

The Fable of the Bees

Bernard Mandeville



The Fable of the Bees

The Fable of the Bees

PREFACE.

THE INTRODUCTION.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF MORAL VIRTUE.

AN ESSAY ON CHARITY, AND CHARITY-SCHOOLS.

A SEARCH INTO THE NATURE OF SOCIETY.

A VINDICATION OF THE Book, from the Aspersions

contained in a Presentment of the Grand Jury of

Middlesex, And an Abusive Letter to Lord C---

THE FABLE OF THE BEES.

PREFACE.

THE FIRST DIALOGUE. BETWEEN HORATIO,

CLEOMENES, and FULVIA.

THE SECOND DIALOGUE BETWEEN HORATIO AND

CLEOMENES

THE THIRD DIALOGUE BETWEEN HORATIO AND

CLEOMENES.

THE FOURTH DIALOGUE BETWEEN HORATIO AND

CLEOMENES.

THE FIFTH DIALOGUE BETWEEN HORATIO AND

CLEOMENES.

THE SIXTH DIALOGUE BETWEEN HORATIO AND

CLEOMENES

Copyright

The Fable of the Bees

Bernard Mandeville

PREFACE.



Laws and government are to the political bodies of civil societies, what the vital spirits and life itself are to the natural bodies of animated creatures; and as those that study the anatomy of dead carcasses may see, that the chief organs and nicest springs more immediately required to continue the motion of our machine, are not hard bones, strong muscles and nerves, nor the smooth white skin, that so beautifully covers them, but small trifling films, and little pipes, that are either overlooked or else seem inconsiderable to vulgar eyes; so they that examine into the nature of man, abstract from art and education, may observe, that what renders him a sociable animal, consists not in his desire of company, good nature, pity, affability, and other graces of a fair outside; but that his vilest and most hateful qualities are the most necessary accomplishments to fit him for the largest, and, according to the world, the happiest and most flourishing societies. The following Fable, in which what I have said is set forth at large, was printed above eight years ago

1

, in a six penny pamphlet, called, *The Grumbling Hive, or Knaves turn'd Honest*; and being soon after pirated, cried about the streets in a halfpenny sheet. Since the first publishing of it, I have met with several that, either wilfully or ignorantly mistaking the design, would have it, that the scope of it was a satire upon virtue and morality, and the whole wrote for the encouragement of vice. This made me

resolve, whenever it should be reprinted, some way or other to inform the reader of the real intent this little poem was wrote with. I do not dignify these few loose lines with the name of Poem, that I would have the reader expect any poetry in them, but barely because they are rhyme, and I am in reality puzzled what name to give them; for they are neither heroic nor pastoral, satire, burlesque, nor heroic-comic; to be a tale they want probability, and the whole is rather too long for a fable. All I can say of them is, that they are a story told in doggerel, which, without the least design of being witty, I have endeavoured to do in as easy and familiar a manner as I was able: the reader shall be welcome to call them what he pleases. It was said of Montaigne, that he was pretty well versed in the defects of mankind, but unacquainted with the excellencies of human nature: if I fare no worse, I shall think myself well used.

What country soever in the universe is to be understood by the Bee-Hive represented here, it is evident, from what is said of the laws and constitution of it, the glory, wealth, power, and industry of its inhabitants, that it must be a large, rich and warlike nation, that is happily governed by a limited monarchy. The satire, therefore, to be met with in the following lines, upon the several professions and callings, and almost every degree and station of people, was not made to injure and point to particular persons, but only to show the vileness of the ingredients that altogether compose the wholesome mixture of a well-ordered society; in order to extol the wonderful power of political wisdom, by the help of which so beautiful a machine is raised from the most contemptible branches. For the main design of the Fable (as it is briefly explained in the Moral), is to show the impossibility of enjoying all the most elegant comforts of life, that are to be met with in an industrious, wealthy and powerful nation, and at the same time, be blessed with all the virtue and innocence that can be wished for in a golden

age; from thence to expose the unreasonableness and folly of those, that desirous of being an opulent and flourishing people, and wonderfully greedy after all the benefits they can receive as such, are yet always murmuring at and exclaiming against those vices and inconveniences, that from the beginning of the world to this present day, have been inseparable from all kingdoms and states, that ever were famed, for strength, riches, and politeness, at the same time.

To do this, I first slightly touch upon some of the faults and corruptions the several professions and callings are generally charged with. After that I show that those very vices, of every particular person, by skilful management, were made subservient to the grandeur and worldly happiness of the whole. Lastly, by setting forth what of necessity must be the consequence of general honesty and virtue, and national temperance, innocence and content, I demonstrate that if mankind could be cured of the failings they are naturally guilty of, they would cease to be capable of being raised into such vast potent and polite societies, as they have

been under the several great commonwealths and monarchies that have flourished since the creation.

If you ask me, why I have done all this, *cui bono*? and what good these notions will produce? truly, besides the reader's diversion, I believe none at all; but if I was asked what naturally ought to be expected from them, I would answer, that, in the first place, the people who continually find fault with others, by reading them, would be taught to look at home, and examining their own consciences, be made ashamed of always railing at what they are more or less guilty of themselves; and that, in the next, those who are so fond of the ease and comforts, and reap all the benefits that are the consequence of a great and flourishing nation, would learn more patiently to submit to those inconveniences, which no government upon earth can

remedy, when they should see the impossibility of enjoying any great share of the first, without partaking likewise of the latter.

This, I say, ought naturally to be expected from the publishing of these notions, if people were to be made better by any thing that could be said to them; but mankind having for so many ages remained still the same, notwithstanding the many instructive and elaborate writings, by which their amendment has been endeavoured, I am not so vain as to hope for better success from so inconsiderable a trifle.

Having allowed the small advantage this little whim is likely to produce, I think myself obliged to show that it cannot be prejudicial to any; for what is published, if it does no good, ought at least to do no harm: in order to this, I have made some explanatory notes, to which the reader will find himself referred in those passages that seem to be most liable to exceptions.

The censorious, that never saw the Grumbling Hive, will tell me, that whatever I may talk of the Fable, it not taking up a tenth part of the book, was only contrived to introduce the Remarks; that instead of clearing up the doubtful or obscure places, I have only pitched upon such as I had a mind to expatiate upon; and that far from striving to extenuate the errors committed before, I have made bad worse, and shown myself a more barefaced champion for vice, in the rambling digressions, than I had done in the Fable itself.

I shall spend no time in answering these accusations: where men are prejudiced, the best apologies are lost; and I know that those who think it criminal to suppose a necessity of

vice in any case whatever, will never be reconciled to any part of the performance; but if this be thoroughly examined, all the offence it can give must result from the wrong inferences that may perhaps be drawn from it, and

which I desire nobody to make. When I assert that vices are inseparable from great and potent societies, and that it is impossible their wealth and grandeur should subsist without, I do not say that the particular members of them who are guilty of any should not be continually reprov'd, or not be punished for them when they grow into crimes. There are, I believe, few people in London, of those that are at any time forced to go a-foot, but what could wish the streets of it much cleaner than generally they are; while they regard nothing but their own clothes and private conveniency; but when once they come to consider, that what offends them, is the result of the plenty, great traffic, and opulency of that mighty city, if they have any concern in its welfare, they will hardly ever wish to see the streets of it less dirty. For if we mind the materials of all sorts that must supply such an infinite number of trades and handicrafts, as are always going forward; the vast quantity of victuals, drink, and fuel, that are daily consumed in it; the waste and superfluties that must be produced from them; the multitudes of horses, and other cattle, that are always dawbing the streets; the carts, coaches, and more heavy carriages that are perpetually wearing and breaking the pavement of them; and, above all, the numberless swarms of people that are continually harassing and trampling through every part of them: If, I say, we mind all these, we shall find, that every moment must produce new filth; and, considering how far distant the great streets are from the river side, what cost and care soever be bestowed to remove the nastiness almost as fast as it is made, it is impossible London should be more cleanly before it is less flourishing. Now would I ask, if a good citizen, in consideration of what has been said, might not assert, that dirty streets are a necessary evil, inseparable from the felicity of London, without being the least hinderance to the cleaning of shoes, or sweeping of streets, and consequently without any prejudice either to the blackguard or the

scavengers.

But if, without any regard to the interest or happiness of the city, the question was put, What place I thought most pleasant to walk in? Nobody can doubt, but before the stinking streets of London, I would esteem a fragrant garden, or a shady grove in the country. In the same manner, if laying aside all worldly greatness and vain glory, I should be asked where I thought it was most probable that men might enjoy true happiness, I would prefer a small peaceable society, in which men, neither envied nor esteemed by neighbours, should be contented to live upon the natural product of the spot they inhabit, to a vast multitude abounding in wealth and power, that should always be conquering others by their arms abroad, and debauching themselves by foreign luxury at home.

Thus much I had said to the reader in the first edition; and have added nothing by way of preface in the second. But since that, a violent outcry has been made against the book, exactly answering the expectation I always had of the justice, the wisdom, the charity, and fair-dealing of those whose good will I despaired of. It has been presented by the Grand Jury, and condemned by thousands who never saw a word of it. It has been preached against before my Lord Mayor; and an utter refutation of it is daily expected from a reverend divine, who has called me names in the advertisements, and threatened to answer me in two months time for above five months together. What I have to say for myself, the reader will see in my Vindication at the end of the book, where he will likewise find the Grand Jury's Presentment, and a letter to the Right Honourable Lord C. which is very rhetorical beyond argument or connection. The author shows a fine talent for invectives, and great sagacity in discovering atheism, where others can find none. He is zealous against wicked books, points at the Fable of the Bees, and is very angry with the author: He bestows four strong epithets on the enormity of his guilt,

and by several elegant innuendos to the multitude, as the danger there is in suffering such authors to live, and the vengeance of Heaven upon a whole nation, very charitably recommends him to their care.

Considering the length of this epistle, and that it is not wholly levelled at me only, I thought at first to have made some extracts from it of what related to myself; but finding, on a nearer inquiry, that what concerned me was so blended and interwoven with what did not, I was obliged to trouble the reader with it entire, not without hopes that, prolix as it is, the extravagancy of it will be entertaining to those who have perused the treatise it condemns with so much horror.

1

This was wrote in 1714. ↑

THE
GRUMBLING HIVE:

OR,

KNAVES TURN'D HONEST.

A spacious hive well stock'd with bees,

That liv'd in luxury and ease;

And yet as fam'd for laws and arms,

As yielding large and early swarms;

Was counted the great nursery 5

Of sciences and industry.
No bees had better government,
More fickleness, or less content:
They were not slaves to tyranny.
Nor rul'd by wild democracy; 10
But kings, that could not wrong, because
Their power was circumscrib'd by laws.
These insects liv'd like men, and all
Our actions they performed in small:
They did whatever's done in town, 15
And what belongs to sword or gown:
Though th' artful works, by nimble slight
Of minute limbs, 'scap'd human sight;
Yet we've no engines, labourers,
Ships, castles, arms, artificers, 20
Craft, science, shop, or instrument,
But they had an equivalent:
Which, since their language is unknown,
Must be call'd, as we do our own.
As grant, that among other things, 25
They wanted dice, yet they had kings;
And those had guards; from whence we may
Justly conclude, they had some play;
Unless a regiment be shown
Of soldiers, that make use of none. 30
Vast numbers throng'd the fruitful hive;
Yet those vast numbers made 'em thrive;
Millions endeavouring to supply
Each other's lust and vanity;
While other millions were employ'd, 35
To see their handy-works destroy'd;
They furnish'd half the universe;
Yet had more work than labourers.
Some with vast flocks, and little pains,
Jump'd into business of great gains; 40
And some were damn'd to scythes and spades,

And all those hard laborious trades;
Where willing wretches daily sweat,
And wear out strength and limbs to eat:
While others follow'd mysteries, 45
To which few folks binds 'prentices;
That want no stock, but that of brass,
And may set up without a cross;
As sharpeners, parasites, pimps, players,
Pickpockets, coiners, quacks, soothsayers, 50
And all those, that in enmity,
With downright working, cunningly
Convert to their own use the labour
Of their good-natur'd heedless neighbour.
These were call'd Knaves, but bar the name, 55
The grave industrious were the same:
All trades and places knew some cheat,
No calling was without deceit.
The lawyers, of whose art the basis
Was raising feuds and splitting cases, 60
Oppos'd all registers, that cheats
Might make more work with dipt estates;
As were't unlawful, that one's own,
Without a law-suit, should be known.
They kept off hearings wilfully, 65
To finger the refreshing fee;
And to defend a wicked cause,
Examin'd and survey'd the laws,
As burglar's shops and houses do,
To find out where they'd best break through. 70
Physicians valu'd fame and wealth
Above the drooping patient's health,
Or their own skill: the greatest part
Study'd, instead of rules of art,
Grave pensive looks and dull behaviour, 75
To gain th' apothecary's favour;
The praise of midwives, priests, and all

That serv'd at birth or funeral.
To bear with th' ever-talking tribe,
And hear my lady's aunt prescribe; 80
With formal smile, and kind how d'ye,
To fawn on all the family;
And, which of all the greatest curse is,
T' endure th' impertinence of nurses.
Among the many priests of Jove, 85
Hir'd to draw blessings from above,
Some few were learn'd and eloquent,
But thousands hot and ignorant:
Yet all pass'd muster that could hide
Their sloth, lust, avarice and pride; 90
For which they were as fam'd as tailors
For cabbage, or for brandy sailors,
Some, meagre-look'd, and meanly clad,
Would mystically pray for bread,
Meaning by that an ample store, 95
Yet lit'rally received no more;
And, while these holy drudges starv'd,
The lazy ones, for which they serv'd,
Indulg'd their ease, with all the graces
Of health and plenty in their faces. 100
The soldiers, that were forc'd to fight,
If they surviv'd, got honour by't;
Though some, that shunn'd the bloody fray,
Had limbs shot off, that ran away:
Some valiant gen'als fought the foe; 105
Others took bribes to let them go:
Some ventur'd always where 'twas warm,
Lost now a leg, and then an arm;
Till quite disabled, and put by,
They liv'd on half their salary; 110
While others never came in play,
And staid at home for double pay.
Their kings were serv'd, but knavishly,

Cheated by their own ministry;
Many, that for their welfare slaved, 115
Robbing the very crown they saved:
Pensions were small, and they liv'd high,
Yet boasted of their honesty.
Calling, whene'er they strain'd their right,
The slipp'ry trick a perquisite; 120
And when folks understood their cant,
They chang'd that for emolument;
Unwilling to be short or plain,
In any thing concerning gain;
For there was not a bee but would 125
Get more, I won't say, than he should;
But than he dar'd to let them know,
That pay'd for't; as your gamesters do,
That, though at fair play, ne'er will own
Before the losers that they've won. 130
But who can all their frauds repeat?
The very stuff which in the street
They sold for dirt t' enrich the ground,
Was often by the buyers found
Sophisticated with a quarter 135
Of good-for-nothing stones and mortar;
Though Flail had little cause to mutter.
Who sold the other salt for butter.
Justice herself, fam'd for fair dealing,
By blindness had not lost her feeling; 140
Her left hand, which the scales should hold,
Had often dropt 'em, brib'd with gold;
And, though she seem'd impartial,
Where punishment was corporal,
Pretended to a reg'lar course, 145
In murder, and all crimes of force;
Though some first pillory'd for cheating,
Were hang'd in hemp of their own beating;
Yet, it was thought, the sword she bore

Check'd but the desp'rate and the poor; 150
That, urg'd by mere necessity,
Were ty'd up to the wretched tree
For crimes, which not deserv'd that fate,
But to secure the rich and great.
Thus every part was full of vice, 155
Yet the whole mass a paradise;
Flatter'd in peace, and fear'd in wars
They were th' esteem of foreigners,
And lavish of their wealth and lives,
The balance of all other hives. 160
Such were the blessings of that state;
Their crimes conspir'd to make them great:
And virtue, who from politics
Has learn'd a thousand cunning tricks,
Was, by their happy influence, 165
Made friends with vice: And ever since,
The worst of all the multitude
Did something for the common good.
This was the state's craft, that maintain'd
The whole of which each part complain'd: 170
This, as in music harmony
Made jarrings in the main agree,
Parties directly opposite,
Assist each other, as 'twere for spite;
And temp'rance with sobriety, 175
Serve drunkenness and gluttony.
The root of evil, avarice,
That damn'd ill-natur'd baneful vice,
Was slave to prodigality,
That noble sin; whilst luxury 180
Employ'd a million of the poor,
And odious pride a million more:
Envy itself, and vanity,
Were ministers of industry;
Their darling folly, fickleness, 185

In diet, furniture, and dress,
That strange ridic'ulous vice, was made
The very wheel that turn'd the trade.
Their laws and clothes were equally
Objects of mutability! 190
For, what was well done for a time,
In half a year became a crime;
Yet while they altered thus their laws,
Still finding and correcting flaws,
They mended by inconstancy 195
Faults, which no prudence could foresee.
Thus vice nurs'd ingenuity,
Which join'd the time and industry,
Had carry'd life's conveniences,
Its real pleasures, comforts, ease, 200
To such a height, the very poor
}

Liv'd better than the rich before.
And nothing could be added more.
How vain is mortal happiness!
Had they but known the bounds of bliss; 205
And that perfection here below
Is more than gods can well bestow;
The grumbling brutes had been content
With ministers and government.
But they, at every ill success, 210
Like creatures lost without redress,
Curs'd politicians, armies, fleets;
While every one cry'd, damn the cheats,
And would, though conscious of his own,
In others barb'rously bear none. 215
One, that had got a princely store,
By cheating master, king, and poor,

Dar'd cry aloud, the land must sink
For all its fraud; and whom d'ye think
The sermonizing rascal chid? 220
A glover that sold lamb for kid.
The least thing was not done amiss,
Or cross'd the public business;
But all the rogues cry'd brazenly,
Good gods, had we but honesty! 225
Merc'ry smil'd at th' impudence,
And others call'd it want of sense,
Always to rail at what they lov'd:
But Jove with indignation mov'd,
At last in anger swore, he'd rid 230
The bawling hive of fraud; and did.
The very moment it departs,
And honesty fills all their hearts;
There shows 'em, like th' instructive tree,
Those crimes which they're asham'd to see; 235
Which now in silence they confess,
By blushing at their ugliness:
Like children, that would hide their faults,
And by their colour own their thoughts:
Imag'ning, when they're look'd upon, 240
That others see what they have done.
But, O ye gods! what consternation,
How vast and sudden was th' alteration!
In half an hour, the nation round,
Meat fell a penny in the pound. 245
The mask hypocrisy's sitting down,
From the great statesman to the clown:
And in some borrow'd looks well known,
Appear'd like strangers in their own.
The bar was silent from that day; 250
For now the willing debtors pay,
Ev'n what's by creditors forgot;
Who quitted them that had it not.

Those that were in the wrong, stood mute,
And dropt the patch'd vexatious suit: 255
On which since nothing else can thrive,
Than lawyers in an honest hive,
All, except those that got enough,
With inkhorns by their sides troop'd off.
Justice hang'd some, set others free; 260
And after gaol delivery,
Her presence being no more requir'd,
With all her train and pomp retir'd.
First march'd some smiths with locks and grates,
Fetters, and doors with iron plates: 265
Next gaolers, turnkeys and assistants:
Before the goddess, at some distance,
Her chief and faithful minister,
' Squire Catch, the law's great finisher,
Bore not th' imaginary sword, 270
But his own tools, an ax and cord:
Then on a cloud the hood-wink'd fair,
Justice herself was push'd by air:
About her chariot, and behind,
Were serjeants, bums of every kind, 275
Tip-staffs, and all those officers,
That squeeze a living out of tears.
Though physic liv'd, while folks were ill,
None would prescribe, but bees of skill,
Which through the hive dispers'd so wide, 280
That none of them had need to ride;
Wav'd vain disputes, and strove to free
The patients of their misery;
Left drugs in cheating countries grown,
And us'd the product of their own; 285
Knowing the gods sent no disease,
To nations without remedies.
Their clergy rous'd from laziness,
Laid not their charge on journey-bees;

But serv'd themselves, exempt from vice, 290
The gods with pray'r and sacrifice;
All those, that were unfit, or knew,
Their service might be spar'd, withdrew:
Nor was their business for so many,
(If th' honest stand in need of any,) 295
Few only with the high-priest staid,
To whom the rest obedience paid:
Himself employ'd in holy cares;
Resign'd to others state-affairs.
He chas'd no starv'ling from his door, 300
Nor pinch'd the wages of the poor:
But at his house the hungry's fed,
}

The hireling finds unmeasur'd bread,
The needy trav'ler board and bed.
Among the king's great ministers, 305
And all th' inferior officers,
The change was great; for frugally
They now liv'd on their salary:
That a poor bee should ten times come
To ask his due, a trifling sum, 310
And by some well-hir'd clerk be made
To give a crown, or ne'er be paid,
Would now be call'd a downright cheat,
Though formerly a perquisite.
All places manag'd first by three, 315
Who watch'd each other's knavery
And often for a fellow-feeling,
Promoted one another's stealing,
Are happily supply'd by one,
By which some thousands more are gone. 320
No honour now could be content,

To live and owe for what was spent;
Liv'ries in brokers shops are hung,
They part with coaches for a song;
Sell stately horses by whole sets; 325
And country-houses, to pay debts.
Vain cost is shunn'd as much as fraud;
They have no forces kept abroad;
Laugh at th' esteem of foreigners,
And empty glory got by wars; 330
They fight but for their country's sake,
When right or liberty's at stake.
Now mind the glorious hive, and see
How honesty and trade agree.
The show is gone, it thins apace; 335
And looks with quite another face.
For 'twas not only that they went,
By whom vast sums were yearly spent;
But multitudes that liv'd on them,
Were daily forc'd to do the same. 340
In vain to other trades they'd fly;
All were o'er-stock'd accordingly.
The price of land and houses falls;
Mirac'lous palaces, whose walls,
Like those of Thebes, were rais'd by play, 345
Are to be let; while the once gay,
Well-seated household gods would be
More pleas'd to expire in flames, than see
The mean inscription on the door
Smile at the lofty ones they bore. 350
The building trade is quite destroy'd,
Artificers are not employ'd;
No limner for his art is fam'd,
Stone-cutters, carvers are not nam'd.
Those, that remain'd, grown temp'rate, strive, 355
Not how to spend, but how to live;
And, when they paid their tavern score,

Resolv'd to enter it no more:
No vintner's jilt in all the hive
Could wear now cloth of gold, and thrive; 360
Nor Torcol such vast sums advance,
For Burgundy and Ortolans;
The courtier's gone that with his miss
Supp'd at his house on Christmas peas;
Spending as much in two hours stay, 365
As keeps a troop of horse a day.
The haughty Chloe, to live great,
Had made her husband rob the state:
But now she sells her furniture,
Which th' Indies had been ransack'd for; 370
Contracts the expensive bill of fare,
And wears her strong suit a whole year:
The slight and fickle age is past;
And clothes, as well as fashions, last.
Weavers, that join'd rich silk with plate, 375
And all the trades subordinate,
Are gone; still peace and plenty reign,
And every thing is cheap, though plain:
Kind nature, free from gard'ners force,
Allows all fruits in her own course; 380
But rarities cannot be had,
Where pains to get them are not paid.
As pride and luxury decrease,
So by degrees they leave the seas.
Not merchants now, but companies 385
Remove whole manufactories.
All arts and crafts neglected lie;
Content, the bane of industry,
Makes 'em admire their homely store,
And neither seek nor covet more. 390
So few in the vast hive remain,
The hundredth part they can't maintain
Against th' insults of numerous foes;

Whom yet they valiantly oppose:
'Till some well fenc'd retreat is found, 395
And here they die or stand their ground.
No hireling in their army's known;
But bravely fighting for their own,
Their courage and integrity
At last were crown'd with victory. 400
They triumph'd not without their cost,
For many thousand bees were lost.
Harden'd with toils and exercise,
They counted ease itself a vice;
Which so improv'd their temperance; 405
That, to avoid extravagance,
They flew into a hollow tree,
Blest with content and honesty.

THE MORAL.

Then leave complaints: fools only strive
To make a great an honest hive. 410
T' enjoy the world's conveniences,
Be fam'd in war, yet live in ease,
Without great vices, is a vain
Eutopia seated in the brain.
Fraud, luxury, and pride must live, 415
While we the benefits receive:
Hunger's a dreadful plague, no doubt,
Yet who digests or thrives without?
Do we not owe the growth of wine
To the dry shabby crooked vine? 420
Which, while its shoots neglected stood,
Chok'd other plants, and ran to wood;
But blest us with its noble fruit,
As soon as it was ty'd and cut:
So vice is beneficial found, 425
When it's by justice lopp'd and bound;
Nay, where the people would be great,

}

As necessary to the state,
As hunger is to make 'em eat.
Bare virtue can't make nations live 430
In splendor; they, that would revive
A golden age, must be as free,
For acorns as for honesty. 433

THE INTRODUCTION.



One of the greatest reasons why so few people understand themselves, is, that most writers are always teaching men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are. As for my part, without any compliment to the courteous reader, or myself, I believe man (besides skin, flesh, bones, &c. that are obvious to the eye) to be a compound of various passions; that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no. To show that these qualifications, which we all pretend to be ashamed of, are the great support of a flourishing society, has been the subject of the foregoing poem. But there being some passages in it seemingly paradoxical, I have in the preface promised some explanatory remarks on it; which, to render more useful, I have thought fit to inquire, how man, no better qualified, might yet by his own imperfections be taught to distinguish between virtue and vice: and here I must desire the reader once for all to take notice, that when I say men, I mean neither Jews nor Christians; but mere man, in the state of nature and ignorance of the true Deity.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF MORAL VIRTUE.



All untaught animals are only solicitous of pleasing themselves, and naturally follow the bent of their own inclinations, without considering the good or harm that, from their being pleased, will accrue to others. This is the reason that, in the wild state of nature, those creatures are fittest to live peaceably together in great numbers, that discover the least of understanding, and have the fewest appetites to gratify; and consequently no species of animals is, without the curb of government, less capable of agreeing long together in multitudes, than that of man; yet such are his qualities, whether good or bad I shall not determine, that no creature besides himself can ever be made sociable: but being an extraordinary selfish and headstrong, as well as cunning animal, however he may be subdued by superior strength, it is impossible by force alone to make him tractable, and receive the improvements he is capable of.

The chief thing, therefore, which lawgivers, and other wise men that have laboured for the establishment of society, have endeavoured, has been to make the people they were to govern, believe, that it was more beneficial for every body to conquer than indulge his appetites, and much better to mind the public than what seemed his private interest. As this has always been a very difficult task, so no wit or eloquence has been left untried to compass it; and the moralists and philosophers of all ages employed their

utmost skill to prove the truth of so useful an assertion. But whether mankind would have ever believed it or not, it is not likely that any body could have persuaded them to disapprove of their natural inclinations, or prefer the good of others to their own, if, at the same time, he had not showed them an equivalent to be enjoyed as a reward for the violence, which, by so doing, they of necessity must commit upon themselves. Those that have undertaken to civilize mankind, were not ignorant of this; but being unable to give so many real rewards as would satisfy all persons for every individual action, they were forced to contrive an imaginary one, that, as a general equivalent for the trouble of self-denial, should serve on all occasions, and without costing any thing either to themselves or others, be yet a most acceptable recompence to the receivers.

They thoroughly examined all the strength and frailties of our nature, and observing that none were either so savage as not to be charmed with praise, or so despicable as patiently to bear contempt, justly concluded, that flattery must be the most powerful argument that could be used to human creatures. Making use of this bewitching engine, they extolled the excellency of our nature above other animals, and setting forth with unbounded praises the wonders of our sagacity and vastness of understanding, bestowed a thousand encomiums on the rationality of our souls, by the help of which we were capable of performing the most noble achievements. Having, by this artful way of flattery, insinuated themselves into the hearts of men, they began to instruct them in the notions of honour and shame; representing the one as the worst of all evils, and the other as the highest good to which mortals could aspire: which being done, they laid before them how unbecoming it was the dignity of such sublime creatures to be solicitous about gratifying those appetites, which they had in common with brutes, and at the same time unmindful of those higher

qualities that gave them the pre-eminence over all visible beings. They indeed confessed, that those impulses of nature were very pressing; that it was troublesome to resist, and very difficult wholly to subdue them. But this they only used as an argument to demonstrate, how glorious the conquest of them was on the one hand, and how scandalous on the other not to attempt it.

To introduce, moreover, an emulation amongst men, they divided the whole species into two classes, vastly differing from one another: the one consisted of abject, low-minded people, that always hunting after immediate enjoyment, were wholly incapable of self-denial, and without regard to the good of others, had no higher aim than their private advantage; such as being enslaved by voluptuousness, yielded without resistance to every gross desire, and make no use of their rational faculties but to heighten their sensual pleasure. These wild grovelling wretches, they said, were the dross of their kind, and having only the shape of men, differed from

brutes in nothing but their outward figure. But the other class was made up of lofty high-spirited creatures, that, free from sordid selfishness, esteemed the improvements of the mind to be their fairest possessions; and, setting a true value upon themselves, took no delight but in embellishing that part in which their excellency consisted; such as despising whatever they had in common with irrational creatures, opposed by the help of reason their most violent inclinations; and making a continual war with themselves, to promote the peace of others, aimed at no less than the public welfare, and the conquest of their own passion.

Fortior est qui se quàm qui fortissima Vincit

Mœnia — — —

These they called the true representatives of their sublime species, exceeding in worth the first class by more degrees, than that itself was superior to the beasts of the field.

As in all animals that are not too imperfect to discover

pride, we find, that the finest, and such as are the most beautiful and valuable of their kind, have generally the greatest share of it; so in man, the most perfect of animals, it is so inseparable from his very essence (how cunningly soever some may learn to hide or disguise it), that without it the compound he is made of would want one of the chiefest ingredients: which, if we consider, it is hardly to be doubted but lessons and remonstrances, so skilfully adapted to the good opinion man has of himself, as those I have mentioned, must, if scattered amongst a multitude, not only gain the assent of most of them, as to the speculative part, but likewise induce several, especially the fiercest, most resolute, and best among them, to endure a thousand inconveniences, and undergo as many hardships, that they may have the pleasure of counting themselves men of the second class, and consequently appropriating to themselves all the excellencies they have heard of it.

From what has been said, we ought to expect, in the first place, that the heroes who took such extraordinary pains to master some of their natural appetites, and preferred the good of others to any visible interest of their own, would not recede an inch from the fine notions they had received concerning the dignity of rational creatures; and having ever the authority of the government on their side, with all imaginable vigour assert the esteem that was due to those of the

second class, as well as their superiority over the rest of their kind. In the second, that those who wanted a sufficient stock of either pride or resolution, to buoy them up in mortifying of what was dearest to them, followed the sensual dictates of nature, would yet be ashamed of confessing themselves to be those despicable wretches that belonged to the inferior class, and were generally reckoned to be so little removed from brutes; and that therefore, in their own defence, they would say, as others did, and hiding their own imperfections as well as they could, cry up self-

denial and public spiritedness as much as any: for it is highly probable, that some of them, convinced by the real proofs of fortitude and self-conquest they had seen, would admire in others what they found wanting in themselves; others be afraid of the resolution and prowess of those of the second class, and that all of them were kept in awe by the power of their rulers; wherefore is it reasonable to think, that none of them (whatever they thought in themselves) would dare openly contradict, what by every body else was thought criminal to doubt of.

This was (or at least might have been) the manner after which savage man was broke; from whence it is evident, that the first rudiments of morality, broached by skilful politicians, to render men useful to each other, as well as tractable, were chiefly contrived, that the ambitious might reap the more benefit from, and govern vast numbers of them with the greater ease and security. This foundation of politics being once laid, it is impossible that man should long remain uncivilized: for even those who only strove to gratify their appetites, being continually crossed by others of the same stamp, could not but observe, that whenever they checked their inclinations or but followed them with more circumspection, they avoided a world of troubles, and often escaped many of the calamities that generally attended the too eager pursuit after pleasure.

First, they received, as well as others, the benefit of those actions that were done for the good of the whole society, and consequently could not forbear wishing well to those of the superior class that performed them. Secondly, the more intent they were in seeking their own advantage, without regard to others, the more they were hourly convinced, that none stood so much in their way as those that were most like themselves.

It being the interest then of the very worst of them, more than any, to preach up public-spiritedness, that they might reap the fruits of the labour and self-denial of others, and

at the same time indulge their own appetites with less disturbance, they agreed with the rest, to call every thing, which, without regard to the public, man should commit to gratify any of his appetites, vice; if in that action there could be observed the least prospect, that it might either be injurious to any of the society, or ever render himself less serviceable to others: and to give the name of virtue to every performance, by which man, contrary to the impulse of nature, should endeavour the benefit of others, or the conquest of his own passions, out of a rational ambition of being good.

It shall be objected, that no society was ever any ways civilized before the major part had agreed upon some worship or other of an over-ruling power, and consequently that the notions of good and evil, and the distinction between virtue and vice, were never the contrivance of politicians, but the pure effect of religion. Before I answer this objection, I must repeat what I have said already, that in this inquiry into the origin of moral virtue, I speak neither of Jews or Christians, but man in his state of nature and ignorance of the true Deity; and then I affirm, that the idolatrous superstitions of all other nations, and the pitiful notions they had of the Supreme Being, were incapable of exciting man to virtue, and good for nothing but to awe and amuse a rude and unthinking multitude. It is evident from history, that in all considerable societies, how stupid or ridiculous soever people's received notions have been, as to the deities they worshipped, human nature has ever exerted itself in all its branches, and that there is no earthly wisdom or moral virtue, but at one time or other men have excelled in it in all monarchies and commonwealths, that for riches and power have been any ways remarkable.

The Egyptians, not satisfied with having deified all the ugly monsters they could think on, were so silly as to adore the onions of their own sowing; yet at the same time their