord, but there is something very particular in the humour; 'tis true it makes against wit, and I'm sorry for some friends of mine that write; but, i'gad, I love to be

malicious. Nay, deuce take me, there's wit in't, too. And wit must be foiled by wit; cut a diamond with a diamond, no other way, i'gad.

LORD FROTH. Oh, I thought you would not be long before you found out the wit.

CARE. Wit! In what? Where the devil's the wit in not laughing when a man has a mind to't?

BRISK. O Lord, why can't you find it out? Why, there 'tis, in the not laughing. Don't you apprehend me? My lord, Careless is a very honest fellow, but harkee, you understand me, somewhat heavy, a little shallow, or so. Why, I'll tell you now, suppose now you come up to me--nay, prithee, Careless, be instructed. Suppose, as I was saying, you come up to me holding your sides, and laughing as if you would--well--I look grave, and ask the cause of this immoderate mirth. You laugh on still, and are not able to tell me, still I look grave, not so much as smile.

CARE. Smile, no, what the devil should you smile at, when you suppose I can't tell you!

BRISK. Pshaw, pshaw, prithee don't interrupt me. But I tell you, you shall tell me at last, but it shall be a great while first.

CARE. Well, but prithee don't let it be a great while, because I long to have it over.

BRISK. Well then, you tell me some good jest or some very witty thing, laughing all the while as if you were ready to die, and I hear it, and look thus. Would not you be disappointed?

CARE. No; for if it were a witty thing I should not expect you to understand it.

LORD FROTH. Oh, foy, Mr. Careless, all the world allows Mr. Brisk to have wit; my wife says he has a great deal. I hope you think her a judge.

BRISK. Pooh, my lord, his voice goes for nothing; I can't tell how to make him apprehend. Take it t'other way. Suppose I say a witty thing to you?

CARE. Then I shall be disappointed indeed.

MEL. Let him alone, Brisk, he is obstinately bent not to be instructed.

BRISK. I'm sorry for him, the deuce take me.

MEL. Shall we go to the ladies, my lord?

LORD FROTH. With all my heart; methinks we are a solitude without

'em.

MEL. Or what say you to another bottle of champagne?

LORD FROTH. Oh, for the universe not a drop more, I beseech you. Oh, intemperate! I have a flushing in my face already. [Takes out a pocket-glass and looks in it.]

BRISK. Let me see, let me see, my lord, I broke my glass that was in the lid of my snuff-box. Hum! Deuce take me, I have encouraged a pimple here too. [Takes the glass and looks.]

LORD FROTH. Then you must mortify him with a patch; my wife shall supply you. Come, gentlemen, ALLONS, here is company coming.

SCENE VI.

LADY TOUCHWOOD and MASKWELL.

LADY TOUCH. I'll hear no more. You are false and ungrateful; come, I know you false.

MASK. I have been frail, I confess, madam, for your ladyship's service.

LADY TOUCH. That I should trust a man whom I had known betray his friend!

MASK. What friend have I betrayed? or to whom?

LADY TOUCH. Your fond friend Mellefont, and to me; can you deny it?

MASK. I do not.

LADY TOUCH. Have you not wronged my lord, who has been a father to you in your wants, and given you being? Have you not wronged him in the highest manner, in his bed?

MASK. With your ladyship's help, and for your service, as I told you before. I can't deny that neither. Anything more, madam?

LADY TOUCH. More! Audacious villain! Oh, what's more, is most my shame. Have you not dishonoured me?

MASK. No, that I deny; for I never told in all my life: so that accusation's answered; on to the next.

LADY TOUCH. Death, do you dally with my passion? Insolent devil! But have a care,--provoke me not; for, by the eternal fire, you shall not 'scape my vengeance. Calm villain! How unconcerned he stands, confessing treachery and ingratitude! Is there a vice more

black? Oh, I have excuses thousands for my faults; fire in my temper, passions in my soul, apt to ev'ry provocation, oppressed at once with love, and with despair. But a sedate, a thinking villain, whose black blood runs temperately bad, what excuse can clear?

MASK. Will you be in temper, madam? I would not talk not to be heard. I have been [she walks about disordered] a very great rogue for your sake, and you reproach me with it; I am ready to be a rogue still, to do you service; and you are flinging conscience and honour in my face, to rebate my inclinations. How am I to behave myself? You know I am your creature, my life and fortune in your power; to disoblige you brings me certain ruin. Allow it I would betray you, I would not be a traitor to myself: I don't pretend to honesty, because you know I am a rascal; but I would convince you from the necessity of my being firm to you.

LADY TOUCH. Necessity, impudence! Can no gratitude incline you, no obligations touch you? Have not my fortune and my person been subjected to your pleasure? Were you not in the nature of a servant, and have not I in effect made you lord of all, of me, and of my lord? Where is that humble love, the languishing, that adoration, which once was paid me, and everlastingly engaged?

MASK. Fixt, rooted in my heart, whence nothing can remove 'em, yet you -

LADY TOUCH. Yet, what yet?

MASK. Nay, misconceive me not, madam, when I say I have had a gen'rous and a faithful passion, which you had never favoured, but through revenge and policy.

LADY TOUCH. Ha!

MASK. Look you, madam, we are alone,--pray contain yourself and hear me. You know you loved your nephew when I first sighed for you; I quickly found it: an argument that I loved, for with that art you veiled your passion 'twas imperceptible to all but jealous eyes. This discovery made me bold; I confess it; for by it I thought you in my power. Your nephew's scorn of you added to my hopes; I watched the occasion, and took you, just repulsed by him, warm at once with love and indignation; your disposition, my arguments, and happy opportunity accomplished my design; I pressed the yielding minute, and was blest. How I have loved you since, words have not shown, then how should words express?

LADY TOUCH. Well, mollifying devil! And have I not met your love with forward fire?

MASK. Your zeal, I grant, was ardent, but misplaced; there was revenge in view; that woman's idol had defiled the temple of the god, and love was made a mock-worship. A son and heir would have edged young Mellefont upon the brink of ruin, and left him none but

you to catch at for prevention.

LADY TOUCH. Again provoke me! Do you wind me like a larum, only to rouse my own stilled soul for your diversion? Confusion!

MASK. Nay, madam, I'm gone, if you relapse. What needs this? I say nothing but what you yourself, in open hours of love, have told me. Why should you deny it? Nay, how can you? Is not all this present heat owing to the same fire? Do you not love him still? How have I this day offended you, but in not breaking off his match with Cynthia? which, ere to-morrow, shall be done, had you but patience.

LADY TOUCH. How, what said you, Maskwell? Another caprice to unwind my temper?

MASK. By heav'n, no; I am your slave, the slave of all your pleasures; and will not rest till I have given you peace, would you suffer me.

LADY TOUCH. O Maskwell! in vain I do disguise me from thee, thou know'st me, knowest the very inmost windings and recesses of my soul. O Mellefont! I burn; married to morrow! Despair strikes me. Yet my soul knows I hate him too: let him but once be mine, and next immediate ruin seize him.

MASK. Compose yourself, you shall possess and ruin him too,--will that please you?

LADY TOUCH. How, how? Thou dear, thou precious villain, how?

MASK. You have already been tampering with my Lady Plyant.

LADY TOUCH. I have: she is ready for any impression I think fit.

MASK. She must be throughly persuaded that Mellefont loves her.

LADY TOUCH. She is so credulous that way naturally, and likes him so well, that she will believe it faster than I can persuade her. But I don't see what you can propose from such a trifling design, for her first conversing with Mellefont will convince her of the contrary.

MASK. I know it. I don't depend upon it. But it will prepare something else, and gain us leisure to lay a stronger plot. If I gain a little time, I shall not want contrivance.

One minute gives invention to destroy,
What to rebuild will a whole age employ.

ACT II.--SCENE I.

LADY FROTH and CYNTHIA.

CYNT. Indeed, madam! Is it possible your ladyship could have been so much in love?

LADY FROTH. I could not sleep; I did not sleep one wink for three weeks together.

CYNT. Prodigious! I wonder want of sleep, and so much love and so much wit as your ladyship has, did not turn your brain.

LADY FROTH. Oh, my dear Cynthia, you must not rally your friend. But really, as you say, I wonder too. But then I had a way. For, between you and I, I had whimsies and vapours, but I gave them vent.

CYNT. How, pray, madam?

LADY FROTH. Oh, I writ, writ abundantly. Do you never write?

CYNT. Write what?

LADY FROTH. Songs, elegies, satires, encomiums, panegyrics, lampoons, plays, or heroic poems?

CYNT. O Lord, not I, madam; I'm content to be a courteous reader.

LADY FROTH. Oh, inconsistent! In love and not write! If my lord and I had been both of your temper, we had never come together. Oh, bless me! What a sad thing would that have been, if my lord and I should never have met!

CYNT. Then neither my lord nor you would ever have met with your match, on my conscience.

LADY FROTH. O' my conscience, no more we should; thou say'st right. For sure my Lord Froth is as fine a gentleman and as much a man of quality! Ah! nothing at all of the common air. I think I may say he wants nothing but a blue ribbon and a star to make him shine, the very phosphorus of our hemisphere. Do you understand those two hard words? If you don't, I'll explain 'em to you.

CYNT. Yes, yes, madam, I'm not so ignorant.--At least I won't own it, to be troubled with your instructions. [Aside.]

LADY FROTH. Nay, I beg your pardon; but being derived from the Greek, I thought you might have escaped the etymology. But I'm the more amazed to find you a woman of letters and not write! Bless me! how can Mellefont believe you love him?

CYNT. Why, faith, madam, he that won't take my word shall never

have it under my hand.

LADY FROTH. I vow Mellefont's a pretty gentleman, but methinks he wants a manner.

CYNT. A manner! What's that, madam?

LADY FROTH. Some distinguishing quality, as, for example, the BEL AIR or BRILLANT of Mr. Brisk; the solemnity, yet complaisance of my lord, or something of his own that should look a little JE-NE-SAIS-QUOISH; he is too much a mediocrity, in my mind.

CYNT. He does not indeed affect either pertness or formality; for which I like him. Here he comes.

LADY FROTH. And my lord with him. Pray observe the difference.

SCENE II.

[To them] LORD FROTH, MELLEFONT, and BRISK.

CYNT. Impertinent creature! I could almost be angry with her now.
[Aside.]

LADY FROTH. My lord, I have been telling Cynthia how much I have been in love with you; I swear I have; I'm not ashamed to own it now. Ah! it makes my heart leap, I vow I sigh when I think on't. My dear lord! Ha, ha, ha, do you remember, my lord? [Squeezes him by the hand, looks kindly on him, sighs, and then laughs out.]

LORD FROTH. Pleasant creature! perfectly well, ah! that look, ay, there it is; who could resist? 'twas so my heart was made a captive first, and ever since t'has been in love with happy slavery.

LADY FROTH. Oh, that tongue, that dear deceitful tongue! that charming softness in your mien and your expression, and then your bow! Good my lord, bow as you did when I gave you my picture; here, suppose this my picture. [Gives him a pocket-glass.] Pray mind, my lord; ah! he bows charmingly; nay, my lord, you shan't kiss it so much; I shall grow jealous, I vow now. [He bows profoundly low, then kisses the glass.]

LORD FROTH. I saw myself there, and kissed it for your sake.

LADY FROTH. Ah! Gallantry to the last degree. Mr. Brisk, you're a judge; was ever anything so well bred as my lord?

BRISK. Never anything, but your ladyship; let me perish.

LADY FROTH. Oh, prettily turned again; let me die, but you have a great deal of wit. Mr. Mellefont, don't you think Mr. Brisk has a

world of wit?

MEL. O yes, madam.

BRISK. O dear, madam -

LADY FROTH. An infinite deal!

BRISK. O heav'ns, madam -

LADY FROTH. More wit than anybody.

BRISK. I'm everlastingly your humble servant, deuce take me, madam.

LORD FROTH. Don't you think us a happy couple?

CYNT. I vow, my lord, I think you the happiest couple in the world, for you're not only happy in one another, and when you are together, but happy in yourselves, and by yourselves.

LORD FROTH. I hope Mellefont will make a good husband too.

CYNT. 'Tis my interest to believe he will, my Lord.

LORD FROTH. D'ye think he'll love you as well as I do my wife? I'm afraid not.

CYNT. I believe he'll love me better.

LORD FROTH. Heav'ns! that can never be. But why do you think so?

CYNT. Because he has not so much reason to be fond of himself.

LORD FROTH. Oh, your humble servant for that, dear madam. Well, Mellefont, you'll be a happy creature.

MEL. Ay, my lord, I shall have the same reason for my happiness that your lordship has, I shall think myself happy.

LORD FROTH. Ah, that's all.

BRISK. [To LADY FROTH.] Your ladyship is in the right; but, i'gad, I'm wholly turned into satire. I confess I write but seldom, but when I do--keen iambics, i'gad. But my lord was telling me your ladyship has made an essay toward an heroic poem.

LADY FROTH. Did my lord tell you? Yes, I vow, and the subject is my lord's love to me. And what do you think I call it? I dare swear you won't guess--THE SILLABUB, ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Because my lord's title's Froth, i'gad, ha, ha, ha, deuce take me, very e propos and surprising, ha, ha, ha.

LADY FROTH. He, ay, is not it? And then I call my lord Spumoso; and myself, what d'ye think I call myself?

BRISK. Lactilla, may be,--i'gad, I cannot tell.

LADY FROTH. Bidly, that's all; just my own name.

BRISK. Bidly! I'gad, very pretty. Deuce take me if your ladyship has not the art of surprising the most naturally in the world. I hope you'll make me happy in communicating the poem.

LADY FROTH. Oh, you must be my confidant, I must ask your advice.

BRISK. I'm your humble servant, let me perish. I presume your ladyship has read Bossu?

LADY FROTH. Oh yes, and Racine, and Dacier upon Aristotle and Horace. My lord, you must not be jealous, I'm communicating all to Mr. Brisk.

LORD FROTH. No, no, I'll allow Mr. Brisk; have you nothing about you to shew him, my dear?

LADY FROTH. Yes, I believe I have. Mr. Brisk, come, will you go into the next room? and there I'll shew you what I have.

LORD FROTH. I'll walk a turn in the garden, and come to you.

SCENE III.

MELLEFONT, CYNTHIA.

MEL. You're thoughtful, Cynthia?

CYNT. I'm thinking, though marriage makes man and wife one flesh, it leaves 'em still two fools; and they become more conspicuous by setting off one another.

MEL. That's only when two fools meet, and their follies are opposed.

CYNT. Nay, I have known two wits meet, and by the opposition of their wit render themselves as ridiculous as fools. 'Tis an odd game we're going to play at. What think you of drawing stakes, and giving over in time?

MEL. No, hang't, that's not endeavouring to win, because it's possible we may lose; since we have shuffled and cut, let's even turn up trump now.

CYNT. Then I find it's like cards, if either of us have a good hand

it is an accident of fortune.

MEL. No, marriage is rather like a game at bowls: fortune indeed makes the match, and the two nearest, and sometimes the two farthest, are together, but the game depends entirely upon judgment.

CYNT. Still it is a game, and consequently one of us must be a loser.

MEL. Not at all; only a friendly trial of skill, and the winnings to be laid out in an entertainment. What's here, the music? Oh, my lord has promised the company a new song; we'll get 'em to give it us by the way. [Musicians crossing the stage.] Pray let us have the favour of you, to practise the song before the company hear it.

SONG.

I.

Cynthia frowns whene'er I woo her,
Yet she's vex't if I give over;
Much she fears I should undo her,
But much more to lose her lover:
Thus, in doubting, she refuses;
And not winning, thus she loses.

II.

Prithee, Cynthia, look behind you,
Age and wrinkles will o'ertake you;
Then too late desire will find you,
When the power must forsake you:
Think, O think o' th' sad condition,
To be past, yet wish fruition.

MEL. You shall have my thanks below. [To the musicians, they go out.]

SCENE IV.

[To them] SIR PAUL PLYANT and LADY PLYANT.

SIR PAUL. Gadsbud! I am provok'd into a fermentation, as my Lady Froth says; was ever the like read of in story?

LADY PLYANT. Sir Paul, have patience, let me alone to rattle him up.

SIR PAUL. Pray, your ladyship, give me leave to be angry. I'll

rattle him up, I warrant you, I'll firk him with a CERTIORARI.

LADY PLYANT. You firk him, I'll firk him myself; pray, Sir Paul, hold you contented.

CYNT. Bless me, what makes my father in such a passion? I never saw him thus before.

SIR PAUL. Hold yourself contented, my Lady Plyant. I find passion coming upon me by inflation, and I cannot submit as formerly, therefore give way.

LADY PLYANT. How now! will you be pleased to retire and -

SIR PAUL. No, marry will I not be pleased: I am pleased to be angry, that's my pleasure at this time.

MEL. What can this mean?

LADY PLYANT. Gads my life, the man's distracted; why, how now, who are you? What am I? Slidikins, can't I govern you? What did I marry you for? Am I not to be absolute and uncontrollable? Is it fit a woman of my spirit and conduct should be contradicted in a matter of this concern?

SIR PAUL. It concerns me and only me. Besides, I'm not to be governed at all times. When I am in tranquillity, my Lady Plyant shall command Sir Paul; but when I am provoked to fury, I cannot incorporate with patience and reason: as soon may tigers match with tigers, lambs with lambs, and every creature couple with its foe, as the poet says.

LADY PLYANT. He's hot-headed still! 'Tis in vain to talk to you; but remember I have a curtain-lecture for you, you disobedient, headstrong brute.

SIR PAUL. No, 'tis because I won't be headstrong, because I won't be a brute, and have my head fortified, that I am thus exasperated. But I will protect my honour, and yonder is the violator of my fame.

LADY PLYANT. 'Tis my honour that is concerned, and the violation was intended to me. Your honour! You have none but what is in my keeping, and I can dispose of it when I please: therefore don't provoke me.

SIR PAUL. Hum, gadsbud, she says true. Well, my lady, march on; I will fight under you, then: I am convinced, as far as passion will permit. [LADY PLYANT and SIR PAUL come up to MELLEFONT.]

LADY PLYANT. Inhuman and treacherous -

SIR PAUL. Thou serpent and first tempter of womankind.

CYNT. Bless me! Sir, madam, what mean you?

SIR PAUL. Thy, Thy, come away, Thy; touch him not. Come hither, girl; go not near him, there's nothing but deceit about him. Snakes are in his peruke, and the crocodile of Nilus is in his belly; he will eat thee up alive.

LADY PLYANT. Dishonourable, impudent creature!

MEL. For heav'n's sake, madam, to whom do you direct this language?

LADY PLYANT. Have I behaved myself with all the decorum and nicety befitting the person of Sir Paul's wife? Have I preserved my honour as it were in a snow-house for these three years past? Have I been white and unsullied even by Sir Paul himself?

SIR PAUL. Nay, she has been an invincible wife, even to me; that's the truth on't.

LADY PLYANT. Have I, I say, preserved myself like a fair sheet of paper for you to make a blot upon?

SIR PAUL. And she shall make a simile with any woman in England.

MEL. I am so amazed, I know not what to say.

SIR PAUL. Do you think my daughter, this pretty creature--gadsbud, she's a wife for a cherubim!--do you think her fit for nothing but to be a stalking horse, to stand before you, while you take aim at my wife? Gadsbud, I was never angry before in my life, and I'll never be appeased again.

MEL. Hell and damnation! This is my aunt; such malice can be engendered nowhere else. [Aside.]

LADY PLYANT. Sir Paul, take Cynthia from his sight; leave me to strike him with the remorse of his intended crime.

CYNT. Pray, sir, stay, hear him; I dare affirm he's innocent.

SIR PAUL. Innocent! Why, hark'ee--come hither, Thy--hark'ee, I had it from his aunt, my sister Touchwood. Gadsbud, he does not care a farthing for anything of thee but thy portion. Why, he's in love with my wife. He would have tantalised thee, and made a cuckold of thy poor father, and that would certainly have broke my heart. I'm sure, if ever I should have horns, they would kill me; they would never come kindly--I should die of 'em like a child that was cutting his teeth--I should indeed, Thy--therefore come away; but providence has prevented all, therefore come away when I bid you.

CYNT. I must obey.

SCENE V.

LADY PLYANT, MELLEFONT.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, such a thing! the impiety of it startles me--to wrong so good, so fair a creature, and one that loves you tenderly-- 'tis a barbarity of barbarities, and nothing could be guilty of it -

MEL. But the greatest villain imagination can form, I grant it; and next to the villainy of such a fact is the villainy of aspersing me with the guilt. How? which way was I to wrong her? For yet I understand you not.

LADY PLYANT. Why, gads my life, cousin Mellefont, you cannot be so peremptory as to deny it, when I tax you with it to your face? for now Sir Paul's gone, you are CORUM NOBUS.

MEL. By heav'n, I love her more than life or -

LADY PLYANT. Fiddle faddle, don't tell me of this and that, and everything in the world, but give me mathemacular demonstration; answer me directly. But I have not patience. Oh, the impiety of it, as I was saying, and the unparalleled wickedness! O merciful Father! How could you think to reverse nature so, to make the daughter the means of procuring the mother?

MEL. The daughter to procure the mother!

LADY PLYANT. Ay, for though I am not Cynthia's own mother, I am her father's wife, and that's near enough to make it incest.

MEL. Incest! O my precious aunt, and the devil in conjunction.
[Aside.]

LADY PLYANT. Oh, reflect upon the horror of that, and then the guilt of deceiving everybody; marrying the daughter, only to make a cuckold of the father; and then seducing me, debauching my purity, and perverting me from the road of virtue in which I have trod thus long, and never made one trip, not one FAUX PAS. Oh, consider it! What would you have to answer for if you should provoke me to frailty? Alas! humanity is feeble, heav'n knows! very feeble, and unable to support itself.

MEL. Where am I? is it day? and am I awake? Madam -

LADY PLYANT. And nobody knows how circumstances may happen together. To my thinking, now I could resist the strongest temptation. But yet I know, 'tis impossible for me to know whether I could or not; there's no certainty in the things of this life.

MEL. Madam, pray give me leave to ask you one question.

LADY PLYANT. O Lord, ask me the question; I'll swear I'll refuse it, I swear I'll deny it--therefore don't ask me; nay, you shan't ask me, I swear I'll deny it. O Gemini, you have brought all the blood into my face; I warrant I am as red as a turkey-cock. O fie, cousin Mellefont!

MEL. Nay, madam, hear me; I mean -

LADY PLYANT. Hear you? No, no; I'll deny you first and hear you afterwards. For one does not know how one's mind may change upon hearing. Hearing is one of the senses, and all the senses are fallible. I won't trust my honour, I assure you; my honour is infallible and uncomeatable.

MEL. For heav'n's sake, madam -

LADY PLYANT. Oh, name it no more. Bless me, how can you talk of heav'n, and have so much wickedness in your heart? May be you don't think it a sin--they say some of you gentlemen don't think it a sin. May be it is no sin to them that don't think it so; indeed, if I did not think it a sin--But still my honour, if it were no sin. But then, to marry my daughter for the conveniency of frequent opportunities, I'll never consent to that; as sure as can be, I'll break the match.

MEL. Death and amazement! Madam, upon my knees -

LADY PLYANT. Nay, nay, rise up; come, you shall see my good-nature. I know love is powerful, and nobody can help his passion. 'Tis not your fault; nor, I swear, it is not mine. How can I help it, if I have charms? And how can you help it, if you are made a captive? I swear it is pity it should be a fault. But my honour,--well, but your honour, too--but the sin!--well, but the necessity--O Lord, here's somebody coming, I dare not stay. Well, you must consider of your crime; and strive as much as can be against it,--strive, be sure. But don't be melancholic; don't despair. But never think that I'll grant you anything. O Lord, no. But be sure you lay aside all thoughts of the marriage, for though I know you don't love Cynthia, only as a blind for your passion to me, yet it will make me jealous. O Lord, what did I say? Jealous! no, no, I can't be jealous, for I must not love you; therefore don't hope,--but don't despair neither. Oh, they're coming, I must fly.

SCENE VI.

MELLEFONT alone.

MEL. [After a pause.] So then, spite of my care and foresight, I am caught, caught in my security. Yet this was but a shallow artifice, unworthy of my Machiavellian aunt. There must be more behind: this is but the first flash, the priming of her engine.

Destruction follows hard, if not most presently prevented.

SCENE VII.

[To him] MASKWELL.

MEL. Maskwell, welcome, thy presence is a view of land, appearing to my shipwrecked hopes. The witch has raised the storm, and her ministers have done their work: you see the vessels are parted.

MASK. I know it. I met Sir Paul towing away Cynthia. Come, trouble not your head; I'll join you together ere to-morrow morning, or drown between you in the attempt.

MEL. There's comfort in a hand stretched out to one that's sinking; though ne'er so far off.

MASK. No sinking, nor no danger. Come, cheer up; why, you don't know that while I plead for you, your aunt has given me a retaining fee. Nay, I am your greatest enemy, and she does but journey-work under me.

MEL. Ha! how's this?

MASK. What d'ye think of my being employed in the execution of all her plots? Ha, ha, ha, by heav'n, it's true: I have undertaken to break the match; I have undertaken to make your uncle disinherit you; to get you turned out of doors; and to--ha, ha, ha, I can't tell you for laughing. Oh, she has opened her heart to me! I am to turn you a-grazing, and to--ha, ha, ha, marry Cynthia myself. There's a plot for you.

MEL. Ha! Oh, see, I see my rising sun! Light breaks through clouds upon me, and I shall live in day--Oh, my Maskwell! how shall I thank or praise thee? Thou hast outwitted woman. But, tell me, how couldst thou thus get into her confidence? Ha! How? But was it her contrivance to persuade my Lady Plyant to this extravagant belief?

MASK. It was; and to tell you the truth, I encouraged it for your diversion. Though it made you a little uneasy for the present, yet the reflection of it must needs be entertaining. I warrant she was very violent at first.

MEL. Ha, ha, ha, ay, a very fury; but I was most afraid of her violence at last. If you had not come as you did, I don't know what she might have attempted.

MASK. Ha, ha, ha, I know her temper. Well, you must know, then, that all my contrivances were but bubbles, till at last I pretended to have been long secretly in love with Cynthia; that did my

business, that convinced your aunt I might be trusted; since it was as much my interest as hers to break the match. Then, she thought my jealousy might qualify me to assist her in her revenge. And, in short, in that belief, told me the secrets of her heart. At length we made this agreement, if I accomplish her designs (as I told you before) she has engaged to put Cynthia with all her fortune into my power.

MEL. She is most gracious in her favour. Well, and, dear Jack, how hast thou contrived?

MASK. I would not have you stay to hear it now; for I don't know but she may come this way. I am to meet her anon; after that, I'll tell you the whole matter. Be here in this gallery an hour hence; by that time I imagine our consultation may be over.

MEL. I will; till then success attend thee.

SCENE VIII.

MASKWELL alone.

Till then, success will attend me; for when I meet you, I meet the only obstacle to my fortune. Cynthia, let thy beauty gild my crimes; and whatsoever I commit of treachery or deceit, shall be imputed to me as a merit. Treachery? What treachery? Love cancels all the bonds of friendship, and sets men right upon their first foundations.

Duty to kings, piety to parents, gratitude to benefactors, and fidelity to friends, are different and particular ties. But the name of rival cuts 'em all asunder, and is a general acquittance. Rival is equal, and love like death an universal leveller of mankind. Ha! But is there not such a thing as honesty? Yes, and whosoever has it about him, bears an enemy in his breast. For your honest man, as I take it, is that nice, scrupulous, conscientious person, who will cheat nobody but himself; such another coxcomb as your wise man, who is too hard for all the world, and will be made a fool of by nobody but himself; ha, ha, ha. Well, for wisdom and honesty give me cunning and hypocrisy; oh, 'tis such a pleasure to angle for fair-faced fools! Then that hungry gudgeon credulity will bite at anything. Why, let me see, I have the same face, the same words and accents when I speak what I do think, and when I speak what I do not think, the very same; and dear dissimulation is the only art not to be known from nature.

Why will mankind be fools, and be deceived,
And why are friends' and lovers' oaths believed,
When each, who searches strictly his own mind,
May so much fraud and power of baseness find?

ACT III.--SCENE I.

LORD TOUCHWOOD and LADY TOUCHWOOD.

LADY TOUCH. My lord, can you blame my brother Plyant if he refuse his daughter upon this provocation? The contract's void by this unheard-of impiety.

LORD TOUCH. I don't believe it true; he has better principles. Pho, 'tis nonsense. Come, come, I know my Lady Plyant has a large eye, and would centre everything in her own circle; 'tis not the first time she has mistaken respect for love, and made Sir Paul jealous of the civility of an undesigning person, the better to bespeak his security in her unfeigned pleasures.

LADY TOUCH. You censure hardly, my lord; my sister's honour is very well known.

LORD TOUCH. Yes, I believe I know some that have been familiarly acquainted with it. This is a little trick wrought by some pitiful contriver, envious of my nephew's merit.

LADY TOUCH. Nay, my lord, it may be so, and I hope it will be found so. But that will require some time; for in such a case as this, demonstration is necessary.

LORD TOUCH. There should have been demonstration of the contrary too, before it had been believed.

LADY TOUCH. So I suppose there was.

LORD TOUCH. How? Where? When?

LADY TOUCH. That I can't tell; nay, I don't say there was. I am willing to believe as favourably of my nephew as I can.

LORD TOUCH. I don't know that. [Half aside.]

LADY TOUCH. How? Don't you believe that, say you, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. No, I don't say so. I confess I am troubled to find you so cold in his defence.

LADY TOUCH. His defence! Bless me, would you have me defend an ill thing?

LORD TOUCH. You believe it, then?

LADY TOUCH. I don't know; I am very unwilling to speak my thoughts in anything that may be to my cousin's disadvantage: besides, I find, my lord, you are prepared to receive an ill impression from any opinion of mine which is not consenting with your own. But, since I am like to be suspected in the end, and 'tis a pain any longer to dissemble, I own it to you; in short I do believe it, nay, and can believe anything worse, if it were laid to his charge. Don't ask me my reasons, my lord, for they are not fit to be told you.

LORD TOUCH. I'm amazed: there must be something more than ordinary in this. [Aside.] Not fit to be told me, madam? You can have no interests wherein I am not concerned, and consequently the same reasons ought to be convincing to me, which create your satisfaction or disquiet.

LADY TOUCH. But those which cause my disquiet I am willing to have remote from your hearing. Good my lord, don't press me.

LORD TOUCH. Don't oblige me to press you.

LADY TOUCH. Whatever it was, 'tis past. And that is better to be unknown which cannot be prevented; therefore let me beg you to rest satisfied.

LORD TOUCH. When you have told me, I will.

LADY TOUCH. You won't.

LORD TOUCH. By my life, my dear, I will.

LADY TOUCH. What if you can't?

LORD TOUCH. How? Then I must know, nay, I will. No more trifling. I charge you tell me. By all our mutual peace to come; upon your duty -

LADY TOUCH. Nay, my lord, you need say no more, to make me lay my heart before you, but don't be thus transported; compose yourself. It is not of concern to make you lose one minute's temper. 'Tis not, indeed, my dear. Nay, by this kiss you shan't be angry. O Lord, I wish I had not told you anything. Indeed, my lord, you have frighted me. Nay, look pleased, I'll tell you.

LORD TOUCH. Well, well.

LADY TOUCH. Nay, but will you be calm? Indeed it's nothing but -

LORD TOUCH. But what?

LADY TOUCH. But will you promise me not to be angry? Nay, you must--not to be angry with Mellefont? I dare swear he's sorry, and were it to do again, would not -

LORD TOUCH. Sorry for what? 'Death, you rack me with delay.

LADY TOUCH. Nay, no great matter, only--well, I have your promise. Pho, why nothing, only your nephew had a mind to amuse himself sometimes with a little gallantry towards me. Nay, I can't think he meant anything seriously, but methought it looked oddly.

LORD TOUCH. Confusion and hell, what do I hear?

LADY TOUCH. Or, may be, he thought he was not enough akin to me, upon your account, and had a mind to create a nearer relation on his own; a lover you know, my lord. Ha, ha, ha. Well, but that's all. Now you have it; well remember your promise, my lord, and don't take any notice of it to him.

LORD TOUCH. No, no, no. Damnation!

LADY TOUCH. Nay, I swear you must not. A little harmless mirth; only misplaced, that's all. But if it were more, 'tis over now, and all's well. For my part I have forgot it, and so has he, I hope,-- for I have not heard anything from him these two days.

LORD TOUCH. These two days! Is it so fresh? Unnatural villain! Death, I'll have him stripped and turned naked out of my doors this moment, and let him rot and perish, incestuous brute!

LADY TOUCH. Oh, for heav'n's sake, my lord, you'll ruin me if you take such public notice of it; it will be a town talk. Consider your own and my honour; nay, I told you you would not be satisfied when you knew it.

LORD TOUCH. Before I've done I will be satisfied. Ungrateful monster! how long?

LADY TOUCH. Lord, I don't know; I wish my lips had grown together when I told you. Almost a twelvemonth. Nay, I won't tell you any more till you are yourself. Pray, my lord, don't let the company see you in this disorder. Yet, I confess, I can't blame you; for I think I was never so surprised in my life. Who would have thought my nephew could have so misconstrued my kindness? But will you go into your closet, and recover your temper. I'll make an excuse of sudden business to the company, and come to you. Pray, good, dear my lord, let me beg you do now. I'll come immediately and tell you all; will you, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. I will--I am mute with wonder.

LADY TOUCH. Well, but go now, here's somebody coming.

LORD TOUCH. Well, I go. You won't stay? for I would hear more of this.

LADY TOUCH. I follow instantly. So.

SCENE II.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, MASKWELL.

MASK. This was a masterpiece, and did not need my help, though I stood ready for a cue to come in and confirm all, had there been occasion.

LADY TOUCH. Have you seen Mellefont?

MASK. I have; and am to meet him here about this time.

LADY TOUCH. How does he bear his disappointment?

MASK. Secure in my assistance, he seemed not much afflicted, but rather laughed at the shallow artifice, which so little time must of necessity discover. Yet he is apprehensive of some farther design of yours, and has engaged me to watch you. I believe he will hardly be able to prevent your plot, yet I would have you use caution and expedition.

LADY TOUCH. Expedition indeed, for all we do must be performed in the remaining part of this evening, and before the company break up, lest my lord should cool and have an opportunity to talk with him privately. My lord must not see him again.

MASK. By no means; therefore you must aggravate my lord's displeasure to a degree that will admit of no conference with him. What think you of mentioning me?

LADY TOUCH. How?

MASK. To my lord, as having been privy to Mellefont's design upon you, but still using my utmost endeavours to dissuade him, though my friendship and love to him has made me conceal it; yet you may say, I threatened the next time he attempted anything of that kind to discover it to my lord.

LADY TOUCH. To what end is this?

MASK. It will confirm my lord's opinion of my honour and honesty, and create in him a new confidence in me, which (should this design miscarry) will be necessary to the forming another plot that I have in my head.--To cheat you as well as the rest. [Aside.]

LADY TOUCH. I'll do it--I'll tell him you hindered him once from forcing me.

MASK. Excellent! Your ladyship has a most improving fancy. You

had best go to my lord, keep him as long as you can in his closet, and I doubt not but you will mould him to what you please; your guests are so engaged in their own follies and intrigues, they'll miss neither of you.

LADY TOUCH. When shall we meet?--at eight this evening in my chamber? There rejoice at our success, and toy away an hour in mirth.

MASK. I will not fail.

SCENE III.

MASKWELL alone.

I know what she means by toying away an hour well enough. Pox, I have lost all appetite to her; yet she's a fine woman, and I loved her once. But I don't know: since I have been in a great measure kept by her, the case is altered; what was my pleasure is become my duty, and I have as little stomach to her now as if I were her husband. Should she smoke my design upon Cynthia, I were in a fine pickle. She has a damned penetrating head, and knows how to interpret a coldness the right way; therefore I must dissemble ardour and ecstasy; that's resolved. How easily and pleasantly is that dissembled before fruition! Pox on't that a man can't drink without quenching his thirst. Ha! yonder comes Mellefont, thoughtful. Let me think. Meet her at eight--hum--ha! By heav'n I have it.--If I can speak to my lord before. Was it my brain or providence? No matter which--I will deceive 'em all, and yet secure myself. 'Twas a lucky thought! Well, this double-dealing is a jewel. Here he comes, now for me. [MASKWELL, pretending not to see him, walks by him, and speaks as it were to himself.]

SCENE IV.

[To him] MELLEFONT, musing.

MASK. Mercy on us, what will the wickedness of this world come to?

MEL. How now, Jack? What, so full of contemplation that you run over?

MASK. I'm glad you're come, for I could not contain myself any longer, and was just going to give vent to a secret, which nobody but you ought to drink down. Your aunt's just gone from hence.

MEL. And having trusted thee with the secrets of her soul, thou art villainously bent to discover 'em all to me, ha?

MASK. I'm afraid my frailty leans that way. But I don't know whether I can in honour discover 'em all.

MEL. All, all, man! What, you may in honour betray her as far as she betrays herself. No tragical design upon my person, I hope.

MASK. No, but it's a comical design upon mine.

MEL. What dost thou mean?

MASK. Listen and be dumb; we have been bargaining about the rate of your ruin -

MEL. Like any two guardians to an orphan heiress. Well?

MASK. And whereas pleasure is generally paid with mischief, what mischief I do is to be paid with pleasure.

MEL. So when you've swallowed the potion you sweeten your mouth with a plum.

MASK. You are merry, sir, but I shall probe your constitution. In short, the price of your banishment is to be paid with the person of -

MEL. Of Cynthia and her fortune. Why, you forget you told me this before.

MASK. No, no. So far you are right; and I am, as an earnest of that bargain, to have full and free possession of the person of-- your aunt.

MEL. Ha! Pho, you trifle.

MASK. By this light, I'm serious; all raillery apart. I knew 'twould stun you. This evening at eight she will receive me in her bedchamber.

MEL. Hell and the devil, is she abandoned of all grace? Why, the woman is possessed.

MASK. Well, will you go in my stead?

MEL. By heav'n, into a hot furnace sooner.

MASK. No, you would not; it would not be so convenient, as I can order matters.

MEL. What d'ye mean?

MASK. Mean? Not to disappoint the lady, I assure you. Ha, ha, ha, how gravely he looks. Come, come, I won't perplex you. 'Tis the only thing that providence could have contrived to make me capable

of serving you, either to my inclination or your own necessity.

MEL. How, how, for heav'n's sake, dear Maskwell?

MASK. Why, thus. I'll go according to appointment; you shall have notice at the critical minute to come and surprise your aunt and me together. Counterfeit a rage against me, and I'll make my escape through the private passage from her chamber, which I'll take care to leave open. 'Twill be hard if then you can't bring her to any conditions. For this discovery will disarm her of all defence, and leave her entirely at your mercy--nay, she must ever after be in awe of you.

MEL. Let me adore thee, my better genius! By heav'n I think it is not in the power of fate to disappoint my hopes--my hopes? My certainty!

MASK. Well, I'll meet you here, within a quarter of eight, and give you notice.

MEL. Good fortune ever go along with thee.

SCENE V.

MELLEFONT, CARELESS.

CARE. Mellefont, get out o' th' way, my Lady Plyant's coming, and I shall never succeed while thou art in sight. Though she begins to tack about; but I made love a great while to no purpose.

MEL. Why, what's the matter? She's convinced that I don't care for her.

CARE. I can't get an answer from her, that does not begin with her honour, or her virtue, her religion, or some such cant. Then she has told me the whole history of Sir Paul's nine years courtship; how he has lain for whole nights together upon the stairs before her chamber-door; and that the first favour he received from her was a piece of an old scarlet petticoat for a stomacher, which since the day of his marriage he has out of a piece of gallantry converted into a night-cap, and wears it still with much solemnity on his anniversary wedding-night.

MEL. That I have seen, with the ceremony thereunto belonging. For on that night he creeps in at the bed's feet like a gulled bassa that has married a relation of the Grand Signior, and that night he has his arms at liberty. Did not she tell you at what a distance she keeps him? He has confessed to me that, but at some certain times, that is, I suppose, when she apprehends being with child, he never has the privilege of using the familiarity of a husband with a wife. He was once given to scrambling with his hands, and sprawling

in his sleep, and ever since she has him swaddled up in blankets, and his hands and feet swathed down, and so put to bed; and there he lies with a great beard, like a Russian bear upon a drift of snow. You are very great with him, I wonder he never told you his grievances: he will, I warrant you.

CARE. Excessively foolish! But that which gives me most hopes of her is her telling me of the many temptations she has resisted.

MEL. Nay, then you have her; for a woman's bragging to a man that she has overcome temptations is an argument that they were weakly offered, and a challenge to him to engage her more irresistibly. 'Tis only an enhancing the price of the commodity, by telling you how many customers have underbid her.

CARE. Nay, I don't despair. But still she has a grudging to you. I talked to her t'other night at my Lord Froth's masquerade, when I'm satisfied she knew me, and I had no reason to complain of my reception; but I find women are not the same bare-faced and in masks, and a vizer disguises their inclinations as much as their faces.

MEL. 'Tis a mistake, for women may most properly be said to be unmasked when they wear vizors; for that secures them from blushing and being out of countenance, and next to being in the dark, or alone, they are most truly themselves in a vizer mask. Here they come: I'll leave you. Ply her close, and by and by clap a BILLET DOUX into her hand; for a woman never thinks a man truly in love with her, till he has been fool enough to think of her out of her sight, and to lose so much time as to write to her.

SCENE VI.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL, and LADY PLYANT.

SIR PAUL. Shan't we disturb your meditation, Mr. Careless? You would be private?

CARE. You bring that along with you, Sir Paul, that shall be always welcome to my privacy.

SIR PAUL. O sweet sir, you load your humble servants, both me and my wife, with continual favours.

LADY PLYANT. Sir Paul, what a phrase was there? You will be making answers, and taking that upon you which ought to lie upon me. That you should have so little breeding to think Mr. Careless did not apply himself to me. Pray what have you to entertain anybody's privacy? I swear and declare in the face of the world I'm ready to blush for your ignorance.

SIR PAUL. I acquiesce, my lady; but don't snub so loud. [Aside to her.]

LADY PLYANT. Mr. Careless, if a person that is wholly illiterate might be supposed to be capable of being qualified to make a suitable return to those obligations, which you are pleased to confer upon one that is wholly incapable of being qualified in all those circumstances, I'm sure I should rather attempt it than anything in the world, [Courtesies] for I'm sure there's nothing in the world that I would rather. [Courtesies] But I know Mr. Careless is so great a critic, and so fine a gentleman, that it is impossible for me -

CARE. O heavens! madam, you confound me.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, she's a fine person.

LADY PLYANT. O Lord! sir, pardon me, we women have not those advantages; I know my imperfections. But at the same time you must give me leave to declare in the face of the world that nobody is more sensible of favours and things; for with the reserve of my honour I assure you, Mr. Careless, I don't know anything in the world I would refuse to a person so meritorious. You'll pardon my want of expression.

CARE. O, your ladyship is abounding in all excellence, particularly that of phrase.

LADY PLYANT. You are so obliging, sir.

CARE. Your ladyship is so charming.

SIR PAUL. So, now, now; now, my lady.

LADY PLYANT. So well bred.

CARE. So surprising.

LADY PLYANT. So well dressed, so BONNE MINE, so eloquent, so unaffected, so easy, so free, so particular, so agreeable.

SIR PAUL. Ay, so, so, there.

CARE. O Lord, I beseech you madam, don't.

LADY PLYANT. So gay, so graceful, so good teeth, so fine shape, so fine limbs, so fine linen, and I don't doubt but you have a very good skin, sir,

CARE. For heaven's sake, madam, I'm quite out of countenance.

SIR PAUL. And my lady's quite out of breath; or else you should hear--Gads-bud, you may talk of my Lady Froth.

CARE. O fie, fie, not to be named of a day. My Lady Froth is very well in her accomplishments. But it is when my Lady Plyant is not thought of. If that can ever be.

LADY PLYANT. O, you overcome me. That is so excessive.

SIR PAUL. Nay, I swear and vow that was pretty.

CARE. O, Sir Paul, you are the happiest man alive. Such a lady! that is the envy of her own sex, and the admiration of ours.

SIR PAUL. Your humble servant. I am, I thank heaven, in a fine way of living, as I may say, peacefully and happily, and I think need not envy any of my neighbours, blessed be providence. Ay, truly, Mr. Careless, my lady is a great blessing, a fine, discreet, well-spoken woman as you shall see, if it becomes me to say so, and we live very comfortably together; she is a little hasty sometimes, and so am I; but mine's soon over, and then I'm so sorry.--O Mr. Careless, if it were not for one thing -

SCENE VII.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL, LADY PLYANT, BOY with a letter.

LADY PLYANT. How often have you been told of that, you jackanapes?

SIR PAUL. Gad so, gad's-bud. Tim, carry it to my lady, you should have carried it to my lady first.

BOY. 'Tis directed to your worship.

SIR PAUL. Well, well, my lady reads all letters first. Child, do so no more; d'ye hear, Tim.

BOY. No, and please you.

SCENE VIII.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL, LADY PLYANT.

SIR PAUL. A humour of my wife's: you know women have little fancies. But as I was telling you, Mr. Careless, if it were not for one thing, I should think myself the happiest man in the world; indeed that touches me near, very near.

CARE. What can that be, Sir Paul?

SIR PAUL. Why, I have, I thank heaven, a very plentiful fortune, a

good estate in the country, some houses in town, and some money, a pretty tolerable personal estate; and it is a great grief to me, indeed it is, Mr. Careless, that I have not a son to inherit this.

'Tis true I have a daughter, and a fine dutiful child she is, though I say it, blessed be providence I may say; for indeed, Mr. Careless, I am mightily beholden to providence. A poor unworthy sinner. But if I had a son! Ah, that's my affliction, and my only affliction; indeed I cannot refrain tears when it comes in my mind. [Cries.]

CARE. Why, methinks that might be easily remedied--my lady's a fine likely woman -

SIR PAUL. Oh, a fine likely woman as you shall see in a summer's day. Indeed she is, Mr. Careless, in all respects.

CARE. And I should not have taken you to have been so old -

SIR PAUL. Alas, that's not it, Mr. Careless; ah! that's not it; no, no, you shoot wide of the mark a mile; indeed you do, that's not it, Mr. Careless; no, no, that's not it.

CARE. No? What can be the matter then?

SIR PAUL. You'll scarcely believe me when I shall tell you--my lady is so nice. It's very strange, but it's true; too true--she's so very nice, that I don't believe she would touch a man for the world. At least not above once a year; I'm sure I have found it so; and, alas, what's once a year to an old man, who would do good in his generation? Indeed it's true, Mr. Careless, it breaks my heart. I am her husband, as I may say; though far unworthy of that honour, yet I am her husband; but alas-a-day, I have no more familiarity with her person--as to that matter--than with my own mother--no indeed.

CARE. Alas-a-day, this is a lamentable story. My lady must be told on't. She must i'faith, Sir Paul; 'tis an injury to the world.

SIR PAUL. Ah! would to heaven you would, Mr. Careless; you are mightily in her favour.

CARE. I warrant you, what! we must have a son some way or other.

SIR PAUL. Indeed I should be mightily bound to you if you could bring it about, Mr. Careless.

LADY PLYANT. Here, Sir Paul, it's from your steward. Here's a return of 600 pounds; you may take fifty of it for the next half year. [Gives him the letter.]

SCENE IX.

[To them] LORD FROTH, CYNTHIA.

SIR PAUL. How does my girl? Come hither to thy father, poor lamb: thou'rt melancholic.

LORD FROTH. Heaven, Sir Paul, you amaze me, of all things in the world. You are never pleased but when we are all upon the broad grin: all laugh and no company; ah, then 'tis such a sight to see some teeth. Sure you're a great admirer of my Lady Whifler, Mr. Sneer, and Sir Laurence Loud, and that gang.

SIR PAUL. I vow and swear she's a very merry woman; but I think she laughs a little too much.

LORD FROTH. Merry! O Lord, what a character that is of a woman of quality. You have been at my Lady Whifler's upon her day, madam?

CYNT. Yes, my lord. I must humour this fool. [Aside.]

LORD FROTH. Well, and how? hee! What is your sense of the conversation?

CYNT. Oh, most ridiculous, a perpetual comfort of laughing without any harmony; for sure, my lord, to laugh out of time, is as disagreeable as to sing out of time or out of tune.

LORD FROTH. Hee, hee, hee, right; and then, my Lady Whifler is so ready--she always comes in three bars too soon. And then, what do they laugh at? For you know laughing without a jest is as impertinent, hee! as, as -

CYNT. As dancing without a fiddle.

LORD FROTH. Just i'faith, that was at my tongue's end.

CYNT. But that cannot be properly said of them, for I think they are all in good nature with the world, and only laugh at one another; and you must allow they have all jests in their persons, though they have none in their conversation.

LORD FROTH. True, as I'm a person of honour. For heaven's sake let us sacrifice 'em to mirth a little. [Enter BOY and whispers SIR PAUL.]

SIR PAUL. Gads so.--Wife, wife, my Lady Plyant, I have a word.

LADY PLYANT. I'm busy, Sir Paul, I wonder at your impertinence.

CARE. Sir Paul, harkee, I'm reasoning the matter you know. Madam, if your ladyship please, we'll discourse of this in the next room.

SIR PAUL. O ho, I wish you good success, I wish you good success. Boy, tell my lady, when she has done, I would speak with her below.

SCENE X.

CYNTHIA, LORD FROTH, LADY FROTH, BRISK.

LADY FROTH. Then you think that episode between Susan, the dairy-
maid, and our coachman is not amiss; you know, I may suppose the
dairy in town, as well as in the country.

BRISK. Incomparable, let me perish. But then, being an heroic
poem, had you not better call him a charioteer? Charioteer sounds
great; besides, your ladyship's coachman having a red face, and you
comparing him to the sun--and you know the sun is called Heaven's
charioteer.

LADY FROTH. Oh, infinitely better; I'm extremely beholden to you
for the hint; stay, we'll read over those half a score lines again.
[Pulls out a paper.] Let me see here, you know what goes before,--
the comparison, you know. [Reads.]

For as the sun shines ev'ry day,
So of our coachman I may say.

BRISK. I'm afraid that simile won't do in wet weather; because you
say the sun shines every day.

LADY FROTH. No; for the sun it won't, but it will do for the
coachman, for you know there's most occasion for a coach in wet
weather.

BRISK. Right, right, that saves all.

LADY FROTH. Then I don't say the sun shines all the day, but that
he peeps now and then; yet he does shine all the day too, you know,
though we don't see him.

BRISK. Right, but the vulgar will never comprehend that.

LADY FROTH. Well, you shall hear. Let me see. [Reads.]

For as the sun shines ev'ry day,
So of our coachman I may say,
He shows his drunken fiery face,
Just as the sun does, more or less.

BRISK. That's right, all's well, all's well. 'More or less.'

LADY FROTH reads:

And when at night his labour's done,
Then too, like Heav'n's charioteer the sun:

Ay, charioteer does better.

Into the dairy he descends,
And there his whipping and his driving ends;
There he's secure from danger of a bilk,
His fare is paid him, and he sets in milk.

For Susan you know, is Thetis, and so -

BRISK. Incomparable well and proper, egad--but I have one exception to make--don't you think bilk--(I know it's good rhyme)--but don't you think BILK and FARE too like a hackney coachman?

LADY FROTH. I swear and vow I'm afraid so. And yet our Jehu was a hackney coachman, when my lord took him.

BRISK. Was he? I'm answered, if Jehu was a hackney coachman. You may put that in the marginal notes though, to prevent criticism--only mark it with a small asterism, and say, 'Jehu was formerly a hackney coachman.'

LADY FROTH. I will. You'd oblige me extremely to write notes to the whole poem.

BRISK. With all my heart and soul, and proud of the vast honour, let me perish.

LORD FROTH. Hee, hee, hee, my dear, have you done? won't you join with us? We were laughing at my Lady Whifler and Mr. Sneer.

LADY FROTH. Ay, my dear, were you? Oh, filthy Mr. Sneer; he's a nauseous figure, a most fulsamic fop, foh! He spent two days together in going about Covent Garden to suit the lining of his coach with his complexion.

LORD FROTH. O silly! yet his aunt is as fond of him as if she had brought the ape into the world herself.

BRISK. Who, my Lady Toothless? Oh, she's a mortifying spectacle; she's always chewing the cud like an old ewe.

CYNT. Fie, Mr. Brisk, eringo's for her cough.

LADY FROTH. I have seen her take 'em half chewed out of her mouth,

to laugh, and then put 'em in again. Foh!

LORD FROTH. Foh!

LADY FROTH. Then she's always ready to laugh when Sneer offers to speak, and sits in expectation of his no jest, with her gums bare, and her mouth open -

BRISK. Like an oyster at low ebb, egad. Ha, ha, ha!

CYNT. [Aside] Well, I find there are no fools so inconsiderable in themselves but they can render other people contemptible by exposing their infirmities.

LADY FROTH. Then that t'other great strapping lady--I can't hit of her name; the old fat fool that paints so exorbitantly.

BRISK. I know whom you mean--but deuce take me, I can't hit of her name neither. Paints, d'ye say? Why, she lays it on with a trowel. Then she has a great beard that bristles through it, and makes her look as if she were plastered with lime and hair, let me perish.

LADY FROTH. Oh, you made a song upon her, Mr. Brisk.

BRISK. He! egad, so I did. My lord can sing it.

CYNT. O good, my lord, let's hear it.

BRISK. 'Tis not a song neither, it's a sort of an epigram, or rather an epigrammatic sonnet; I don't know what to call it, but it's satire. Sing it, my lord.

LORD FROTH sings.

Ancient Phyllis has young graces,
'Tis a strange thing, but a true one;
Shall I tell you how?
She herself makes her own faces,
And each morning wears a new one;
Where's the wonder now?

BRISK. Short, but there's salt in't; my way of writing, egad.

SCENE XI.

[To them] FOOTMAN.

LADY FROTH. How now?

FOOT. Your ladyship's chair is come.

LADY FROTH. Is nurse and the child in it?

FOOT. Yes, madam.

LADY FROTH. O the dear creature! Let's go see it.

LORD FROTH. I swear, my dear, you'll spoil that child, with sending it to and again so often; this is the seventh time the chair has gone for her to-day.

LADY FROTH. O law! I swear it's but the sixth--and I haven't seen her these two hours. The poor creature--I swear, my lord, you don't love poor little Sapho. Come, my dear Cynthia, Mr. Brisk, we'll go see Sapho, though my lord won't.

CYNT. I'll wait upon your ladyship.

BRISK. Pray, madam, how old is Lady Sapho?

LADY FROTH. Three-quarters, but I swear she has a world of wit, and can sing a tune already. My lord, won't you go? Won't you? What! not to see Saph? Pray, my lord, come see little Saph. I knew you could not stay.

SCENE XII.

CYNTHIA alone.

CYNT. 'Tis not so hard to counterfeit joy in the depth of affliction, as to dissemble mirth in company of fools. Why should I call 'em fools? The world thinks better of 'em; for these have quality and education, wit and fine conversation, are received and admired by the world. If not, they like and admire themselves. And why is not that true wisdom? for 'tis happiness: and for ought I know, we have misapplied the name all this while, and mistaken the thing: since

If happiness in self-content is placed,
The wise are wretched, and fools only bless'd.

ACT IV.--SCENE I.

MELLEFONT and CYNTHIA.

CYNT. I heard him loud as I came by the closet-door, and my lady with him, but she seemed to moderate his passion.

MEL. Ay, hell thank her, as gentle breezes moderate a fire; but I shall counter-work her spells, and ride the witch in her own bridle.

CYNT. It's impossible; she'll cast beyond you still. I'll lay my life it will never be a match.

MEL. What?

CYNT. Between you and me.

MEL. Why so?

CYNT. My mind gives me it won't, because we are both willing. We each of us strive to reach the goal, and hinder one another in the race. I swear it never does well when the parties are so agreed; for when people walk hand in hand there's neither overtaking nor meeting. We hunt in couples, where we both pursue the same game but forget one another; and 'tis because we are so near that we don't think of coming together.

MEL. Hum, 'gad I believe there's something in it. Marriage is the game that we hunt, and while we think that we only have it in view, I don't see but we have it in our power.

CYNT. Within reach; for example, give me your hand. You have looked through the wrong end of the perspective all this while, for nothing has been between us but our fears.

MEL. I don't know why we should not steal out of the house this very moment and marry one another, without consideration or the fear of repentance. Pox o' fortune, portion, settlements, and jointures.

CYNT. Ay, ay, what have we to do with 'em? You know we marry for love.

MEL. Love, love, downright, very villainous love.

CYNT. And he that can't live upon love deserves to die in a ditch. Here then, I give you my promise, in spite of duty, any temptation of wealth, your inconstancy, or my own inclination to change -

MEL. To run most wilfully and unreasonably away with me this moment and be married.

CYNT. Hold. Never to marry anybody else.

MEL. That's but a kind of negative consent. Why, you won't baulk the frolic?

CYNT. If you had not been so assured of your own conduct I would

not. But 'tis but reasonable that since I consent to like a man without the vile consideration of money, he should give me a very evident demonstration of his wit: therefore let me see you undermine my Lady Touchwood, as you boasted, and force her to give her consent, and then -

MEL. I'll do't.

CYNT. And I'll do't.

MEL. This very next ensuing hour of eight o'clock is the last minute of her reign, unless the devil assist her IN PROPRIA PERSONA.

CYNT. Well, if the devil should assist her, and your plot miscarry -

MEL. Ay, what am I to trust to then?

CYNT. Why, if you give me very clear demonstration that it was the devil, I'll allow for irresistible odds. But if I find it to be only chance, or destiny, or unlucky stars, or anything but the very devil, I'm inexorable: only still I'll keep my word, and live a maid for your sake.

MEL. And you won't die one, for your own, so still there's hope.

CYNT. Here's my mother-in-law, and your friend Careless; I would not have 'em see us together yet.

SCENE II.

CARELESS and LADY PLYANT.

LADY PLYANT. I swear, Mr. Careless, you are very alluring, and say so many fine things, and nothing is so moving to me as a fine thing. Well, I must do you this justice, and declare in the face of the world, never anybody gained so far upon me as yourself. With blushes I must own it, you have shaken, as I may say, the very foundation of my honour. Well, sure, if I escape your importunities, I shall value myself as long as I live, I swear.

CARE. And despise me. [Sighing.]

LADY PLYANT. The last of any man in the world, by my purity; now you make me swear. O gratitude forbid, that I should ever be wanting in a respectful acknowledgment of an entire resignation of all my best wishes for the person and parts of so accomplished a person, whose merit challenges much more, I'm sure, than my illiterate praises can description.

CARE. [In a whining tone.] Ah heavens, madam, you ruin me with

kindness. Your charming tongue pursues the victory of your eyes,
while at your feet your poor adorer dies.

LADY PLYANT. Ah! Very fine.

CARE. [Still whining.] Ah, why are you so fair, so bewitching
fair? O let me grow to the ground here, and feast upon that hand; O
let me press it to my heart, my trembling heart: the nimble
movement shall instruct your pulse, and teach it to alarm desire.
(Zoons, I'm almost at the end of my cant, if she does not yield
quickly.) [Aside.]

LADY PLYANT. O that's so passionate and fine, I cannot hear. I am
not safe if I stay, and must leave you.

CARE. And must you leave me! Rather let me languish out a wretched
life, and breath my soul beneath your feet. (I must say the same
thing over again, and can't help it.) [Aside.]

LADY PLYANT. I swear I'm ready to languish too! O my honour!
Whither is it going? I protest you have given me the palpitation of
the heart.

CARE. Can you be so cruel -

LADY PLYANT. O rise, I beseech you, say no more till you rise. Why
did you kneel so long? I swear I was so transported, I did not see
it. Well, to show you how far you have gained upon me, I assure
you, if Sir Paul should die, of all mankind there's none I'd sooner
make my second choice.

CARE. O Heaven! I can't out-live this night without your favour; I
feel my spirits faint, a general dampness overspreads my face, a
cold deadly dew already vents through all my pores, and will to-
morrow wash me for ever from your sight, and drown me in my tomb.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, you have conquered, sweet, melting, moving sir,
you have conquered. What heart of marble can refrain to weep, and
yield to such sad sayings! [Cries.]

CARE. I thank Heaven, they are the saddest that I ever said. Oh!
(I shall never contain laughter.) [Aside.]

LADY PLYANT. Oh, I yield myself all up to your uncontrollable
embraces. Say, thou dear dying man, when, where, and how. Ah,
there's Sir Paul.

CARE. 'Slife, yonder's Sir Paul, but if he were not come, I'm so
transported I cannot speak. This note will inform you. [Gives her
a note.]

SCENE III.

LADY PLYANT, SIR PAUL, CYNTHIA.

SIR PAUL. Thou art my tender lambkin, and shalt do what thou wilt.
But endeavour to forget this Mellefont.

CYNT. I would obey you to my power, sir; but if I have not him, I
have sworn never to marry.

SIR PAUL. Never to marry! Heavens forbid! must I neither have sons
nor grandsons? Must the family of the Plyants be utterly extinct
for want of issue male? O impiety! But did you swear, did that
sweet creature swear? ha! How durst you swear without my consent,
ah? Gads-bud, who am I?

CYNT. Pray don't be angry, sir, when I swore I had your consent;
and therefore I swore.

SIR PAUL. Why then the revoking my consent does annul, or make of
none effect your oath; so you may unswear it again. The law will
allow it.

CYNT. Ay, but my conscience never will.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, no matter for that, conscience and law never go
together; you must not expect that.

LADY PLYANT. Ay, but, Sir Paul, I conceive if she has sworn, d'ye
mark me, if she has once sworn, it is most unchristian, inhuman, and
obscene that she should break it. I'll make up the match again,
because Mr. Careless said it would oblige him. [Aside.]

SIR PAUL. Does your ladyship conceive so? Why, I was of that
opinion once too. Nay, if your ladyship conceives so, I'm of that
opinion again; but I can neither find my lord nor my lady to know
what they intend.

LADY PLYANT. I'm satisfied that my cousin Mellefont has been much
wronged.

CYNT. [Aside.] I'm amazed to find her of our side, for I'm sure
she loved him.

LADY PLYANT. I know my Lady Touchwood has no kindness for him; and
besides I have been informed by Mr. Careless, that Mellefont had
never anything more than a profound respect. That he has owned
himself to be my admirer 'tis true, but he was never so presumptuous
to entertain any dishonourable notions of things; so that if this be
made plain, I don't see how my daughter can in conscience, or
honour, or anything in the world -

SIR PAUL. Indeed if this be made plain, as my lady, your mother,

says, child -

LADY PLYANT. Plain! I was informed of it by Mr. Careless. And I assure you, Mr. Careless is a person that has a most extraordinary respect and honour for you, Sir Paul.

CYNT. [Aside.] And for your ladyship too, I believe, or else you had not changed sides so soon; now I begin to find it.

SIR PAUL. I am much obliged to Mr. Careless really; he is a person that I have a great value for, not only for that, but because he has a great veneration for your ladyship.

LADY PLYANT. O las, no indeed, Sir Paul, 'tis upon your account.

SIR PAUL. No, I protest and vow, I have no title to his esteem, but in having the honour to appertain in some measure to your ladyship, that's all.

LADY PLYANT. O law now, I swear and declare it shan't be so; you're too modest, Sir Paul.

SIR PAUL. It becomes me, when there is any comparison made between

-

LADY PLYANT. O fie, fie, Sir Paul, you'll put me out of countenance. Your very obedient and affectionate wife; that's all. And highly honoured in that title.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, I am transported! Give me leave to kiss your ladyship's hand.

CYNT. That my poor father should be so very silly! [Aside.]

LADY PLYANT. My lip indeed, Sir Paul, I swear you shall. [He kisses her, and bows very low.]

SIR PAUL. I humbly thank your ladyship. I don't know whether I fly on ground, or walk in air. Gads-bud, she was never thus before. Well, I must own myself the most beholden to Mr. Careless. As sure as can be, this is all his doing, something that he has said; well, 'tis a rare thing to have an ingenious friend. Well, your ladyship is of opinion that the match may go forward.

LADY PLYANT. By all means. Mr. Careless has satisfied me of the matter.

SIR PAUL. Well, why then, lamb, you may keep your oath, but have a care about making rash vows; come hither to me, and kiss papa.

LADY PLYANT. I swear and declare, I am in such a twitter to read Mr. Careless his letter, that I can't forbear any longer. But though I may read all letters first by prerogative, yet I'll be sure

to be unsuspected this time, Sir Paul.

SIR PAUL. Did your ladyship call?

LADY PLYANT. Nay, not to interrupt you, my dear. Only lend me your letter, which you had from your steward to-day; I would look upon the account again, and may be increase your allowance.

SIR PAUL. There it is, madam, do you want a pen and ink? [Bows and gives the letter.]

LADY PLYANT. No, no, nothing else, I thank you, Sir Paul. So, now I can read my own letter under the cover of his. [Aside.]

SIR PAUL. He? And wilt thou bring a grandson at nine months end--he? A brave chopping boy. I'll settle a thousand pound a year upon the rogue as soon as ever he looks me in the face, I will, gads-bud. I'm overjoyed to think I have any of my family that will bring children into the world. For I would fain have some resemblance of myself in my posterity, he, Thy? Can't you contrive that affair, girl? Do, gads-bud, think on thy old father, heh? Make the young rogue as like as you can.

CYNT. I'm glad to see you so merry, sir.

SIR PAUL. Merry, gads-bud, I'm serious; I'll give thee five hundred pounds for every inch of him that resembles me; ah, this eye, this left eye! A thousand pounds for this left eye. This has done execution in its time, girl; why, thou hast my leer, hussey, just thy father's leer. Let it be transmitted to the young rogue by the help of imagination; why, 'tis the mark of our family, Thy; our house is distinguished by a languishing eye, as the house of Austria is by a thick lip. Ah! when I was of your age, hussey, I would have held fifty to one, I could have drawn my own picture--gads-bud I could have done--not so much as you, neither; but--nay, don't blush.

CYNT. I don't blush, sir, for I vow I don't understand.

SIR PAUL. Pshaw, pshaw, you fib, you baggage, you do understand, and you shall understand; come, don't be so nice. Gads-bud, don't learn after your mother-in-law my lady here. Marry, heaven forbid that you should follow her example; that would spoil all indeed. Bless us! if you should take a vagary and make a rash resolution on your wedding night, to die a maid, as she did; all were ruined, all my hopes lost. My heart would break, and my estate would be left to the wide world, he? I hope you are a better Christian than to think of living a nun, he? Answer me?

CYNT. I'm all obedience, sir, to your commands.

LADY PLYANT. [Having read the letter.] O dear Mr. Careless, I swear he writes charmingly, and he looks charmingly, and he has charmed me, as much as I have charmed him; and so I'll tell him in

the wardrobe when 'tis dark. O crimony! I hope Sir Paul has not seen both letters. [Puts the wrong letter hastily up, and gives him her own.] Sir Paul, here's your letter; to-morrow morning I'll settle accounts to your advantage.

SCENE IV.

[To them] BRISK.

BRISK. Sir Paul, gads-bud, you're an uncivil person, let me tell you, and all that; and I did not think it had been in you.

SIR PAUL. O law, what's the matter now? I hope you are not angry, Mr. Brisk.

BRISK. Deuce take me, I believe you intend to marry your daughter yourself; you're always brooding over her like an old hen, as if she were not well hatched, egad, he.

SIR PAUL. Good strange! Mr. Brisk is such a merry facetious person, he, he, he. No, no, I have done with her, I have done with her now.

BRISK. The fiddles have stayed this hour in the hall, and my Lord Froth wants a partner, we can never begin without her.

SIR PAUL. Go, go child, go, get you gone and dance and be merry; I'll come and look at you by and by. Where's my son Mellefont?

LADY PLYANT. I'll send him to them, I know where he is.

BRISK. Sir Paul, will you send Careless into the hall if you meet him?

SIR PAUL. I will, I will, I'll go and look for him on purpose.

SCENE V.

BRISK alone.

BRISK. So now they are all gone, and I have an opportunity to practice. Ah! My dear Lady Froth, she's a most engaging creature, if she were not so fond of that damned coxcomby lord of hers; and yet I am forced to allow him wit too, to keep in with him. No matter, she's a woman of parts, and, egad, parts will carry her. She said she would follow me into the gallery. Now to make my approaches. Hem, hem! Ah ma- [bows.] dam! Pox on't, why should I disparage my parts by thinking what to say? None but dull rogues think; witty men, like rich fellows, are always ready for all

expenses; while your blockheads, like poor needy scoundrels, are forced to examine their stock, and forecast the charges of the day. Here she comes, I'll seem not to see her, and try to win her with a new airy invention of my own, hem!

SCENE VI.

[To him] LADY FROTH.

BRISK [Sings, walking about.] 'I'm sick with love,' ha, ha, ha, 'prithee, come cure me. I'm sick with,' etc. O ye powers! O my Lady Froth, my Lady Froth, my Lady Froth! Heigho! Break heart; gods, I thank you. [Stands musing with his arms across.]

LADY FROTH. O heavens, Mr. Brisk! What's the matter?

BRISK. My Lady Froth! Your ladyship's most humble servant. The matter, madam? Nothing, madam, nothing at all, egad. I was fallen into the most agreeable amusement in the whole province of contemplation: that's all--(I'll seem to conceal my passion, and that will look like respect.) [Aside.]

LADY FROTH. Bless me, why did you call out upon me so loud?

BRISK. O Lord, I, madam! I beseech your ladyship--when?

LADY FROTH. Just now as I came in, bless me, why, don't you know it?

BRISK. Not I, let me perish. But did I? Strange! I confess your ladyship was in my thoughts; and I was in a sort of dream that did in a manner represent a very pleasing object to my imagination, but--but did I indeed?--To see how love and murder will out. But did I really name my Lady Froth?

LADY FROTH. Three times aloud, as I love letters. But did you talk of love? O Parnassus! Who would have thought Mr. Brisk could have been in love, ha, ha, ha. O heavens, I thought you could have no mistress but the Nine Muses.

BRISK. No more I have, egad, for I adore 'em all in your ladyship. Let me perish, I don't know whether to be splenetic, or airy upon't; the deuce take me if I can tell whether I am glad or sorry that your ladyship has made the discovery.

LADY FROTH. O be merry by all means. Prince Volscius in love! Ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. O barbarous, to turn me into ridicule! Yet, ha, ha, ha. The deuce take me, I can't help laughing myself, ha, ha, ha; yet by heavens, I have a violent passion for your ladyship, seriously.

LADY FROTH. Seriously? Ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Seriously, ha, ha, ha. Gad I have, for all I laugh.

LADY FROTH. Ha, ha, ha! What d'ye think I laugh at? Ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Me, egad, ha, ha.

LADY FROTH. No, the deuce take me if I don't laugh at myself; for hang me if I have not a violent passion for Mr. Brisk, ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Seriously?

LADY FROTH. Seriously, ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. That's well enough; let me perish, ha, ha, ha. O miraculous; what a happy discovery. Ah my dear charming Lady Froth!

LADY FROTH. Oh my adored Mr. Brisk! [Embrace.]

SCENE VII.

[To them] LORD FROTH.

LORD FROTH. The company are all ready. How now?

BRISK. Zoons! madam, there's my lord. [Softly to her.]

LADY FROTH. Take no notice, but observe me. Now, cast off, and meet me at the lower end of the room, and then join hands again; I could teach my lord this dance purely, but I vow, Mr. Brisk, I can't tell how to come so near any other man. Oh here's my lord, now you shall see me do it with him. [They pretend to practise part of a country dance.]

LORD FROTH. Oh, I see there's no harm yet, but I don't like this familiarity. [Aside.]

LADY FROTH. Shall you and I do our close dance, to show Mr. Brisk?

LORD FROTH. No, my dear, do it with him.

LADY FROTH. I'll do it with him, my lord, when you are out of the way.

BRISK. That's good, egad, that's good. Deuce take me, I can hardly hold laughing in his face. [Aside.]

LORD FROTH. Any other time, my dear, or we'll dance it below.

LADY FROTH. With all my heart.

BRISK. Come, my lord, I'll wait on you. My charming witty angel!
[To her.]

LADY FROTH. We shall have whispering time enough, you know, since we are partners.

SCENE VIII.

LADY PLYANT and CARELESS.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, Mr. Careless, Mr. Careless, I'm ruined, I'm undone.

CARE. What's the matter, madam?

LADY PLYANT. Oh, the unluckiest accident, I'm afraid I shan't live to tell it you.

CARE. Heaven forbid! What is it?

LADY PLYANT. I'm in such a fright; the strangest quandary and premonition! I'm all over in a universal agitation; I dare swear every circumstance of me trembles. O your letter, your letter! By an unfortunate mistake I have given Sir Paul your letter instead of his own.

CARE. That was unlucky.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, yonder he comes reading of it; for heaven's sake step in here and advise me quickly before he sees.

SCENE IX.

SIR PAUL with the Letter.

SIR PAUL. O Providence, what a conspiracy have I discovered. But let me see to make an end on't. [Reads.] Hum--After supper in the wardrobe by the gallery. If Sir Paul should surprise us, I have a commission from him to treat with you about the very matter of fact. Matter of fact! Very pretty; it seems that I am conducting to my own cuckoldom. Why, this is the very traitorous position of taking up arms by my authority, against my person! Well, let me see. Till then I languish in expectation of my adored charmer.--Dying Ned Careless. Gads-bud, would that were matter of fact too. Die and be damned for a Judas Maccabeus and Iscariot both. O friendship! what art thou but a name? Henceforward let no man make a friend that would not be a cuckold: for whomsoever he receives into his bosom

will find the way to his bed, and there return his caresses with interest to his wife. Have I for this been pinioned, night after night for three years past? Have I been swathed in blankets till I have been even deprived of motion? Have I approached the marriage bed with reverence as to a sacred shrine, and denied myself the enjoyment of lawful domestic pleasures to preserve its purity, and must I now find it polluted by foreign iniquity? O my Lady Plyant, you were chaste as ice, but you are melted now, and false as water. But Providence has been constant to me in discovering this conspiracy; still, I am beholden to Providence. If it were not for Providence, sure, poor Sir Paul, thy heart would break.

SCENE X.

[To him] LADY PLYANT.

LADY PLYANT. So, sir, I see you have read the letter. Well, now, Sir Paul, what do you think of your friend Careless? Has he been treacherous, or did you give his insolence a licence to make trial of your wife's suspected virtue? D'ye see here? [Snatches the letter as in anger.] Look, read it. Gads my life, if I thought it were so, I would this moment renounce all communication with you. Ungrateful monster! He? is it so? Ay, I see it, a plot upon my honour; your guilty cheeks confess it. Oh, where shall wronged virtue fly for reparation? I'll be divorced this instant.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, what shall I say? This is the strangest surprise. Why, I don't know anything at all, nor I don't know whether there be anything at all in the world, or no.

LADY PLYANT. I thought I should try you, false man. I, that never dissembled in my life, yet to make trial of you, pretended to like that monster of iniquity, Careless, and found out that contrivance to let you see this letter, which now I find was of your own inditing--I do, heathen, I do. See my face no more; I'll be divorced presently.

SIR PAUL. O strange, what will become of me? I'm so amazed, and so overjoyed, so afraid, and so sorry. But did you give me this letter on purpose, he? Did you?

LADY PLYANT. Did I? Do you doubt me, Turk, Saracen? I have a cousin that's a proctor in the Commons; I'll go to him instantly.

SIR PAUL. Hold, stay, I beseech your ladyship. I'm so overjoyed, stay, I'll confess all.

LADY PLYANT. What will you confess, Jew?

SIR PAUL. Why, now, as I hope to be saved, I had no hand in this letter--nay, hear me, I beseech your ladyship. The devil take me

now if he did not go beyond my commission. If I desired him to do any more than speak a good word only just for me; gads-bud, only for poor Sir Paul, I'm an Anabaptist, or a Jew, or what you please to call me.

LADY PLYANT. Why, is not here matter of fact?

SIR PAUL. Ay, but by your own virtue and continency that matter of fact is all his own doing. I confess I had a great desire to have some honours conferred upon me, which lie all in your ladyship's breast, and he being a well-spoken man, I desired him to intercede for me.

LADY PLYANT. Did you so? presumption! Oh, he comes, the Tarquin comes; I cannot bear his sight.

SCENE XI.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL.

CARE. Sir Paul, I'm glad I've met with you, 'gad, I have said all I could, but can't prevail. Then my friendship to you has carried me a little farther in this matter.

SIR PAUL. Indeed; well sir, I'll dissemble with him a little.
[Aside.]

CARE. Why, faith I have in my time known honest gentlemen abused by a pretended coyness in their wives, and I had a mind to try my lady's virtue. And when I could not prevail for you, gad, I pretended to be in love myself; but all in vain, she would not hear a word upon that subject. Then I writ a letter to her; I don't know what effects that will have, but I'll be sure to tell you when I do, though by this light I believe her virtue is impregnable.

SIR PAUL. O Providence! Providence! What discoveries are here made? Why, this is better and more miraculous than the rest.

CARE. What do you mean?

SIR PAUL. I can't tell you, I'm so overjoyed; come along with me to my lady, I can't contain myself; come, my dear friend.

CARE. So, so, so, this difficulty's over. [Aside.]

SCENE XII.

MELLEFONT, MASKWELL, from different doors.

MEL. Maskwell! I have been looking for you--'tis within a quarter of eight.

MASK. My lady is just gone into my lord's closet, you had best steal into her chamber before she comes, and lie concealed there, otherwise she may lock the door when we are together, and you not easily get in to surprise us.

MEL. He? You say true.

MASK. You had best make haste, for after she has made some apology to the company for her own and my lord's absence all this while, she'll retire to her chamber instantly.

MEL. I go this moment. Now, fortune, I defy thee.

SCENE XIII.

MASKWELL alone.

MASK. I confess you may be allowed to be secure in your own opinion; the appearance is very fair, but I have an after-game to play that shall turn the tables, and here comes the man that I must manage.

SCENE XIV.

[To him] LORD TOUCHWOOD.

LORD TOUCH. Maskwell, you are the man I wished to meet.

MASK. I am happy to be in the way of your lordship's commands.

LORD TOUCH. I have always found you prudent and careful in anything that has concerned me or my family.

MASK. I were a villain else. I am bound by duty and gratitude, and my own inclination, to be ever your lordship's servant.

LORD TOUCH. Enough. You are my friend; I know it. Yet there has been a thing in your knowledge, which has concerned me nearly, that you have concealed from me.

MASK. My lord!

LORD TOUCH. Nay, I excuse your friendship to my unnatural nephew thus far. But I know you have been privy to his impious designs upon my wife. This evening she has told me all. Her good nature concealed it as long as was possible; but he perseveres so in

villainy, that she has told me even you were weary of dissuading him, though you have once actually hindered him from forcing her.

MASK. I am sorry, my lord, I can't make you an answer; this is an occasion in which I would not willingly be silent.

LORD TOUCH. I know you would excuse him--and I know as well that you can't.

MASK. Indeed I was in hopes it had been a youthful heat that might have soon boiled over; but -

LORD TOUCH. Say on.

MASK. I have nothing more to say, my lord; but to express my concern; for I think his frenzy increases daily.

LORD TOUCH. How! Give me but proof of it, ocular proof, that I may justify my dealing with him to the world, and share my fortunes.

MASK. O my lord! consider; that is hard. Besides, time may work upon him. Then, for me to do it! I have professed an everlasting friendship to him.

LORD TOUCH. He is your friend; and what am I?

MASK. I am answered.

LORD TOUCH. Fear not his displeasure; I will put you out of his, and fortune's power, and for that thou art scrupulously honest, I will secure thy fidelity to him, and give my honour never to own any discovery that you shall make me. Can you give me a demonstrative proof? Speak.

MASK. I wish I could not. To be plain, my lord, I intended this evening to have tried all arguments to dissuade him from a design which I suspect; and if I had not succeeded, to have informed your lordship of what I knew.

LORD TOUCH. I thank you. What is the villain's purpose?

MASK. He has owned nothing to me of late, and what I mean now, is only a bare suspicion of my own. If your lordship will meet me a quarter of an hour hence there, in that lobby by my lady's bed-chamber, I shall be able to tell you more.

LORD TOUCH. I will.

MASK. My duty to your lordship makes me do a severe piece of justice.

LORD TOUCH. I will be secret, and reward your honesty beyond your hopes.

SCENE XV.

Scene opening, shows Lady Touchwood's chamber.

MELLEFONT solus.

MEL. Pray heaven my aunt keep touch with her assignation. O that her lord were but sweating behind this hanging, with the expectation of what I shall see. Hist, she comes. Little does she think what a mine is just ready to spring under her feet. But to my post. [Goes behind the hangings.]

SCENE XVI.

LADY TOUCHWOOD.

LADY TOUCH. 'Tis eight o'clock; methinks I should have found him here. Who does not prevent the hour of love, outstays the time; for to be dully punctual is too slow. I was accusing you of neglect.

SCENE XVII.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, MASKWELL, MELLEFONT absconding.

MASK. I confess you do reproach me when I see you here before me; but 'tis fit I should be still behindhand, still to be more and more indebted to your goodness.

LADY TOUCH. You can excuse a fault too well, not to have been to blame. A ready answer shows you were prepared.

MASK. Guilt is ever at a loss, and confusion waits upon it; when innocence and bold truth are always ready for expression.

LADY TOUCH. Not in love: words are the weak support of cold indifference; love has no language to be heard.

MASK. Excess of joy has made me stupid! Thus may my lips be ever closed. [Kisses her.] And thus--O who would not lose his speech, upon condition to have joys above it?

LADY TOUCH. Hold, let me lock the door first. [Goes to the door.]

MASK. [Aside.] That I believed; 'twas well I left the private passage open.

LADY TOUCH. So, that's safe.

MASK. And so may all your pleasures be, and secret as this kiss -

MEL. And may all treachery be thus discovered. [Leaps out.]

LADY TOUCH. Ah! [Shrieks.]

MEL. Villain! [Offers to draw.]

MASK. Nay, then, there's but one way. [Runs out.]

SCENE XVIII.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, MELLEFONT.

MEL. Say you so, were you provided for an escape? Hold, madam, you have no more holes to your burrow; I'll stand between you and this sally-port.

LADY TOUCH. Thunder strike thee dead for this deceit, immediate lightning blast thee, me, and the whole world! Oh! I could rack myself, play the vulture to my own heart, and gnaw it piecemeal, for not boding to me this misfortune.

MEL. Be patient.

LADY TOUCH. Be damned.

MEL. Consider, I have you on the hook; you will but flounder yourself a-weary, and be nevertheless my prisoner.

LADY TOUCH. I'll hold my breath and die, but I'll be free.

MEL. O madam, have a care of dying unprepared, I doubt you have some unrepented sins that may hang heavy, and retard your flight.

LADY TOUCH. O! what shall I do? say? Whither shall I turn? Has hell no remedy?

MEL. None; hell has served you even as heaven has done, left you to yourself.--You're in a kind of Erasmus paradise, yet if you please you may make it a purgatory; and with a little penance and my absolution all this may turn to good account.

LADY TOUCH. [Aside.] Hold in my passion, and fall, fall a little, thou swelling heart; let me have some intermission of this rage, and one minute's coolness to dissemble. [She weeps.]

MEL. You have been to blame. I like those tears, and hope they are of the purest kind,--penitential tears.

LADY TOUCH. O the scene was shifted quick before me,--I had not time to think. I was surprised to see a monster in the glass, and now I find 'tis myself; can you have mercy to forgive the faults I have imagined, but never put in practice?--O consider, consider how fatal you have been to me, you have already killed the quiet of this life. The love of you was the first wandering fire that e'er misled my steps, and while I had only that in view, I was betrayed into unthought of ways of ruin.

MEL. May I believe this true?

LADY TOUCH. O be not cruelly incredulous.--How can you doubt these streaming eyes? Keep the severest eye o'er all my future conduct, and if I once relapse, let me not hope forgiveness; 'twill ever be in your power to ruin me. My lord shall sign to your desires; I will myself create your happiness, and Cynthia shall be this night your bride. Do but conceal my failings, and forgive.

MEL. Upon such terms I will be ever yours in every honest way.

SCENE XIX.

MASKWELL softly introduces LORD TOUCHWOOD, and retires.

MASK. I have kept my word, he's here, but I must not be seen.

SCENE XX.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, LORD TOUCHWOOD, MELLEFONT.

LORD TOUCH. Hell and amazement, she's in tears.

LADY TOUCH. [Kneeling.] Eternal blessings thank you.--Ha! my lord listening! O fortune has o'erpaid me all, all! all's my own!
[Aside.]

MEL. Nay, I beseech you rise.

LADY TOUCH. [Aloud.] Never, never! I'll grow to the ground, be buried quick beneath it, e'er I'll be consenting to so damned a sin as incest! unnatural incest!

MEL. Ha!

LADY TOUCH. O cruel man, will you not let me go? I'll forgive all that's past. O heaven, you will not ravish me?

MEL. Damnation!

LORD TOUCH. Monster, dog! your life shall answer this! [Draws and runs at MELLEFONT, is held by LADY TOUCHWOOD.]

LADY TOUCH. O heavens, my lord! Hold, hold, for heaven's sake.

MEL. Confusion, my uncle! O the damned sorceress.

LADY TOUCH. Moderate your rage, good my lord! He's mad, alas, he's mad. Indeed he is, my lord, and knows not what he does. See how wild he looks.

MEL. By heaven, 'twere senseless not to be mad, and see such witchcraft.

LADY TOUCH. My lord, you hear him, he talks idly.

LORD TOUCH. Hence from my sight, thou living infamy to my name; when next I see that face, I'll write villain in't with my sword's point.

MEL. Now, by my soul, I will not go till I have made known my wrongs. Nay, till I have made known yours, which, if possible, are greater,--though she has all the host of hell her servants.

LADY TOUCH. Alas, he raves! Talks very poetry! For heaven's sake away, my lord, he'll either tempt you to extravagance, or commit some himself.

MEL. Death and furies, will you not hear me?--Why by heaven she laughs, grins, points to your back; she forks out cuckoldom with her fingers, and you're running horn-mad after your fortune. [As she is going she turns back and smiles at him.]

LORD TOUCH. I fear he's mad indeed.--Let's send Maskwell to him.

MEL. Send him to her.

LADY TOUCH. Come, come, good my lord, my heart aches so, I shall faint if I stay.

SCENE XXI.

MELLEFONT alone.

MEL. Oh, I could curse my stars, fate, and chance; all causes and accidents of fortune in this life! But to what purpose? Yet, 'sdeath, for a man to have the fruit of all his industry grow full and ripe, ready to drop into his mouth, and just when he holds out his hand to gather it, to have a sudden whirlwind come, tear up tree and all, and bear away the very root and foundation of his hopes:-

what temper can contain? They talk of sending Maskwell to me; I never had more need of him. But what can he do? Imagination cannot form a fairer and more plausible design than this of his which has miscarried. O my precious aunt, I shall never thrive without I deal with the devil, or another woman.

Women, like flames, have a destroying power,
Ne'er to be quenched, till they themselves devour.

ACT V.--SCENE I.

LADY TOUCHWOOD and MASKWELL.

LADY TOUCH. Was't not lucky?

MASK. Lucky! Fortune is your own, and 'tis her interest so to be. By heaven I believe you can control her power, and she fears it: though chance brought my lord, 'twas your own art that turned it to advantage.

LADY TOUCH. 'Tis true it might have been my ruin. But yonder's my lord. I believe he's coming to find you: I'll not be seen.

SCENE II.

MASKWELL alone.

MASK. So; I durst not own my introducing my lord, though it succeeded well for her, for she would have suspected a design which I should have been puzzled to excuse. My lord is thoughtful. I'll be so too; yet he shall know my thoughts: or think he does.

SCENE III.

[To him] LORD TOUCHWOOD.

MASK. What have I done?

LORD TOUCH. Talking to himself!

MASK. 'Twas honest--and shall I be rewarded for it? No, 'twas honest, therefore I shan't. Nay, rather therefore I ought not; for it rewards itself.

LORD TOUCH. Unequalled virtue! [Aside.]

MASK. But should it be known, then I have lost a friend! He was an ill man, and I have gained; for half myself I lent him, and that I have recalled: so I have served myself, and what is yet better, I have served a worthy lord to whom I owe myself.

LORD TOUCH. Excellent man! [Aside.]

MASK. Yet I am wretched. Oh, there is a secret burns within this breast, which, should it once blaze forth, would ruin all, consume my honest character, and brand me with the name of villain.

LORD TOUCH. Ha!

MASK. Why do I love! Yet heaven and my waking conscience are my witnesses, I never gave one working thought a vent, which might discover that I loved, nor ever must. No, let it prey upon my heart; for I would rather die, than seem once, barely seem, dishonest. Oh, should it once be known I love fair Cynthia, all this that I have done would look like rival's malice, false friendship to my lord, and base self-interest. Let me perish first, and from this hour avoid all sight and speech, and, if I can, all thought of that pernicious beauty. Ha! But what is my distraction doing? I am wildly talking to myself, and some ill chance might have directed malicious ears this way. [Seems to start, seeing my lord.]

LORD TOUCH. Start not; let guilty and dishonest souls start at the revelation of their thoughts, but be thou fixed, as is thy virtue.

MASK. I am confounded, and beg your Lordship's pardon for those free discourses which I have had with myself.

LORD TOUCH. Come, I beg your pardon that I overheard you, and yet it shall not need. Honest Maskwell! Thy and my good genius led me hither. Mine, in that I have discovered so much manly virtue; thine, in that thou shalt have due reward of all thy worth. Give me thy hand. My nephew is the alone remaining branch of all our ancient family: him I thus blow away, and constitute thee in his room to be my heir -

MASK. Now heaven forbid -

LORD TOUCH. No more--I have resolved. The writings are ready drawn, and wanted nothing but to be signed, and have his name inserted. Yours will fill the blank as well. I will have no reply. Let me command this time; for 'tis the last in which I will assume authority. Hereafter, you shall rule where I have power.

MASK. I humbly would petition -

LORD TOUCH. Is't for yourself? [MASKWELL pauses.] I'll hear of nought for anybody else.

MASK. Then witness heaven for me, this wealth and honour was not of my seeking, nor would I build my fortune on another's ruin. I had but one desire -

LORD TOUCH. Thou shalt enjoy it. If all I'm worth in wealth or interest can purchase Cynthia, she is thine. I'm sure Sir Paul's consent will follow fortune. I'll quickly show him which way that is going.

MASK. You oppress me with bounty. My gratitude is weak, and shrinks beneath the weight, and cannot rise to thank you. What, enjoy my love! Forgive the transports of a blessing so unexpected, so unhop'd for, so unthought of!

LORD TOUCH. I will confirm it, and rejoice with thee.

SCENE IV.

MASKWELL alone.

MASK. This is prosperous indeed. Why let him find me out a villain, settled in possession of a fair estate, and full fruition of my love, I'll bear the railings of a losing gamester. But should he find me out before! 'Tis dangerous to delay. Let me think. Should my lord proceed to treat openly of my marriage with Cynthia, all must be discovered, and Mellefont can be no longer blinded. It must not be; nay, should my lady know it--ay, then were fine work indeed! Her fury would spare nothing, though she involved herself in ruin. No, it must be by stratagem. I must deceive Mellefont once more, and get my lord to consent to my private management. He comes opportunely. Now will I, in my old way, discover the whole and real truth of the matter to him, that he may not suspect one word on't.

No mask like open truth to cover lies,
As to go naked is the best disguise.

SCENE V.

[To him] MELLEFONT.

MEL. O Maskwell, what hopes? I am confounded in a maze of thoughts, each leading into one another, and all ending in perplexity. My uncle will not see nor hear me.

MASK. No matter, sir, don't trouble your head: all's in my power.

MEL. How? For heaven's sake?

MASK. Little do you think that your aunt has kept her word. How the devil she wrought my lord into this dotage, I know not; but he's gone to Sir Paul about my marriage with Cynthia, and has appointed me his heir.

MEL. The devil he has! What's to be done?

MASK. I have it, it must be by stratagem; for it's in vain to make application to him. I think I have that in my head that cannot fail. Where's Cynthia?

MEL. In the garden.

MASK. Let us go and consult her: my life for yours, I cheat my lord.

SCENE VI.

LORD TOUCHWOOD, LADY TOUCHWOOD.

LADY TOUCH. Maskwell your heir, and marry Cynthia!

LORD TOUCH. I cannot do too much for so much merit.

LADY TOUCH. But this is a thing of too great moment to be so suddenly resolved. Why Cynthia? Why must he be married? Is there not reward enough in raising his low fortune, but he must mix his blood with mine, and wed my niece? How know you that my brother will consent, or she? Nay, he himself perhaps may have affections elsewhere.

LORD TOUCH. No, I am convinced he loves her.

LADY TOUCH. Maskwell love Cynthia? Impossible!

LORD TOUCH. I tell you he confessed it to me.

LADY TOUCH. Confusion! How's this? [Aside.]

LORD TOUCH. His humility long stifled his passion. And his love of Mellefont would have made him still conceal it. But by encouragement, I wrung the secret from him, and know he's no way to be rewarded but in her. I'll defer my farther proceedings in it till you have considered it; but remember how we are both indebted to him.

SCENE VII.

LADY TOUCHWOOD alone.

LADY TOUCH. Both indebted to him! Yes, we are both indebted to him, if you knew all. Villain! Oh, I am wild with this surprise of treachery: it is impossible, it cannot be. He love Cynthia! What, have I been bawd to his designs, his property only, a baiting place? Now I see what made him false to Mellefont. Shame and distraction! I cannot bear it, oh! what woman can bear to be a property? To be kindled to a flame, only to light him to another's arms; oh! that I were fire indeed that I might burn the vile traitor. What shall I do? How shall I think? I cannot think. All my designs are lost, my love unsated, my revenge unfinished, and fresh cause of fury from unthought of plagues.

SCENE VIII.

[To her] SIR PAUL.

SIR PAUL. Madam, sister, my lady sister, did you see my lady my wife?

LADY TOUCH. Oh! Torture!

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, I can't find her high nor low; where can she be, think you?

LADY TOUCH. Where she's serving you, as all your sex ought to be served, making you a beast. Don't you know you're a fool, brother?

SIR PAUL. A fool; he, he, he, you're merry. No, no, not I, I know no such matter.

LADY TOUCH. Why, then, you don't know half your happiness.

SIR PAUL. That's a jest with all my heart, faith and troth. But harkee, my lord told me something of a revolution of things; I don't know what to make on't. Gads-bud, I must consult my wife:- he talks of disinheriting his nephew, and I don't know what. Look you, sister, I must know what my girl has to trust to, or not a syllable of a wedding, gads-bud!--to show you that I am not a fool.

LADY TOUCH. Hear me: consent to the breaking off this marriage, and the promoting any other without consulting me, and I'll renounce all blood, all relation and concern with you for ever; nay, I'll be your enemy, and pursue you to destruction: I'll tear your eyes out, and tread you under my feet.

SIR PAUL. Why, what's the matter now? Good Lord, what's all this for? Pooh, here's a joke indeed. Why, where's my wife?

LADY TOUCH. With Careless, in the close arbour; he may want you by this time, as much as you want her.

SIR PAUL. Oh, if she be with Mr. Careless, 'tis well enough.

LADY TOUCH. Fool, sot, insensible ox! But remember what I said to you, or you had better eat your own horns, by this light you had.

SIR PAUL. You're a passionate woman, gads-bud! But to say truth all our family are choleric; I am the only peaceable person amongst 'em.

SCENE IX.

MELLEFONT, MASKWELL, and CYNTHIA.

MEL. I know no other way but this he has proposed: if you have love enough to run the venture.

CYNT. I don't know whether I have love enough, but I find I have obstinacy enough to pursue whatever I have once resolved; and a true female courage to oppose anything that resists my will, though 'twere reason itself.

MASK. That's right. Well, I'll secure the writings and run the hazard along with you.

CYNT. But how can the coach and six horses be got ready without suspicion?

MASK. Leave it to my care; that shall be so far from being suspected, that it shall be got ready by my lord's own order.

MEL. How?

MASK. Why, I intend to tell my lord the whole matter of our contrivance; that's my way.

MEL. I don't understand you.

MASK. Why, I'll tell my lord I laid this plot with you on purpose to betray you; and that which put me upon it, was the finding it impossible to gain the lady any other way, but in the hopes of her marrying you.

MEL. So.

MASK. So, why so, while you're busied in making yourself ready, I'll wheedle her into the coach; and instead of you, borrow my lord's chaplain, and so run away with her myself.

MEL. Oh, I conceive you; you'll tell him so.

MASK. Tell him so! ay; why, you don't think I mean to do so?

MEL. No, no; ha, ha, I dare swear thou wilt not.

MASK. Therefore, for our farther security, I would have you disguised like a parson, that if my lord should have curiosity to peep, he may not discover you in the coach, but think the cheat is carried on as he would have it.

MEL. Excellent Maskwell! Thou wert certainly meant for a statesman or a Jesuit; but thou art too honest for one, and too pious for the other.

MASK. Well, get yourself ready, and meet me in half-an-hour, yonder in my lady's dressing-room; go by the back stairs, and so we may slip down without being observed. I'll send the chaplain to you with his robes: I have made him my own, and ordered him to meet us to-morrow morning at St. Albans; there we will sum up this account, to all our satisfactions.

MEL. Should I begin to thank or praise thee, I should waste the little time we have.

SCENE X.

CYNTHIA, MASKWELL

MASK. Madam, you will be ready?

CYNT. I will be punctual to the minute. [Going.]

MASK. Stay, I have a doubt. Upon second thoughts, we had better meet in the chaplain's chamber here, the corner chamber at this end of the gallery, there is a back way into it, so that you need not come through this door, and a pair of private stairs leading down to the stables. It will be more convenient.

CYNT. I am guided by you; but Mellefont will mistake.

MASK. No, no, I'll after him immediately, and tell him.

CYNT. I will not fail.

SCENE XI.

MASKWELL alone.

MASK. Why, QUI VULT DECIPI DECIPIATUR.--'Tis no fault of mine: I have told 'em in plain terms how easy 'tis for me to cheat 'em, and if they will not hear the serpent's hiss, they must be stung into experience and future caution. Now to prepare my lord to consent to this. But first I must instruct my little Levite; there is no plot, public or private, that can expect to prosper without one of them has a finger in't: he promised me to be within at this hour,--Mr. Saygrace, Mr. Saygrace! [Goes to the chamber door and knocks.]

SCENE XII.

MASKWELL, SAYGRACE.

SAYGRACE [looking out.] Sweet sir, I will but pen the last line of an acrostic, and be with you in the twinkling of an ejaculation, in the pronouncing of an Amen, or before you can -

MASK. Nay, good Mr. Saygrace, do not prolong the time by describing to me the shortness of your stay; rather if you please, defer the finishing of your wit, and let us talk about our business; it shall be tithes in your way.

SAYGRACE. [Enters.] You shall prevail: I would break off in the middle of a sermon to do you a pleasure.

MASK. You could not do me a greater,--except the business in hand. Have you provided a habit for Mellefont?

SAYGRACE. I have; they are ready in my chamber, together with a clean starched band and cuffs.

MASK. Good, let them be carried to him; have you stitched the gown sleeve, that he may be puzzled, and waste time in putting it on?

SAYGRACE. I have: the gown will not be indued without perplexity.

MASK. Meet me in half-an-hour, here in your own chamber. When Cynthia comes, let there be no light, and do not speak, that she may not distinguish you from Mellefont. I'll urge haste to excuse your silence.

SAYGRACE. You have no more commands?

MASK. None: your text is short.

SAYGRACE. But pithy: and I will handle it with discretion.

MASK. It will be the first you have so served.

SCENE XIII.

LORD TOUCHWOOD, MASKWELL.

LORD TOUCH. Sure I was born to be controlled by those I should command. My very slaves will shortly give me rules how I shall govern them.

MASK. I am concerned to see your lordship discomposed.

LORD TOUCH. Have you seen my wife lately, or disoblged her?

MASK. No, my lord. What can this mean? [Aside.]

LORD TOUCH. Then Mellefont has urged somebody to incense her. Something she has heard of you which carries her beyond the bounds of patience.

MASK. This I feared. [Aside.] Did not your lordship tell her of the honours you designed me?

LORD TOUCH. Yes.

MASK. 'Tis that; you know my lady has a high spirit; she thinks I am unworthy.

LORD TOUCH. Unworthy! 'Tis an ignorant pride in her to think so. Honesty to me is true nobility. However, 'tis my will it shall be so, and that should be convincing to her as much as reason. By Heaven, I'll not be wife-ridden; were it possible, it should be done this night.

MASK. By Heaven, he meets my wishes! [Aside.] Few things are impossible to willing minds.

LORD TOUCH. Instruct me how this may be done, you shall see I want no inclination.

MASK. I had laid a small design for to-morrow (as love will be inventing) which I thought to communicate to your lordship. But it may be as well done to-night.

LORD TOUCH. Here's company. Come this way and tell me.

SCENE XIV.

CARELESS and CYNTHIA.

CARE. Is not that he now gone out with my lord?

CYNT. Yes.

CARE. By heaven, there's treachery. The confusion that I saw your father in, my Lady Touchwood's passion, with what imperfectly I overheard between my lord and her, confirm me in my fears. Where's Mellefont?

CYNT. Here he comes.

SCENE XV.

[To them] MELLEFONT.

CYNT. Did Maskwell tell you anything of the chaplain's chamber?

MEL. No. My dear, will you get ready? The things are all in my chamber; I want nothing but the habit.

CARE. You are betrayed, and Maskwell is the villain I always thought him.

CYNT. When you were gone, he said his mind was changed, and bid me meet him in the chaplain's room, pretending immediately to follow you and give you notice.

MEL. How?

CARE. There's Saygrace tripping by with a bundle under his arm. He cannot be ignorant that Maskwell means to use his chamber; let's follow and examine him.

MEL. 'Tis loss of time; I cannot think him false.

SCENE XVI.

CYNTHIA, LORD TOUCHWOOD.

CYNT. My lord musing!

LORD TOUCH. He has a quick invention, if this were suddenly designed. Yet he says he had prepared my chaplain already.

CYNT. How's this? Now I fear indeed.

LORD TOUCH. Cynthia here! Alone, fair cousin, and melancholy?

CYNT. Your lordship was thoughtful.

LORD TOUCH. My thoughts were on serious business not worth your hearing.

CYNT. Mine were on treachery concerning you, and may be worth your hearing.

LORD TOUCH. Treachery concerning me? Pray be plain. Hark! What noise?

MASK. (within) Will you not hear me?

LADY TOUCH. (within) No, monster! traitor! No.

CYNT. My lady and Maskwell! This may be lucky. My lord, let me entreat you to stand behind this screen and listen: perhaps this chance may give you proof of what you ne'er could have believed from my suspicions.

SCENE XVII.

LADY TOUCHWOOD with a dagger; MASKWELL; CYNTHIA and LORD TOUCHWOOD abscond, listening.

LADY TOUCH. You want but leisure to invent fresh falsehood, and soothe me to a fond belief of all your fictions: but I will stab the lie that's forming in your heart, and save a sin, in pity to your soul.

MASK. Strike then, since you will have it so.

LADY TOUCH. Ha! A steady villain to the last.

MASK. Come, why do you dally with me thus?

LADY TOUCH. Thy stubborn temper shocks me, and you knew it would; this is cunning all, and not courage. No; I know thee well, but thou shalt miss thy aim.

MASK. Ha, ha, ha!

LADY TOUCH. Ha! Do you mock my rage? Then this shall punish your fond, rash contempt. Again smile! [Goes to strike.] And such a smile as speaks in ambiguity! Ten thousand meanings lurk in each corner of that various face.

Oh! that they were written in thy heart,
That I, with this, might lay thee open to my sight!
But then 'twill be too late to know -

Thou hast, thou hast found the only way to turn my rage. Too well thou knowest my jealous soul could never bear uncertainty. Speak, then, and tell me. Yet are you silent. Oh, I am wildered in all passions. But thus my anger melts. [Weeps.] Here, take this

poniard, for my very spirits faint, and I want strength to hold it; thou hast disarmed my soul. [Gives the dagger.]

LORD TOUCH. Amazement shakes me. Where will this end?

MASK. So, 'tis well--let your wild fury have a vent; and when you have temper, tell me.

LADY TOUCH. Now, now, now I am calm and can hear you.

MASK. [Aside.] Thanks, my invention; and now I have it for you. First, tell me what urged you to this violence: for your passion broke in such imperfect terms, that yet I am to learn the cause.

LADY TOUCH. My lord himself surprised me with the news you were to marry Cynthia, that you had owned our love to him, and his indulgence would assist you to attain your ends.

CYNT. How, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. Pray forbear all resentments for a while, and let us hear the rest.

MASK. I grant you in appearance all is true; I seemed consenting to my lord--nay, transported with the blessing. But could you think that I, who had been happy in your loved embraces, could e'er be fond of an inferior slavery?

LORD TOUCH. Ha! Oh, poison to my ears! What do I hear?

CYNT. Nay, good my lord, forbear resentment; let us hear it out.

LORD TOUCH. Yes, I will contain, though I could burst.

MASK. I, that had wantoned in the rich circle of your world of love, could be confined within the puny province of a girl? No. Yet though I dote on each last favour more than all the rest, though I would give a limb for every look you cheaply throw away on any other object of your love: yet so far I prize your pleasures o'er my own, that all this seeming plot that I have laid has been to gratify your taste and cheat the world, to prove a faithful rogue to you.

LADY TOUCH. If this were true. But how can it be?

MASK. I have so contrived that Mellefont will presently, in the chaplain's habit, wait for Cynthia in your dressing-room; but I have put the change upon her, that she may be other where employed. Do you procure her night-gown, and with your hoods tied over your face, meet him in her stead. You may go privately by the back stairs, and, unperceived, there you may propose to reinstate him in his uncle's favour, if he'll comply with your desires--his case is desperate, and I believe he'll yield to any conditions. If not

here, take this; you may employ it better than in the heart of one who is nothing when not yours. [Gives the dagger.]

LADY TOUCH. Thou can'st deceive everybody. Nay, thou hast deceived me; but 'tis as I would wish. Trusty villain! I could worship thee.

MASK. No more; it wants but a few minutes of the time; and Mellefont's love will carry him there before his hour.

LADY TOUCH. I go, I fly, incomparable Maskwell!

SCENE XVIII.

MASKWELL, CYNTHIA, LORD TOUCHWOOD.

MASK. So, this was a pinch indeed, my invention was upon the rack, and made discovery of her last plot. I hope Cynthia and my chaplain will be ready; I'll prepare for the expedition.

SCENE XIX.

CYNTHIA and LORD TOUCHWOOD.

CYNT. Now, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. Astonishment binds up my rage! Villainy upon villainy! Heavens, what a long track of dark deceit has this discovered! I am confounded when I look back, and want a clue to guide me through the various mazes of unheard-of treachery. My wife! Damnation! My hell!

CYNT. My lord, have patience, and be sensible how great our happiness is, that this discovery was not made too late.

LORD TOUCH. I thank you, yet it may be still too late, if we don't presently prevent the execution of their plots;--ha, I'll do't. Where's Mellefont, my poor injured nephew? How shall I make him ample satisfaction?

CYNT. I dare answer for him.

LORD TOUCH. I do him fresh wrong to question his forgiveness; for I know him to be all goodness. Yet my wife! Damn her:- she'll think to meet him in that dressing-room. Was't not so? And Maskwell will expect you in the chaplain's chamber. For once, I'll add my plot too:- let us haste to find out, and inform my nephew; and do you, quickly as you can, bring all the company into this gallery. I'll expose the strumpet, and the villain.

SCENE XX.

LORD FROTH and SIR PAUL.

LORD FROTH. By heavens, I have slept an age. Sir Paul, what o'clock is't? Past eight, on my conscience; my lady's is the most inviting couch, and a slumber there is the prettiest amusement! But where's all the company?

SIR PAUL. The company, gads-bud, I don't know, my lord, but here's the strangest revolution, all turned topsy turvy; as I hope for providence.

LORD FROTH. O heavens, what's the matter? Where's my wife?

SIR PAUL. All turned topsy turvy as sure as a gun.

LORD FROTH. How do you mean? My wife?

SIR PAUL. The strangest posture of affairs!

LORD FROTH. What, my wife?

SIR PAUL. No, no, I mean the family. Your lady's affairs may be in a very good posture; I saw her go into the garden with Mr. Brisk.

LORD FROTH. How? Where, when, what to do?

SIR PAUL. I suppose they have been laying their heads together.

LORD FROTH. How?

SIR PAUL. Nay, only about poetry, I suppose, my lord; making couplets.

LORD FROTH. Couplets.

SIR PAUL. Oh, here they come.

SCENE XXI.

[To them] LADY FROTH, BRISK.

BRISK. My lord, your humble servant; Sir Paul, yours,--the finest night!

LADY FROTH. My dear, Mr. Brisk and I have been star-gazing, I don't know how long.

SIR PAUL. Does it not tire your ladyship? Are not you weary with looking up?

LADY FROTH. Oh, no, I love it violently. My dear, you're melancholy.

LORD FROTH. No, my dear; I'm but just awake.

LADY FROTH. Snuff some of my spirit of hartshorn.

LORD FROTH. I've some of my own, thank you, dear.

LADY FROTH. Well, I swear, Mr. Brisk, you understood astronomy like an old Egyptian.

BRISK. Not comparably to your ladyship; you are the very Cynthia of the skies, and queen of stars.

LADY FROTH. That's because I have no light but what's by reflection from you, who are the sun.

BRISK. Madam, you have eclipsed me quite, let me perish. I can't answer that.

LADY FROTH. No matter. Hark 'ee, shall you and I make an almanac together?

BRISK. With all my soul. Your ladyship has made me the man in't already, I'm so full of the wounds which you have given.

LADY FROTH. O finely taken! I swear now you are even with me. O Parnassus, you have an infinite deal of wit.

SIR PAUL. So he has, gads-bud, and so has your ladyship.

SCENE XXII.

[To them] LADY PLYANT, CARELESS, CYNTHIA.

LADY PLYANT. You tell me most surprising things; bless me, who would ever trust a man? Oh my heart aches for fear they should be all deceitful alike.

CARE. You need not fear, madam, you have charms to fix inconstancy itself.

LADY PLYANT. O dear, you make me blush.

LORD FROTH. Come, my dear, shall we take leave of my lord and lady?

CYNT. They'll wait upon your lordship presently.

LADY FROTH. Mr. Brisk, my coach shall set you down.

ALL. What's the matter? [A great shriek from the corner of the stage.]

SCENE XXIII.

[To them] LADY TOUCHWOOD runs out affrighted, my lord after her, like a parson.

LADY TOUCH. Oh, I'm betrayed. Save me, help me!

LORD TOUCH. Now what evasion, strumpet?

LADY TOUCH. Stand off, let me go.

LORD TOUCH. Go, and thy own infamy pursue thee. You stare as you were all amazed,--I don't wonder at it,--but too soon you'll know mine, and that woman's shame.

SCENE the last.

LORD TOUCHWOOD, LORD FROTH, LADY FROTH, LADY PLYANT, SIR PAUL, CYNTHIA, MELLEFONT, MASKWELL, MELLEFONT disguised in a parson's habit and pulling in MASKWELL.

MEL. Nay, by heaven you shall be seen. Careless, your hand. Do you hold down your head? Yes, I am your chaplain, look in the face of your injured friend; thou wonder of all falsehood.

LORD TOUCH. Are you silent, monster?

MEL. Good heavens! How I believed and loved this man! Take him hence, for he's a disease to my sight.

LORD TOUCH. Secure that manifold villain. [Servants seize him.]

CARE. Miracle of ingratitude!

BRISK. This is all very surprising, let me perish.

LADY FROTH. You know I told you Saturn looked a little more angry than usual.

LORD TOUCH. We'll think of punishment at leisure, but let me hasten to do justice in rewarding virtue and wronged innocence. Nephew, I hope I have your pardon, and Cynthia's.

MEL. We are your lordship's creatures.

LORD TOUCH. And be each other's comfort. Let me join your hands.
Unwearied nights, and wishing days attend you both; mutual love,
lasting health, and circling joys, tread round each happy year of
your long lives.

Let secret villany from hence be warned;
Howe'er in private mischiefs are conceived,
Torture and shame attend their open birth;
Like vipers in the womb, base treachery lies,
Still gnawing that, whence first it did arise;
No sooner born, but the vile parent dies.

[Exeunt Omnes.]

EPILOGUE--Spoken by Mrs. Mountford.

Could poets but foresee how plays would take,
Then they could tell what epilogues to make;
Whether to thank or blame their audience most.
But that late knowledge does much hazard cost:
Till dice are thrown, there's nothing won, nor lost.
So, till the thief has stolen, he cannot know
Whether he shall escape the law, or no.
But poets run much greater hazards far
Than they who stand their trials at the bar.
The law provides a curb for it's own fury,
And suffers judges to direct the jury:
But in this court, what difference does appear!
For every one's both judge and jury here;
Nay, and what's worse, an executioner.
All have a right and title to some part,
Each choosing that in which he has most art.
The dreadful men of learning all confound,
Unless the fable's good, and moral sound.
The vizor-masks, that are in pit and gallery,
Approve, or damn, the repartee and raillery.
The lady critics, who are better read,
Inquire if characters are nicely bred;
If the soft things are penned and spoke with grace;
They judge of action too, and time, and place;
In which we do not doubt but they're discerning,
For that's a kind of assignation learning.
Beaus judge of dress; the witlings judge of songs;
The cuckoldom, of ancient right, to cits belongs.

Thus poor poets the favour are denied
Even to make exceptions, when they're tried.
'Tis hard that they must every one admit:
Methinks I see some faces in the pit
Which must of consequence be foes to wit.
You who can judge, to sentence may proceed;
But though he cannot write, let him be freed
At least from their contempt who cannot read.

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