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English 46B

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Alexander Pope: An Essay on Criticism (1711)

‘Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
Appear in Writing or in Judging ill,
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,
To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense:
Some few in that, but Numbers err in this,
Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss;
A Fool might once himself alone expose,
Now One in Verse makes many more in Prose.

'Tis with our Judgments as our Watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In Poets as true Genius is but rare,
True Taste as seldom is the Critick's Share;
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their Light,
These born to Judge, as well as those to Write.
Let such teach others who themselves excell,
And censure freely who have written well.
Authors are partial to their Wit, 'tis true,
But are not Criticks to their Judgment too?

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
Most have the Seeds of Judgment in their Mind;
Nature affords at least a glimm'ring Light;
The Lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.
But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd,
Is by ill Colouring but the more disgrac'd,
So by false Learning is good Sense defac'd.
Some are bewilder'd in the Maze of Schools,
And some made Coxcombs Nature meant but Fools.
In search of Wit these lose their common Sense,
And then turn Criticks in their own Defence.
Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,
Or with a Rival's or an Eunuch's spite.
All Fools have still an Itching to deride,
And fain wou'd be upon the Laughing Side;
If Maevius Scribble in Apollo's spight,
There are, who judge still worse than he can write

Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past,
Turn'd Criticks next, and prov'd plain Fools at last;
Some neither can for Wits nor Criticks pass,
As heavy Mules are neither Horse or Ass.
Those half-learn'd Witlings, num'rous in our Isle,
As half-form'd Insects on the Banks of Nile:
Unfinish'd Things, one knows now what to call,
Their Generation's so equivocal:
To tell 'em, wou'd a hundred Tongues require,
Or one vain Wit's, that might a hundred tire.

But you who seek to give and merit Fame,
And justly bear a Critick's noble Name,
Be sure your self and your own Reach to know.
How far your Genius, Taste, and Learning go;
Launch not beyond your Depth, but be discreet,
And mark that Point where Sense and Dulness meet.

Nature to all things fix'd the Limits fit,
And wisely curb'd proud Man's pretending Wit:
As on the Land while here the Ocean gains,
In other Parts it leaves wide sandy Plains;
Thus in the Soul while Memory prevails,
The solid Pow'r of Understanding fails;
Where Beams of warm Imagination play,
The Memory's soft Figures melt away.
One Science only will one Genius fit;
So vast is Art, so narrow Human Wit;
Not only bounded to peculiar Arts,
But oft in those, confin'd to single Parts.
Like Kings we lose the Conquests gain'd before,
By vain Ambition still to make them more:
Each might his sev'ral Province well command,
Wou'd all but stoop to what they understand.

First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame
By her just Standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd and Universal Light,
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,
At once the Source, and End, and Test of Art
Art from that Fund each just Supply provides,
Works without Show, and without Pomp presides:
In some fair Body thus th' informing Soul
With Spirits feeds, with Vigour fills the whole,
Each Motion guides, and ev'ry Nerve sustains;
It self unseen, but in th' Effects, remains.
Some, to whom Heav'n in Wit has been profuse.
Want as much more, to turn it to its use,
For Wit and Judgment often are at strife,
Tho' meant each other's Aid, like Man and Wife.
'Tis more to guide than spur the Muse's Steed;
Restrain his Fury, than provoke his Speed;
The winged Courser, like a gen'rous Horse,
Shows most true Mettle when you check his Course.

Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd,
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz'd;
Nature, like Liberty, is but restrain'd
By the same Laws which first herself ordain'd.

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful Rules indites,
When to repress, and when indulge our Flights:
High on Parnassus' Top her Sons she show'd,
And pointed out those arduous Paths they trod,
Held from afar, aloft, th' Immortal Prize,
And urg'd the rest by equal Steps to rise;
Just Precepts thus from great Examples giv'n,
She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n
The gen'rous Critick fann'd the Poet's Fire,
And taught the World, with Reason to Admire.
Then Criticism the Muse's Handmaid prov'd,
To dress her Charms, and make her more belov'd;
But following Wits from that Intention stray'd;
Who cou'd not win the Mistress, woo'd the Maid;
Against the Poets their own Arms they turn'd,
Sure to hate most the Men from whom they learn'd
So modern Pothecaries, taught the Art
By Doctor's Bills to play the Doctor's Part,
Bold in the Practice of mistaken Rules,
Prescribe, apply, and call their Masters Fools.
Some on the Leaves of ancient Authors prey,
Nor Time nor Moths e'er spoil'd so much as they:
Some dryly plain, without Invention's Aid,
Write dull Receits how Poems may be made:
These leave the Sense, their Learning to display,
And theme explain the Meaning quite away

You then whose Judgment the right Course wou'd steer,
Know well each ANCIENT's proper Character,
His Fable, Subject, Scope in ev'ry Page,
Religion, Country, Genius of his Age:
Without all these at once before your Eyes,
Cavil you may, but never Criticize.
Be Homer's Works your Study, and Delight,
Read them by Day, and meditate by Night,
Thence form your Judgment, thence your Maxims bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their Spring;
Still with It self compar'd, his Text peruse;
And let your Comment be the Mantuan Muse.

When first young Maro in his boundless Mind
A Work t' outlast Immortal Rome design'd,
Perhaps he seem'd above the Critick's Law,
And but from Nature's Fountains scorn'd to draw:
But when t'examine ev'ry Part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same:
Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold Design,
And Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine,
As if the Stagyrite o'er looked each Line.
Learn hence for Ancient Rules a just Esteem;
To copy Nature is to copy Them.

Some Beauties yet, no Precepts can declare,
For there's a Happiness as well as Care.
Musick resembles Poetry, in each
Are nameless Graces which no Methods teach,
And which a Master-Hand alone can reach.
If, where the Rules not far enough extend,
(Since Rules were made but to promote their End)
Some Lucky LICENCE answers to the full
Th' Intent propos'd, that Licence is a Rule.
Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common Track.
Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
And rise to Faults true Criticks dare not mend;
From vulgar Bounds with brave Disorder part,
And snatch a Grace beyond the Reach of Art,
Which, without passing thro' the Judgment, gains
The Heart, and all its End at once attains.
In Prospects, thus, some Objects please our Eyes,
Which out of Nature's common Order rise,
The shapeless Rock, or hanging Precipice.
But tho' the Ancients thus their Rules invade,
(As Kings dispense with Laws Themselves have made)
Moderns, beware! Or if you must offend
Against the Precept, ne'er transgress its End,
Let it be seldom, and compell'd by Need,
And have, at least, Their Precedent to plead.
The Critick else proceeds without Remorse,
Seizes your Fame, and puts his Laws in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous Thoughts
Those Freer Beauties, ev'n in Them, seem Faults:
Some Figures monstrous and mis-shap'd appear,
Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,
Which, but proportion'd to their Light, or Place,
Due Distance reconciles to Form and Grace.
A prudent Chief not always must display
His Pow'rs in equal Ranks, and fair Array,
But with th' Occasion and the Place comply,
Conceal his Force, nay seem sometimes to Fly.
Those oft are Stratagems which Errors seem,
Nor is it Homer Nods, but We that Dream.

Still green with Bays each ancient Altar stands,
Above the reach of Sacrilegious Hands,
Secure from Flames, from Envy's fiercer Rage,
Destructive War, and all-involving Age.
See, from each Clime the Learn'd their Incense bring;
Hear, in all Tongues consenting Paeans ring!
In Praise so just, let ev'ry Voice be join'd,
And fill the Gen'ral Chorus of Mankind!
Hail Bards Triumphant! born in happier Days;
Immortal Heirs of Universal Praise!
Whose Honours with Increase of Ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow!
Nations unborn your mighty Names shall sound,
And Worlds applaud that must not yet be found!
Oh may some Spark of your Coelestial Fire
The last, the meanest of your Sons inspire,
(That on weak Wings, from far, pursues your Flights;
Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)
To teach vain Wits a Science little known,
T' admire Superior Sense, and doubt their own!

Of all the Causes which conspire to blind
Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the Mind,
What the weak Head with strongest Byass rules,
Is Pride, the never-failing Vice of Fools.
Whatever Nature has in Worth deny'd,
She gives in large Recruits of needful Pride;
For as in Bodies, thus in Souls, we find
What wants in Blood and Spirits, swell'd with Wind;
Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our Defence,
And fills up all the mighty Void of Sense!
If once right Reason drives that Cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with resistless Day;
Trust not your self; but your Defects to know,
Make use of ev'ry Friend--and ev'ry Foe.

A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring:
There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.
Fir'd at first Sight with what the Muse imparts,
In fearless Youth we tempt the Heights of Arts,
While from the bounded Level of our Mind,
Short Views we take, nor see the lengths behind,
But more advanc'd, behold with strange Surprize
New, distant Scenes of endless Science rise!
So pleas'd at first, the towring Alps we try,
Mount o'er the Vales, and seem to tread the Sky;
Th' Eternal Snows appear already past,
And the first Clouds and Mountains seem the last:
But those attain'd, we tremble to survey
The growing Labours of the lengthen'd Way,
Th' increasing Prospect tires our wandering Eyes,
Hills peep o'er Hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

A perfect Judge will read each Work of Wit
With the same Spirit that its Author writ,
Survey the Whole, nor seek slight Faults to find,
Where Nature moves, and Rapture warms the Mind;
Nor lose, for that malignant dull Delight,
The gen'rous Pleasure to be charm'd with Wit.
But in such Lays as neither ebb, nor flow,
Correctly cold, and regularly low,
That shunning Faults, one quiet Tenour keep;
We cannot blame indeed--but we may sleep.
In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts
Is nor th' Exactness of peculiar Parts;
'Tis not a Lip, or Eye, we Beauty call,
But the joint Force and full Result of all.
Thus when we view some well-proportion'd Dome,
The World's just Wonder, and ev'n thine O Rome!)
No single Parts unequally surprize;
All comes united to th' admiring Eyes;
No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear;
The Whole at once is Bold, and Regular.

Whoever thinks a faultless Piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In ev'ry Work regard the Writer's End,
Since none can compass more than they Intend;
And if the Means be just, the Conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial Faults, is due.
As Men of Breeding, sometimes Men of Wit,
T' avoid great Errors, must the less commit,
Neglect the Rules each Verbal Critick lays,
For not to know some Trifles, is a Praise.
Most Criticks, fond of some subservient Art,
Still make the Whole depend upon a Part,
They talk of Principles, but Notions prize,
And All to one lov'd Folly Sacrifice.

Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight, they say,
A certain Bard encountring on the Way,
Discours'd in Terms as just, with Looks as Sage,
As e'er cou'd Dennis, of the Grecian Stage;
Concluding all were desp'rate Sots and Fools,
Who durst depart from Aristotle's Rules.
Our Author, happy in a Judge so nice,
Produc'd his Play, and beg'd the Knight's Advice,
Made him observe the Subject and the Plot,
The Manners, Passions, Unities, what not?
All which, exact to Rule were brought about,
Were but a Combate in the Lists left out.
What! Leave the Combate out? Exclaims the Knight;
Yes, or we must renounce the Stagyrite.
Not so by Heav'n (he answers in a Rage)
Knights, Squires, and Steeds, must enter on the Stage.
So vast a Throng the Stage can ne'er contain.
Then build a New, or act it in a Plain.

Thus Criticks, of less Judgment than Caprice,
Curious, not Knowing, not exact, but nice,
Form short Ideas; and offend in Arts
(As most in Manners) by a Love to Parts.

Some to Conceit alone their Taste confine,
And glitt'ring Thoughts struck out at ev'ry Line;
Pleas'd with a Work where nothing's just or fit;
One glaring Chaos and wild Heap of Wit;
Poets like Painters, thus, unskill'd to trace
The naked Nature and the living Grace,
With Gold and Jewels cover ev'ry Part,
And hide with Ornaments their Want of Art.
True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest,
Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
That gives us back the Image of our Mind:
As Shades more sweetly recommend the Light,
So modest Plainness sets off sprightly Wit:
For Works may have more Wit than does 'em good,
As Bodies perish through Excess of Blood.

Others for Language all their Care express,
And value Books, as Women Men, for Dress:
Their Praise is still--The Stile is excellent:
The Sense, they humbly take upon Content.
Words are like Leaves; and where they most abound,
Much Fruit of Sense beneath is rarely found.
False Eloquence, like the Prismatic Glass,
Its gawdy Colours spreads on ev'ry place;
The Face of Nature was no more Survey,
All glares alike, without Distinction gay:
But true Expression, like th' unchanging Sun,
Clears, and improves whate'er it shines upon,
It gilds all Objects, but it alters none.
Expression is the Dress of Thought, and still
Appears more decent as more suitable;
A vile Conceit in pompous Words exprest,
Is like a Clown in regal Purple drest;
For diff'rent Styles with diff'rent Subjects sort,
As several Garbs with Country, Town, and Court.
Some by Old Words to Fame have made Pretence;
Ancients in Phrase, meer Moderns in their Sense!
Such labour'd Nothings, in so strange a Style,
Amaze th'unlearn'd, and make the Learned Smile.
Unlucky, as Fungoso in the Play,
These Sparks with aukward Vanity display
What the Fine Gentleman wore Yesterday!
And but so mimick ancient Wits at best,
As Apes our Grandsires in their Doublets treat.
In Words, as Fashions, the same Rule will hold;
Alike Fantastick, if too New, or Old;
Be not the first by whom the New are try'd,
Nor yet the last to lay the Old aside.

But most by Numbers judge a Poet's Song,
And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;
In the bright Muse tho' thousand Charms conspire,
Her Voice is all these tuneful Fools admire,
Who haunt Parnassus but to please their Ear,
Not mend their Minds; as some to Church repair,
Not for the Doctrine, but the Musick there.
These Equal Syllables alone require,
Tho' oft the Ear the open Vowels tire,
While Expletives their feeble Aid do join,
And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line,
While they ring round the same unvary'd Chimes,
With sure Returns of still expected Rhymes.
Where-e'er you find the cooling Western Breeze,
In the next Line, it whispers thro' the Trees;
If Chrystal Streams with pleasing Murmurs creep,
The Reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with Sleep.
Then, at the last, and only Couplet fraught
With some unmeaning Thing they call a Thought,
A needless Alexandrine ends the Song,
That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow length along.
Leave such to tune their own dull Rhimes, and know
What's roundly smooth, or languishingly slow;
And praise the Easie Vigor of a Line,
Where Denham's Strength, and Waller's Sweetness join.
True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance,
'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,
The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense.
Soft is the Strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth Stream in smoother Numbers flows;
But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore,
The hoarse, rough Verse shou'd like the Torrent roar.
When Ajax strives, some Rocks' vast Weight to throw,
The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the Plain,
Flies o'er th'unbending Corn, and skims along the Main.
Hear how Timotheus' vary'd Lays surprize,
And bid Alternate Passions fall and rise!
While, at each Change, the Son of Lybian Jove
Now burns with Glory, and then melts with Love;
Now his fierce Eyes with sparkling Fury glow;
Now Sighs steal out, and Tears begin to flow:
Persians and Greeks like Turns of Nature found,
And the World's Victor stood subdu'd by Sound!
The Pow'rs of Musick all our Hearts allow;
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.

Avoid Extreams; and shun the Fault of such,
Who still are pleas'd too little, or too much.
At ev'ry Trifle scorn to take Offence,
That always shows Great Pride, or Little Sense;
Those Heads as Stomachs are not sure the best
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.
Yet let not each gay Turn thy Rapture move,
For Fools Admire, but Men of Sense Approve;
As things seem large which we thro' Mists descry,
Dulness is ever apt to Magnify.

Some foreign Writers, some our own despise;
The Ancients only, or the Moderns prize:
(Thus Wit, like Faith by each Man is apply'd
To one small Sect, and All are damn'd beside.)
Meanly they seek the Blessing to confine,
And force that Sun but on a Part to Shine;
Which not alone the Southern Wit sublimes,
But ripens Spirits in cold Northern Climes;
Which from the first has shone on Ages past,
Enlights the present, and shall warm the last:
(Tho' each may feel Increases and Decays,
And see now clearer and now darker Days)
Regard not then if Wit be Old or New,
But blame the False, and value still the True.

Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
But catch the spreading Notion of the Town;
They reason and conclude by Precedent,
And own stale Nonsense which they ne'er invent.
Some judge of Authors' Names, not Works, and then
Nor praise nor blame the Writings, but the Men.
Of all this Servile Herd the worst is He
That in proud Dulness joins with Quality,
A constant Critick at the Great-man's Board,
To fetch and carry Nonsense for my Lord.
What woful stuff this Madrigal wou'd be,
To some starv'd Hackny Sonneteer, or me?
But let a Lord once own the happy Lines,
How the Wit brightens! How the Style refines!
Before his sacred Name flies ev'ry Fault,
And each exalted Stanza teems with Thought!

The Vulgar thus through Imitation err;
As oft the Learn'd by being Singular;
So much they scorn the Crowd, that if the Throng
By Chance go right, they purposely go wrong;
So Schismatics the plain Believers quit,
And are but damn'd for having too much Wit.

Some praise at Morning what they blame at Night;
But always think the last Opinion right.
A Muse by these is like a Mistress us'd,
This hour she's idoliz'd, the next abus'd,
While their weak Heads, like Towns unfortify'd,
'Twixt Sense and Nonsense daily change their Side.
Ask them the Cause; They're wiser still, they say;
And still to Morrow's wiser than to Day.
We think our Fathers Fools, so wise we grow;
Our wiser Sons, no doubt, will think us so.
Once School-Divines this zealous Isle o'erspread;
Who knew most Sentences was deepest read;
Faith, Gospel, All, seem'd made to be disputed,
And none had Sense enough to be Confuted.
Scotists and Thomists, now, in Peace remain,
Amidst their kindred Cobwebs in Duck-Lane.
If Faith it self has diff'rent Dresses worn,
What wonder Modes in Wit shou'd take their Turn?
Oft, leaving what is Natural and fit,
The current Folly proves the ready Wit,
And Authors think their Reputation safe,
Which lives as long as Fools are pleas'd to Laugh.

Some valuing those of their own, Side or Mind,
Still make themselves the measure of Mankind;
Fondly we think we honour Merit then,
When we but praise Our selves in Other Men.
Parties in Wit attend on those of State,
And publick Faction doubles private Hate.
Pride, Malice, Folly, against Dryden rose,
In various Shapes of Parsons, Criticks, Beaus;
But Sense surviv'd, when merry Jests were past;
For rising Merit will buoy up at last.
Might he return, and bless once more our Eyes,
New Blackmores and new Milbourns must arise;
Nay shou'd great Homer lift his awful Head,
Zoilus again would start up from the Dead.
Envy will Merit as its Shade pursue,
But like a Shadow, proves the Substance true;
For envy'd Wit, like Sol Eclips'd, makes known
Th' opposing Body's Grossness, not its own.
When first that Sun too powerful Beams displays,
It draws up Vapours which obscure its Rays;
But ev'n those Clouds at last adorn its Way,
Reflect new Glories, and augment the Day.

Be thou the first true Merit to befriend;
His Praise is lost, who stays till All commend;
Short is the Date, alas, of Modern Rhymes;
And 'tis but just to let 'em live betimes.
No longer now that Golden Age appears,
When Patriarch-Wits surviv'd thousand Years;
Now Length of Fame (our second Life) is lost,
And bare Threescore is all ev'n That can boast:
Our Sons their Fathers' failing language see,
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.
So when the faithful Pencil has design'd
Some bright Idea of the Master's Mind,
Where a new World leaps out at his command,
And ready Nature waits upon his Hand;
When the ripe Colours soften and unite,
And sweetly melt into just Shade and Light,
When mellowing Years their full Perfection give,
And each Bold Figure just begins to Live;
The treach'rous Colours the fair Art betray,
And all the bright Creation fades away!

Unhappy Wit, like most mistaken Things,
Attones not for that Envy which it brings.
In Youth alone its empty Praise we boast,
But soon the Short-liv'd Vanity is lost!
Like some fair Flow'r the early Spring supplies,
That gaily Blooms, but ev'n in blooming Dies.
What is this Wit which must our Cares employ?
The Owner's Wife, that other Men enjoy,
Then most our Trouble still when most admir'd,
And still the more we give, the more requir'd;
Whose Fame with Pains we guard, but lose with Ease,
Sure some to vex, but never all to please;
'Tis what the Vicious fear, the Virtuous shun;
By Fools 'tis hated, and by Knaves undone!

If Wit so much from Ign'rance undergo,
Ah let not Learning too commence its Foe!
Of old, those met Rewards who cou'd excel,
And such were Prais'd who but endeavour'd well:
Tho' Triumphs were to Gen'rals only due,
Crowns were reserv'd to grace the Soldiers too.
Now, they who reached Parnassus' lofty Crown,
Employ their Pains to spurn some others down;
And while Self-Love each jealous Writer rules,
Contending Wits becomes the Sport of Fools:
But still the Worst with most Regret commend,
For each Ill Author is as bad a Friend.
To what base Ends, and by what abject Ways,
Are Mortals urg'd thro' Sacred Lust of praise!
Ah ne'er so dire a Thirst of Glory boast,
Nor in the Critick let the Man be lost!
Good-Nature and Good-Sense must ever join;
To err is Humane; to Forgive, Divine.

But if in Noble Minds some Dregs remain,
Not yet purg'd off, of Spleen and sow'r Disdain,
Discharge that Rage on more Provoking Crimes,
Nor fear a Dearth in these Flagitious Times.
No Pardon vile Obscenity should find,
Tho' Wit and Art conspire to move your Mind;
But Dulness with Obscenity must prove
As Shameful sure as Importance in Love.
In the fat Age of Pleasure, Wealth, and Ease,
Sprung the rank Weed, and thriv'd with large Increase;
When Love was all an easie Monarch's Care;
Seldom at Council, never in a War:
Jilts rul'd the State, and Statesmen Farces writ;
Nay Wits had Pensions, and young Lords had Wit:
The Fair sate panting at a Courtier's Play,
And not a Mask went un-improv'd away:
The modest Fan was liked up no more,
And Virgins smil'd at what they blush'd before--
The following Licence of a Foreign Reign
Did all the Dregs of bold Socinus drain;
Then Unbelieving Priests reform'd the Nation,
And taught more Pleasant Methods of Salvation;
Where Heav'ns Free Subjects might their Rights dispute,
Lest God himself shou'd seem too Absolute.
Pulpits their Sacred Satire learn'd to spare,
And Vice admir'd to find a Flatt'rer there!
Encourag'd thus, Witt's Titans brav'd the Skies,
And the Press groan'd with Licenc'd Blasphemies--
These Monsters, Criticks! with your Darts engage,
Here point your Thunder, and exhaust your Rage!
Yet shun their Fault, who, Scandalously nice,
Will needs mistake an Author into Vice;
All seems Infected that th' Infected spy,
As all looks yellow to the Jaundic'd Eye.

LEARN then what MORALS Criticks ought to show,
For 'tis but half a Judge's Task, to Know.
'Tis not enough, Taste, Judgment, Learning, join;
In all you speak, let Truth and Candor shine:
That not alone what to your Sense is due,
All may allow; but seek your Friendship too.

Be silent always when you doubt your Sense;
And speak, tho' sure, with seeming Diffidence:
Some positive persisting Fops we know,
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;
But you, with Pleasure own your Errors past,
An make each Day a Critick on the last.

'Tis not enough your Counsel still be true,
Blunt Truths more Mischief than nice Falsehood do;
Men must be taught as if you taught them not;
And Things unknown propos'd as Things forgot:
Without Good Breeding, Truth is disapprov'd;
That only makes Superior Sense belov'd.

Be Niggards of Advice on no Pretence;
For the worst Avarice is that of Sense:
With mean Complacence ne'er betray your Trust,
Nor be so Civil as to prove Unjust;
Fear not the Anger of the Wise to raise;
Those best can bear Reproof, who merit Praise.

'Twere well, might Criticks still this Freedom take;
But Appius reddens at each Word you speak,
And stares, Tremendous! with a threatning Eye
Like some fierce Tyrant in Old Tapestry!
Fear most to tax an Honourable Fool,
Whose Right it is, uncensur'd to be dull;
Such without Wit are Poets when they please.
As without Learning they can take Degrees.
Leave dang'rous Truths to unsuccessful Satyrs,
And Flattery to fulsome Dedicators,
Whom, when they Praise, the World believes no more,
Than when they promise to give Scribling o'er.
'Tis best sometimes your Censure to restrain,
And charitably let the Dull be vain:
Your Silence there is better than your Spite,
For who can rail so long as they can write?
Still humming on, their drowzy Course they keep,
And lash'd so long, like Tops, are lash'd asleep.
False Steps but help them to renew the Race,
As after Stumbling, Jades will mend their Pace.
What Crouds of these, impenitently bold,
In Sounds and jingling Syllables grown old,
Still run on Poets in a raging Vein,
Ev'n to the Dregs and Squeezings of the Brain;
Strain out the last, dull droppings of their Sense,
And Rhyme with all the Rage of Impotence!

Such shameless Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
There are as mad, abandon'd Criticks too.
The Bookful Blockhead, ignorantly read,
With Loads of Learned Lumber in his Head,
With his own Tongue still edifies his Ears,
And always List'ning to Himself appears.
All Books he reads, and all he reads assails,
From Dryden's Fables down to Durfey's Tales.
With him, most Authors steal their Works, or buy;
Garth did not write his own Dispensary.
Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's Friend,
Nay show'd his Faults--but when wou'd Poets mend?
No Place so Sacred from such Fops is barr'd,
Nor is Paul's Church more safe than Paul's Church-yard:
Nay, fly to Altars; there they'll talk you dead;
For Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.
Distrustful Sense with modest Caution speaks;
It still looks home, and short Excursions makes;
But ratling Nonsense in full Vollies breaks;
And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside,
Bursts out, resistless, with a thundering Tyde!

But where's the Man, who Counsel can bestow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and not proud to know?
Unbiass'd, or by Favour or by Spite;
Not dully prepossest, nor blindly right;
Tho' Learn'd well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;
Modestly bold, and Humanly severe?
Who to a Friend his Faults can freely show,
And gladly praise the Merit of a Foe?
Blest with a Taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
A Knowledge both of Books and Humankind;
Gen'rous Converse; a Sound exempt from Pride;
And Love to Praise, with Reason on his Side?

Such once were Criticks, such the Happy Few,
Athens and Rome in better Ages knew.
The mighty Stagyrite first left the Shore,
Spread all his Sails, and durst the Deeps explore;
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,
Led by the Light of the Maeonian Star.
Poets, a Race long unconfin'd and free,
Still fond and proud of Savage Liberty,
Receiv'd his Laws, and stood convinc'd 'twas fit
Who conquer'd Nature, shou'd preside o'er Wit.

Horace still charms with graceful Negligence,
And without Method talks us into Sense,
Will like a Friend familarly convey
The truest Notions in the easiest way.
He, who Supream in Judgment, as in Wit,
Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,
Yet judg'd with Coolness tho' he sung with Fire;
His Precepts teach but what his Works inspire.
Our Criticks take a contrary Extream,
They judge with Fury, but they write with Fle'me:
Nor suffers Horace more in wrong Translations
By Wits, than Criticks in as wrong Quotations.

See Dionysius Homer's Thoughts refine,
And call new Beauties forth from ev'ry Line!

Fancy and Art in gay Petronius please,
The Scholar's Learning, with the Courtier's Ease.

In grave Quintilian's copious Work we find
The justest Rules, and clearest Method join'd;
Thus useful Arms in Magazines we place,
All rang'd in Order, and dispos'd with Grace,
But less to please the Eye, than arm the Hand,
Still fit for Use, and ready at Command.

Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
And bless their Critick with a Poet's Fire.
An ardent Judge, who Zealous in his Trust,
With Warmth gives Sentence, yet is always Just;
Whose own Example strengthens all his Laws,
And Is himself that great Sublime he draws.

Thus long succeeding Criticks justly reign'd,
Licence repress'd, and useful Laws ordain'd;
Learning and Rome alike in Empire grew,
And Arts still follow'd where her Eagles flew;
From the same Foes, at last, both felt their Doom,
And the same Age saw Learning fall, and Rome.
With Tyranny, then Superstition join'd,
As that the Body, this enslav'd the Mind;
Much was Believ'd, but little understood,
And to be dull was constru'd to be good;
A second Deluge Learning thus o'er-run,
And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun.

At length, Erasmus, that great, injur'd Name,
(The Glory of the Priesthood, and the Shame!)
Stemm'd the wild Torrent of a barb'rous Age.
And drove those Holy Vandals off the Stage.

But see! each Muse, in Leo's Golden Days,
Starts from her Trance, and trims her wither'd Bays!
Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its Ruins spread,
Shakes off the Dust, and rears his rev'rend Head!
Then Sculpture and her Sister-Arts revive;
Stones leap'd to Form, and Rocks began to live;
With sweeter Notes each rising Temple rung;
A Raphael painted, and a Vida sung!
Immortal Vida! on whose honour'd Brow
The Poet's Bays and Critick's Ivy grow:
Cremona now shall ever boast thy Name,
As next in Place to Mantua, next in Fame!

But soon by Impious Arms from Latium chas'd,
Their ancient Bounds the banish'd Muses past:
Thence Arts o'er all the Northern World advance,
But Critic Learning flourish'd most in France.
The Rules, a Nation born to serve, obeys,
And Boileau still in Right of Horace sways.
But we, brave Britons, Foreign Laws despis'd,
And kept unconquer'd and unciviliz'd,
Fierce for the Liberties of Wit, and bold,
We still defy'd the Romans as of old.
Yet some there were, among the sounder Few
Of those who less presum'd, and better knew,
Who durst assert the juster Ancient Cause,
And here restor'd Wit's Fundamental Laws.
Such was the Muse, whose Rules and Practice tell,
Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well.
Such was Roscomon--not more learn'd than good,
With Manners gen'rous as his Noble Blood;
To him the Wit of Greece and Rome was known,
And ev'ry Author's Merit, but his own.
Such late was Walsh,--the Muse's Judge and Friend,
Who justly knew to blame or to commend;
To Failings mild, but zealous for Desert;
The clearest Head, and the sincerest Heart.
This humble Praise, lamented Shade! receive,
This Praise at least a grateful Muse may give!
The Muse, whose early Voice you taught to Sing,
Prescrib'd her Heights, and prun'd her tender Wing,
(Her Guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,
But in low Numbers short Excursions tries:
Content, if hence th' Unlearned their Wants may view,
The Learn'd reflect on what before they knew:
Careless of Censure, not too fond of Fame,
Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame,
Averse alike to Flatter, or Offend,
Not free from Faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

AN ESSAY ON MAN (Epistles 1 and 2)
TO H. ST. JOHN LORD BOLINGBROKE.

THE DESIGN.

Having proposed to write some pieces of Human Life and Manners, such as (to use my Lord Bacon’s expression) come home to Men’s Business and Bosoms, I thought it more satisfactory to begin with considering Man in the abstract, his Nature and his State; since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection or imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being.

The science of Human Nature is, like all other sciences, reduced to a few clear points: there are not many certain truths in this world.  It is therefore in the anatomy of the Mind as in that of the Body; more good will accrue to mankind by attending to the large, open, and perceptible parts, than by studying too much such finer nerves and vessels, the conformations and uses of which will for ever escape our observation.  The disputes are all upon these last, and, I will venture to say, they have less sharpened the wits than the hearts of men against each other, and have diminished the practice more than advanced the theory of Morality.  If I could flatter myself that this Essay has any merit, it is in steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite, in passing over terms utterly unintelligible, and in forming a temperate yet not inconsistent, and a short yet not imperfect system of Ethics.

This I might have done in prose, but I chose verse, and even rhyme, for two reasons.  The one will appear obvious; that principles, maxims, or precepts so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards: the other may seem odd, but is true, I found I could express them more shortly this way than in prose itself; and nothing is more certain, than that much of the force as well as grace of arguments or instructions depends on their conciseness.  I was unable to treat this part of my subject more in detail, without becoming dry and tedious; or more poetically, without sacrificing perspicuity to ornament, without wandering from the precision, or breaking the chain of reasoning: if any man can unite all these without diminution of any of them I freely confess he will compass a thing above my capacity.

What is now published is only to be considered as a general Map of Man, marking out no more than the greater parts, their extent, their limits, and their connection, and leaving the particular to be more fully delineated in the charts which are to follow.  Consequently, these Epistles in their progress (if I have health and leisure to make any progress) will be less dry, and more susceptible of poetical ornament.  I am here only opening the fountains, and clearing the passage.  To deduce the rivers, to follow them in their course, and to observe their effects, may be a task more agreeable.  P.

**ARGUMENT OF EPISTLE I.**

Of the Nature and State of Man, with respect to the Universe.

Of Man in the abstract.  I. That we can judge only with regard to our own system, being ignorant of the relations of systems and things, v.17, etc.  II. That Man is not to be deemed imperfect, but a being suited to his place and rank in the Creation, agreeable to the general Order of Things, and conformable to Ends and Relations to him unknown, v.35, etc.  III. That it is partly upon his ignorance of future events, and partly upon the hope of future state, that all his happiness in the present depends, v.77, etc.  IV. The pride of aiming at more knowledge, and pretending to more Perfection, the cause of Man’s error and misery.  The impiety of putting himself in the place of God, and judging of the fitness or unfitness, perfection or imperfection, justice or injustice of His dispensations, v.109, etc.  V. The absurdity of conceiting himself the final cause of the Creation, or expecting that perfection in the moral world, which is not in the natural, v.131, etc.  VI. The unreasonableness of his complaints against Providence, while on the one hand he demands the Perfections of the Angels, and on the other the bodily qualifications of the Brutes; though to possess any of the sensitive faculties in a higher degree would render him miserable, v.173, etc.  VII. That throughout the whole visible world, an universal order and gradation in the sensual and mental faculties is observed, which cause is a subordination of creature to creature, and of all creatures to Man.  The gradations of sense, instinct, thought, reflection, reason; that Reason alone countervails all the other faculties, v.207.  VIII. How much further this order and subordination of living creatures may extend, above and below us; were any part of which broken, not that part only, but the whole connected creation, must be destroyed, v.233.  IX.  The extravagance, madness, and pride of such a desire, v.250.  X. The consequence of all, the absolute submission due to Providence, both as to our present and future state, v.281, etc., to the end.

**EPISTLE I.**

Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things
To low ambition, and the pride of kings.
Let us (since life can little more supply
Than just to look about us and to die)
Expatiate free o’er all this scene of man;
A mighty maze! but not without a plan;
A wild, where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot;
Or garden tempting with forbidden fruit.
Together let us beat this ample field,
Try what the open, what the covert yield;
The latent tracts, the giddy heights, explore
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;
Eye Nature’s walks, shoot Folly as it flies,
And catch the manners living as they rise;
Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;
But vindicate the ways of God to man.

I.  Say first, of God above, or man below
What can we reason, but from what we know?
Of man, what see we but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer?
Through worlds unnumbered though the God be known,
’Tis ours to trace Him only in our own.
He, who through vast immensity can pierce,
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
Observe how system into system runs,
What other planets circle other suns,
What varied being peoples every star,
May tell why Heaven has made us as we are.
But of this frame, the bearings, and the ties,
The strong connections, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Looked through? or can a part contain the whole?
   Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee?

II.  Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou find,
Why formed so weak, so little, and so blind?
First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,
Why formed no weaker, blinder, and no less;
Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?
Or ask of yonder argent fields above,
Why Jove’s satellites are less than Jove?
   Of systems possible, if ’tis confest
That wisdom infinite must form the best,
Where all must full or not coherent be,
And all that rises, rise in due degree;
Then in the scale of reasoning life, ’tis plain,
There must be, somewhere, such a rank as man:
And all the question (wrangle e’er so long)
Is only this, if God has placed him wrong?
   Respecting man, whatever wrong we call,
May, must be right, as relative to all.
In human works, though laboured on with pain,
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;
In God’s one single can its end produce;
Yet serves to second too some other use.
So man, who here seems principal alone,
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
’Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.
   When the proud steed shall know why man restrains
His fiery course, or drives him o’er the plains:
When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,
Is now a victim, and now Egypt’s god:
Then shall man’s pride and dulness comprehend
His actions’, passions’, being’s, use and end;
Why doing, suffering, checked, impelled; and why
This hour a slave, the next a deity.
   Then say not man’s imperfect, Heaven in fault;
Say rather man’s as perfect as he ought:
His knowledge measured to his state and place;
His time a moment, and a point his space.
If to be perfect in a certain sphere,
What matter, soon or late, or here or there?
The blest to-day is as completely so,
As who began a thousand years ago.

III.  Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescribed, their present state:
From brutes what men, from men what spirits know:
Or who could suffer being here below?
The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,
Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?
Pleased to the last, he crops the flowery food,
And licks the hand just raised to shed his blood.
Oh, blindness to the future! kindly given,
That each may fill the circle, marked by Heaven:
Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.
   Hope humbly, then; with trembling pinions soar;
Wait the great teacher Death; and God adore.
What future bliss, He gives not thee to know,
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.
Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
Man never is, but always to be blest:
The soul, uneasy and confined from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.
   Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears Him in the wind;
His soul, proud science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
Yet simple Nature to his hope has given,
Behind the cloud-topped hill, an humbler heaven;
Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,
Some happier island in the watery waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
To be, contents his natural desire,
He asks no angel’s wing, no seraph’s fire;
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

IV.  Go, wiser thou! and, in thy scale of sense,
Weigh thy opinion against providence;
Call imperfection what thou fanciest such,
Say, here He gives too little, there too much;
Destroy all creatures for thy sport or gust,
Yet cry, if man’s unhappy, God’s unjust;
If man alone engross not Heaven’s high care,
Alone made perfect here, immortal there:
Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
Re-judge His justice, be the God of God.
In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,
Men would be angels, angels would be gods.
Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel:
And who but wishes to invert the laws
Of order, sins against the Eternal Cause.

V.  Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine,
Earth for whose use?  Pride answers, “’Tis for mine:
For me kind Nature wakes her genial power,
Suckles each herb, and spreads out every flower;
Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew
The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;
For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings;
For me, health gushes from a thousand springs;
Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise;
My footstool earth, my canopy the skies.”
   But errs not Nature from this gracious end,
From burning suns when livid deaths descend,
When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests sweep
Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep?
“No, (’tis replied) the first Almighty Cause
Acts not by partial, but by general laws;
The exceptions few; some change since all began;
And what created perfect?”—Why then man?
If the great end be human happiness,
Then Nature deviates; and can man do less?
As much that end a constant course requires
Of showers and sunshine, as of man’s desires;
As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,
As men for ever temperate, calm, and wise.
If plagues or earthquakes break not Heaven’s design,
Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline?
Who knows but He, whose hand the lightning forms,
Who heaves old ocean, and who wings the storms;
Pours fierce ambition in a Cæsar’s mind,
Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind?
From pride, from pride, our very reasoning springs;
Account for moral, as for natural things:
Why charge we heaven in those, in these acquit?
In both, to reason right is to submit.
   Better for us, perhaps, it might appear,
Were there all harmony, all virtue here;
That never air or ocean felt the wind;
That never passion discomposed the mind.
But all subsists by elemental strife;
And passions are the elements of life.
The general order, since the whole began,
Is kept in nature, and is kept in man.

VI.  What would this man?  Now upward will he soar,
And little less than angel, would be more;
Now looking downwards, just as grieved appears
To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears
Made for his use all creatures if he call,
Say what their use, had he the powers of all?
Nature to these, without profusion, kind,
The proper organs, proper powers assigned;
Each seeming want compensated of course,
Here with degrees of swiftness, there of force;
All in exact proportion to the state;
Nothing to add, and nothing to abate.
Each beast, each insect, happy in its own:
Is Heaven unkind to man, and man alone?
Shall he alone, whom rational we call,
Be pleased with nothing, if not blessed with all?
   The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)
Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
No powers of body or of soul to share,
But what his nature and his state can bear.
Why has not man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason, man is not a fly.
Say what the use, were finer optics given,
To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven?
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o’er,
To smart and agonize at every pore?
Or quick effluvia darting through the brain,
Die of a rose in aromatic pain?
If Nature thundered in his opening ears,
And stunned him with the music of the spheres,
How would he wish that Heaven had left him still
The whispering zephyr, and the purling rill?
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,
Alike in what it gives, and what denies?

VII.  Far as Creation’s ample range extends,
The scale of sensual, mental powers ascends:
Mark how it mounts, to man’s imperial race,
From the green myriads in the peopled grass:
What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme,
The mole’s dim curtain, and the lynx’s beam:
Of smell, the headlong lioness between,
And hound sagacious on the tainted green:
Of hearing, from the life that fills the flood,
To that which warbles through the vernal wood:
The spider’s touch, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line:
In the nice bee, what sense so subtly true
From poisonous herbs extracts the healing dew?
How instinct varies in the grovelling swine,
Compared, half-reasoning elephant, with thine!
’Twixt that, and reason, what a nice barrier,
For ever separate, yet for ever near!
Remembrance and reflection how allayed;
What thin partitions sense from thought divide:
And middle natures, how they long to join,
Yet never passed the insuperable line!
Without this just gradation, could they be
Subjected, these to those, or all to thee?
The powers of all subdued by thee alone,
Is not thy reason all these powers in one?

VIII.  See, through this air, this ocean, and this earth,
All matter quick, and bursting into birth.
Above, how high, progressive life may go!
Around, how wide! how deep extend below?
Vast chain of being! which from God began,
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
No glass can reach; from Infinite to thee,
From thee to nothing.  On superior powers
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:
Or in the full creation leave a void,
Where, one step broken, the great scale’s destroyed:
From Nature’s chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.
   And, if each system in gradation roll
Alike essential to the amazing whole,
The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the whole must fall.
Let earth unbalanced from her orbit fly,
Planets and suns run lawless through the sky;
Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurled,
Being on being wrecked, and world on world;
Heaven’s whole foundations to their centre nod,
And nature tremble to the throne of God.
All this dread order break—for whom? for thee?
Vile worm!—Oh, madness! pride! impiety!

IX.  What if the foot, ordained the dust to tread,
Or hand, to toil, aspired to be the head?
What if the head, the eye, or ear repined
To serve mere engines to the ruling mind?
Just as absurd for any part to claim
To be another, in this general frame:
Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains,
The great directing Mind of All ordains.
   All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same;
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame;
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent;
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart:
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns:
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

X.  Cease, then, nor order imperfection name:
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Know thy own point: this kind, this due degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee.
Submit.  In this, or any other sphere,
Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:
Safe in the hand of one disposing Power,
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.
All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good:
And, spite of pride in erring reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.

**ARGUMENT OF EPISTLE II.**

Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Himself, as an Individual.

I. The business of Man not to pry into God, but to study himself.  His Middle Nature; his Powers and Frailties, v.1 to 19. The Limits of his Capacity, v.19, etc.  II. The two Principles of Man, Self-love and Reason, both necessary, v.53, etc. Self-love the stronger, and why, v.67, etc.  Their end the same, v.81, etc.  III. The Passions, and their use, v.93 to 130.  The predominant Passion, and its force, v.132 to 160.  Its Necessity, in directing Men to different purposes, v.165, etc.  Its providential Use, in fixing our Principle, and ascertaining our Virtue, v.177.  IV. Virtue and Vice joined in our mixed Nature; the limits near, yet the things separate and evident: What is the Office of Reason, v.202 to 216.  V. How odious Vice in itself, and how we deceive ourselves into it, v.217.  VI. That, however, the Ends of Providence and general Good are answered in our Passions and Imperfections, v.238, etc.  How usefully these are distributed to all Orders of Men, v.241.  How useful they are to Society, v.251.  And to the Individuals, v.263.  In every state, and every age of life, v.273, etc.

**EPISTLE II.**

I.  Know, then, thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic’s pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!
   Go, wondrous creature! mount where science guides,
Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;
Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
Correct old time, and regulate the sun;
Go, soar with Plato to th’ empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;
Or tread the mazy round his followers trod,
And quitting sense call imitating God;
As Eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the sun.
Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule—
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!
   Superior beings, when of late they saw
A mortal man unfold all Nature’s law,
Admired such wisdom in an earthly shape
And showed a Newton as we show an ape.
   Could he, whose rules the rapid comet bind,
Describe or fix one movement of his mind?
Who saw its fires here rise, and there descend,
Explain his own beginning, or his end?
Alas, what wonder! man’s superior part
Unchecked may rise, and climb from art to art;
But when his own great work is but begun,
What reason weaves, by passion is undone.
Trace Science, then, with Modesty thy guide;
First strip off all her equipage of pride;
Deduct what is but vanity or dress,
Or learning’s luxury, or idleness;
Or tricks to show the stretch of human brain,
Mere curious pleasure, or ingenious pain;
Expunge the whole, or lop th’ excrescent parts
Of all our vices have created arts;
Then see how little the remaining sum,
Which served the past, and must the times to come!

II.  Two principles in human nature reign;
Self-love to urge, and reason, to restrain;
Nor this a good, nor that a bad we call,
Each works its end, to move or govern all
And to their proper operation still,
Ascribe all good; to their improper, ill.
Self-love, the spring of motion, acts the soul;
Reason’s comparing balance rules the whole.
Man, but for that, no action could attend,
And but for this, were active to no end:
Fixed like a plant on his peculiar spot,
To draw nutrition, propagate, and rot;
Or, meteor-like, flame lawless through the void,
Destroying others, by himself destroyed.
Most strength the moving principle requires;
Active its task, it prompts, impels, inspires.
Sedate and quiet the comparing lies,
Formed but to check, deliberate, and advise.
Self-love still stronger, as its objects nigh;
Reason’s at distance, and in prospect lie:
That sees immediate good by present sense;
Reason, the future and the consequence.
Thicker than arguments, temptations throng.
At best more watchful this, but that more strong.
The action of the stronger to suspend,
Reason still use, to reason still attend.
Attention, habit and experience gains;
Each strengthens reason, and self-love restrains.
Let subtle schoolmen teach these friends to fight,
More studious to divide than to unite;
And grace and virtue, sense and reason split,
With all the rash dexterity of wit.
Wits, just like fools, at war about a name,
Have full as oft no meaning, or the same.
Self-love and reason to one end aspire,
Pain their aversion, pleasure their desire;
But greedy that, its object would devour,
This taste the honey, and not wound the flower:
Pleasure, or wrong or rightly understood,
Our greatest evil, or our greatest good.

III.  Modes of self-love the passions we may call;
’Tis real good, or seeming, moves them all:
But since not every good we can divide,
And reason bids us for our own provide;
Passions, though selfish, if their means be fair,
List under Reason, and deserve her care;
Those, that imparted, court a nobler aim,
Exalt their kind, and take some virtue’s name.
   In lazy apathy let stoics boast
Their virtue fixed; ’tis fixed as in a frost;
Contracted all, retiring to the breast;
But strength of mind is exercise, not rest:
The rising tempest puts in act the soul,
Parts it may ravage, but preserves the whole.
On life’s vast ocean diversely we sail,
Reason the card, but passion is the gale;
Nor God alone in the still calm we find,
He mounts the storm, and walks upon the wind.
   Passions, like elements, though born to fight,
Yet, mixed and softened, in his work unite:
These, ’tis enough to temper and employ;
But what composes man, can man destroy?
Suffice that Reason keep to Nature’s road,
Subject, compound them, follow her and God.
Love, hope, and joy, fair pleasure’s smiling train,
Hate, fear, and grief, the family of pain,
These mixed with art, and to due bounds confined,
Make and maintain the balance of the mind;
The lights and shades, whose well-accorded strife
Gives all the strength and colour of our life.
Pleasures are ever in our hands or eyes;
And when in act they cease, in prospect rise:
Present to grasp, and future still to find,
The whole employ of body and of mind.
All spread their charms, but charm not all alike;
On different senses different objects strike;
Hence different passions more or less inflame,
As strong or weak, the organs of the frame;
And hence once master passion in the breast,
Like Aaron’s serpent, swallows up the rest.
   As man, perhaps, the moment of his breath
Receives the lurking principle of death;
The young disease that must subdue at length,
Grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength:
So, cast and mingled with his very frame,
The mind’s disease, its ruling passion came;
Each vital humour which should feed the whole,
Soon flows to this, in body and in soul:
Whatever warms the heart, or fills the head,
As the mind opens, and its functions spread,
Imagination plies her dangerous art,
And pours it all upon the peccant part.
   Nature its mother, habit is its nurse;
Wit, spirit, faculties, but make it worse;
Reason itself but gives it edge and power;
As Heaven’s blest beam turns vinegar more sour.
   We, wretched subjects, though to lawful sway,
In this weak queen some favourite still obey:
Ah! if she lend not arms, as well as rules,
What can she more than tell us we are fools?
Teach us to mourn our nature, not to mend,
A sharp accuser, but a helpless friend!
Or from a judge turn pleader, to persuade
The choice we make, or justify it made;
Proud of an easy conquest all along,
She but removes weak passions for the strong;
So, when small humours gather to a gout,
The doctor fancies he has driven them out.
   Yes, Nature’s road must ever be preferred;
Reason is here no guide, but still a guard:
’Tis hers to rectify, not overthrow,
And treat this passion more as friend than foe:
A mightier power the strong direction sends,
And several men impels to several ends:
Like varying winds, by other passions tossed,
This drives them constant to a certain coast.
Let power or knowledge, gold or glory, please,
Or (oft more strong than all) the love of ease;
Through life ’tis followed, even at life’s expense;
The merchant’s toil, the sage’s indolence,
The monk’s humility, the hero’s pride,
All, all alike, find reason on their side.
   The eternal art, educing good from ill,
Grafts on this passion our best principle:
’Tis thus the mercury of man is fixed,
Strong grows the virtue with his nature mixed;
The dross cements what else were too refined,
And in one interest body acts with mind.
   As fruits, ungrateful to the planter’s care,
On savage stocks inserted, learn to bear;
The surest virtues thus from passions shoot,
Wild nature’s vigour working at the root.
What crops of wit and honesty appear
From spleen, from obstinacy, hate, or fear!
See anger, zeal and fortitude supply;
Even avarice, prudence; sloth, philosophy;
Lust, through some certain strainers well refined,
Is gentle love, and charms all womankind;
Envy, to which th’ ignoble mind’s a slave,
Is emulation in the learned or brave;
Nor virtue, male or female, can we name,
But what will grow on pride, or grow on shame.
   Thus Nature gives us (let it check our pride)
The virtue nearest to our vice allied:
Reason the bias turns to good from ill
And Nero reigns a Titus, if he will.
The fiery soul abhorred in Catiline,
In Decius charms, in Curtius is divine:
The same ambition can destroy or save,
And makes a patriot as it makes a knave.
   This light and darkness in our chaos joined,
What shall divide?  The God within the mind.
   Extremes in nature equal ends produce,
In man they join to some mysterious use;
Though each by turns the other’s bound invade,
As, in some well-wrought picture, light and shade,
And oft so mix, the difference is too nice
Where ends the virtue or begins the vice.
   Fools! who from hence into the notion fall,
That vice or virtue there is none at all.
If white and black blend, soften, and unite
A thousand ways, is there no black or white?
Ask your own heart, and nothing is so plain;
’Tis to mistake them, costs the time and pain.
   Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.
But where th’ extreme of vice, was ne’er agreed:
Ask where’s the north? at York, ’tis on the Tweed;
In Scotland, at the Orcades; and there,
At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where.
No creature owns it in the first degree,
But thinks his neighbour farther gone than he;
Even those who dwell beneath its very zone,
Or never feel the rage, or never own;
What happier nations shrink at with affright,
The hard inhabitant contends is right.
   Virtuous and vicious every man must be,
Few in th’ extreme, but all in the degree,
The rogue and fool by fits is fair and wise;
And even the best, by fits, what they despise.
’Tis but by parts we follow good or ill;
For, vice or virtue, self directs it still;
Each individual seeks a several goal;
But Heaven’s great view is one, and that the whole.
That counter-works each folly and caprice;
That disappoints th’ effect of every vice;
That, happy frailties to all ranks applied,
Shame to the virgin, to the matron pride,
Fear to the statesman, rashness to the chief,
To kings presumption, and to crowds belief:
That, virtue’s ends from vanity can raise,
Which seeks no interest, no reward but praise;
And build on wants, and on defects of mind,
The joy, the peace, the glory of mankind.
   Heaven forming each on other to depend,
A master, or a servant, or a friend,
Bids each on other for assistance call,
Till one man’s weakness grows the strength of all.
Wants, frailties, passions, closer still ally
The common interest, or endear the tie.
To these we owe true friendship, love sincere,
Each home-felt joy that life inherits here;
Yet from the same we learn, in its decline,
Those joys, those loves, those interests to resign;
Taught half by reason, half by mere decay,
To welcome death, and calmly pass away.
   Whate’er the passion, knowledge, fame, or pelf,
Not one will change his neighbour with himself.
The learned is happy nature to explore,
The fool is happy that he knows no more;
The rich is happy in the plenty given,
The poor contents him with the care of Heaven.
See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing,
The sot a hero, lunatic a king;
The starving chemist in his golden views
Supremely blest, the poet in his muse.
   See some strange comfort every state attend,
And pride bestowed on all, a common friend;
See some fit passion every age supply,
Hope travels through, nor quits us when we die.
   Behold the child, by Nature’s kindly law,
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw:
Some livelier plaything gives his youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite:
Scarves, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,
And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age:
Pleased with this bauble still, as that before;
Till tired he sleeps, and life’s poor play is o’er.
   Meanwhile opinion gilds with varying rays
Those painted clouds that beautify our days;
Each want of happiness by hope supplied,
And each vacuity of sense by pride:
These build as fast as knowledge can destroy;
In folly’s cup still laughs the bubble, joy;
One prospect lost, another still we gain;
And not a vanity is given in vain;
Even mean self-love becomes, by force divine,
The scale to measure others’ wants by thine.
See! and confess, one comfort still must rise,
’Tis this, though man’s a fool, yet God is wise.