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AN ESSAY ON MAN

—

EPISTLE II

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF
ENGLISH



28

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A N
E S S A Y
O N
M A N.

In EPISTLES to a Friend.

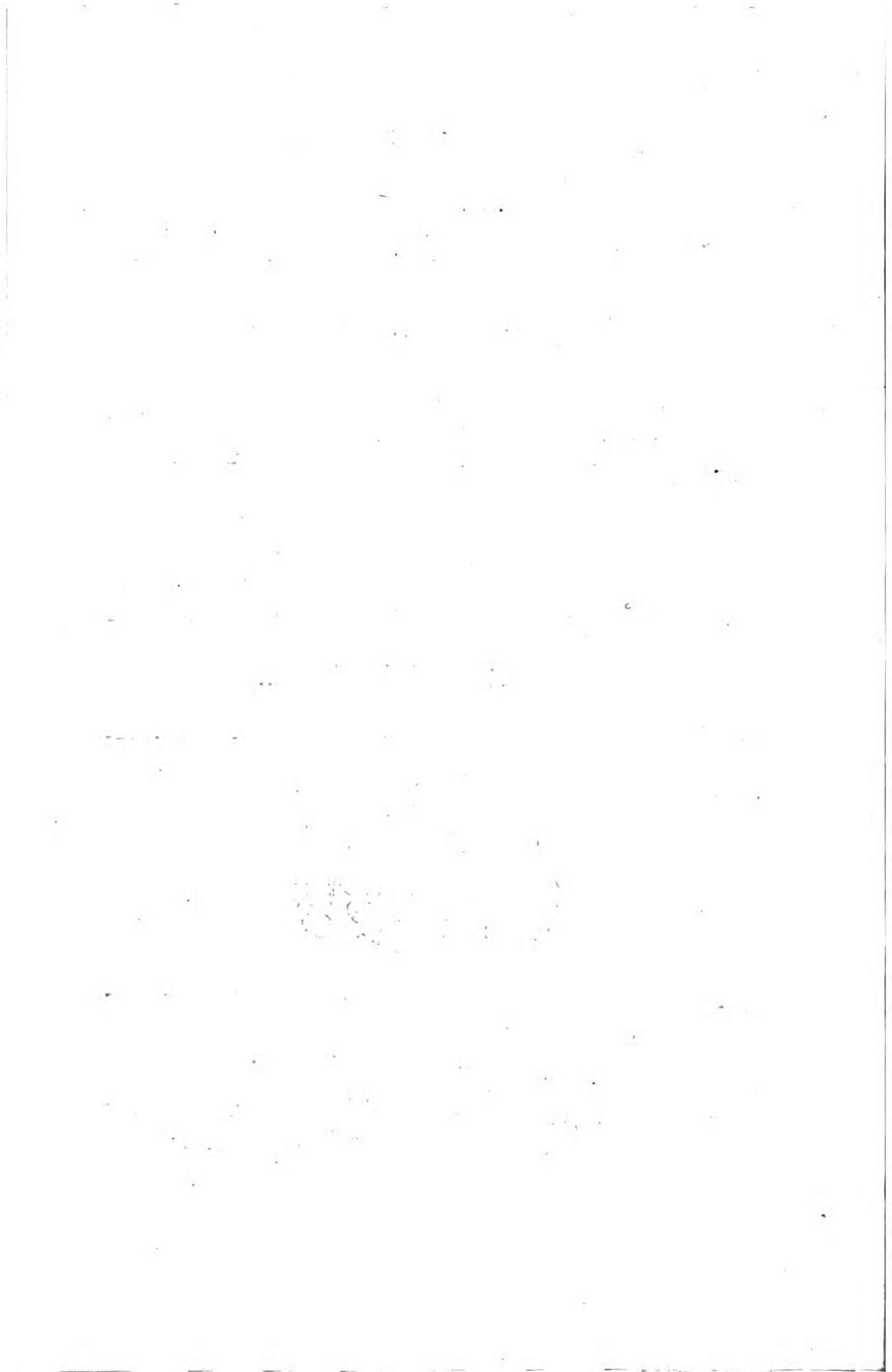
E P I S T L E II.



L O N D O N :

Printed for *J. Wilford*, at the *Three Flower-de-Luces*,
behind the Chapter-House, *St. Paul's*.

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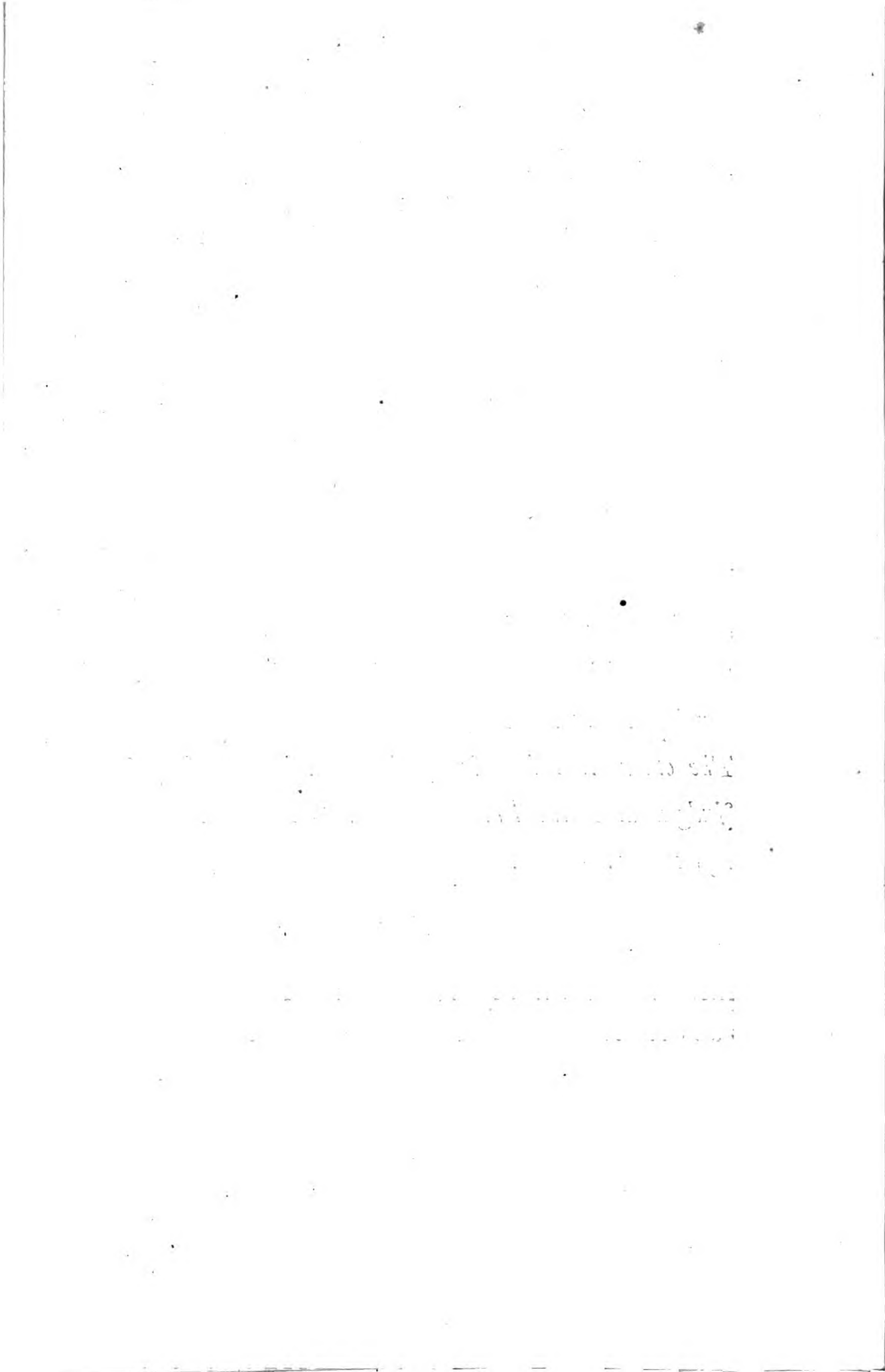


To the R E A D E R.



THE Author has been induced to publish these Epistles separately for two Reasons; The one, that he might not impose upon the Publick too much at once of what he thinks incorrect; The other, that by this Method he might profit of its Judgement on the Parts, in order to make the Whole less unworthy of it.







A N

ESSAY *on* MAN.

· E P I S T L E II.



NOW then Thy-self, presume not God
to scan;

The only Science of Mankind is *Man*.

Plac'd 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 a Stoic's Pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,
To deem himself a Part of God, or Beast;

B

In

In doubt, his Mind or Body to prefer,
 Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err ;
 Alike in Ignorance, his Reason such,
 Whether he thinks too little, or too much.
 Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd ;
 Still by himself abus'd, or dif-abus'd ;
 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 hurl'd :
 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 Follow'rs 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 Thy-self, and be a Fool!

Superior

Superior Beings, when of late they saw
 A mortal Man unfold all Nature's Law,
 Admir'd such Wisdom in an earthly Shape,
 And show'd a NEWTON as we show an *Ape*.

Could He who taught each Planet where to roll,
 Describe, or fix, one Movement of the Soul?
 Who mark'd their Points, to rise, and to descend,
 Explain his own Beginning, or his End?
 Alas what wonder! Man's superior Part
 Uncheck'd may rise, and climb from Art to Art;
 But when his own great Work is but begun,
 What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone.

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*.

Fix'd

Fix'd 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 destroy'd.

Most *Strength* the moving Principle requires,
 Active its Task, it prompts, impels, inspires :
 Sedate and quiet the comparing lies,
 Form'd but to check, delib'rate, and advise.
 Self-Love still stronger, as its Objects nigh ;
 Reason's at distance and in prospect lye ;
 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,

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.

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 tho' *selfish*, if their Means be fair,
 Lift 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 fix'd, 'tis fix'd 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 fail,
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, tho' born to fight,
Yet mix'd and soften'd, 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 mix'd with Art, and to due Bounds confin'd,
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 diff'rent Senses diff'rent Objects strike:

Hence

Hence diff'rent Passions more or less inflame,
 As strong, or weak, the Organs of the Frame;
 And hence one *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
 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 dang'rous 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 Edge and Pow'r,
 As Heav'n's blest Beam turns Vinegar more sow'r;
 We, wretched Subjects, tho' to lawful Sway,
 In this weak *Queen*, some Fav'rite still obey.

Ah!

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 driv'n 'em out.

Yes: Nature's Road must ever be prefer'd;
 Reason is here no *Guide*, but still a *Guard*;
 'Tis her's to *rectify*, not *overthrow*,
 And treat this Passion more as Friend than Foe:
 Like varying Winds, by *other* Passions tost,
This drives them constant to a certain Coast.
 Let Pow'r or Knowledge, Gold, or Glory, please,
 Or (oft more strong than all) the Love of Ease:
 Thro' Life 'tis follow'd, ev'n at Life's Expence;
 The Merchant's Toil, the Sage's Indolence,
 The Monk's Humility, the Hero's Pride,
 And all alike, find Reason on their side.

Th'

Th' Eternal Art, educing Good from Ill,
Grafts on this Passion our *best Principle*;
'Tis thus, the Mercury of Man is fix'd,
Strong grows the Virtue with his Nature mix'd ;
The Dross cements what else were too refin'd,
And in one Int'rest *Body* acts with *Mind*.

As Fruits ungrateful to the Planter's care
On *Savage Stocks* inferted, 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 ;
Ev'n Av'rice, Prudence ; Sloth, Philosophy ;
Envy, to which th' ignoble Mind's a slave,
Is Emulation in the Learn'd or Brave :
Nor Virtue, Male or Female, can we name,
But what or grows on *Pride*, or grows on *Shame*.

Thus *Nature* gives us (let it check our Pride)
The Virtue nearest to our Vice ally'd ;
Reason the Byas turns to Good from Ill,
And *Nero* reigns a *Titus*, if he will.

The fiery Soul abhorr'd in *Cataline*,
 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 join'd,
 What shall divide? The *God* within the *Mind*.

Tho' each by turns the other's bound invade,
 As in some well-wrought Picture Light and Shade,

And oft so mix, the diff'rence 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;

But seen too *oft*, familiar with her Face,

We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

A *Cheat!* a *Whore!* who starts not at the Name,

In all the Inns of Court, or Drury Lane?

But

But where the *Point 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.
 Ev'n those who dwell beneath her very *Zone*,
 Or never feel the *Rage*, or never own ;
 What happier Natures shrink at with *Affright*,
 The hard *Inhabitant* contends is right.

Virtuous and vicious ev'ry Man must be,
 Few in th' *Extreme*, but all in the degree:
 The *Rogue* and *Fool* by fits is fair and wise,
 And ev'n 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 sev'ral Goal :
 But *HEAV'N*'s great View is *One*, and that the *WHOLE* :
That counter-works each *Folly* and *Caprice* ;
That disapoints th' Effect of ev'ry *Vice*.

That

That happy Fraillies to all *Ranks* apply'd,
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 Int'rest, no Reward but Praise.
And builds on *Wants*, and on *Defects* of Mind,
The *Joy*, the *Peace*, the *Glory*, of Mankind.

Heav'n 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, Fraillies, Passions, closer still allye
The common Int'rest, or endear the Tye:
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 Int'rests to resign?
Taught half by Reason, half by mere Decay,
To welcome Death, and calmly pass away.

To

Whate'er the *Passion*, Knowledge, Fame, or Pelf,
 Not one will change his Neighbour with himself.
 The Learn'd are happy, Nature to explore;
 The Fool is happy, that he knows no more;
 The Rich are 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 Chymist in his golden Views
 Supremely blest, the Poet in his Muse.

See! some strange *Comfort* ev'ry *State* attend,
 And *Pride* bestow'd on all, a common Friend;
 See! some fit *Passion* ev'ry *Age* supply,
Hope travels thro', nor quits us when we die.

'Till then, *Opinion* gilds with varying rays
 Those painted Clouds that beautify our Days;
 Each want of Happiness by Hope supply'd,
 And each Vacuity of Sense by Pride.
 These build up all that Knowledge can destroy;
 In Folly's Cup still laughs the Bubble, Joy;

One Prospect lost, another still we gain,
And not a Vanity is giv'n 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, tho' *Man's a Fool*, yet *GOD IS WISE*.

Supremely blest, I bow to thee, O Lord!





