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Book IV

HOW glorious a privilege has man above all other sublunary beings! Who, though indigent, unpitied, forsaken by the world, and even chained in a dungeon, can, by the aid of divine contemplation, enjoy all the charms of pomp, respect, and liberty! — transport himself in idea, to whatever place he wishes, and grasp in theory imagined empires!

Unaccountable is it, therefore, that so many people find an irksomeness in being alone, tho' for never so small a space of time! — Guilt, indeed, creates perturbations, which may well make retirement horrible, and drive the self tormented wretch into any company, to avoid the agonies of remorse; but I speak not of those who are afraid to reflect, but of those who seem to me not to have the power to do it.

There are several of my acquaintance of both sexes, who lead lives perfectly inoffensive, and when in company appear to have a fund of vivacity, capable of enlivening all the conversation they come into, yet, if you happen to meet them after half an hour's solitude, are for some minutes the most heavy lumpish creatures upon earth. Ask them if they are indisposed? They will draw out, "No, they are well enough." If any misfortune has befallen them? Still they answer, "No," in the same stupid tone as before, and look like things inanimate, till something is said or done to reinspire them. One would imagine they were but half awake from a deep steep; and in deed their minds during this lethargy, may be said to have been in a more inactive state than even that of sleep, for they have not so much as dreamed: but I think they may justly enough be compared to clock work, which has power to do nothing of itself till wound up by another.

Whatever opinion the world may have of the wit of persons of this cast, I cannot help thinking there is a vacuum in the mind; — that they have no ideas of their own; — and only thro' custom, and a genteel education, are enabled to talk agreeably on those of other people. A real fine genius can never want matter to entertain itself: and tho' on the top of a mountain, without society, and without books, or any exterior means of employment, will always find that within which will keep it from being idle: — memory and recollection will bring the transactions of past times to view: observation and discernment point out the present with their causes; — and fancy, tempered with judgment, anticipate the future. This power of contemplation and reflection it is that chiefly distinguishes the human from the brute creation, and proves that we have souls which are in reality sparks of that Divine, Omniscent, Omnipresent Being, whence we all boast to be derived. The pleasures which an agreeable society bestows, are indeed the most elegant we can taste; but even that company we like best would grow insipid and tiresome, were we to be for ever in it; and to a person who knows how to think justly, it would certainly be as great a mortification never to be alone, as to be always so.

Conversation, in effect, but furnishes matter for contemplation; — it exhilarates the mind, and fits it for reflection afterwards. Every new thing we hear in company raises in us new ideas in the closet or on the pillow; and as there are few people but one may gather something from, either to divert or improve, a good understanding will, like the industrious bee, suck out the various sweets, and digest them in retirement. But those who are perpetually hurrying from one company to another, and never suffer themselves to be alone but when weary Nature summons them to repose, will be little amended, tho' the maxims of a Seneca were to be delivered to them in all the enchanting eloquence of a Tully.

But not to be more improved, is not the worst mischief that attends an immoderate aversion to solitude. People of this humour, rather than be alone, fly into all company indiscriminately, and sometimes fall into such as they have reason to repent their whole lives of having ever seen; for tho' they may not possibly reap any advantage from the good, their reputations must certainly, and perhaps their morals and fortune too, will suffer very much

from the bad; and where we do not give ourselves leisure to chuse, it is rarely we happen or the former, as they are infinitely the smaller number, and also less easy of access to those whose characters they are unacquainted with.

Many young persons of both sexes owe their ruin to this one unfortunate propensity of loving to be always in company; and it is the more dangerous, as nobody takes any pains to conquer it in themselves, but on the contrary, are apt to mistake it for a laudable inclination, and look on those who preach up the happiness of a more retired life, as phlegmatic and vapourish. I doubt not but I shall pass for such in the opinion of many of my readers, who are too volatile to consider that it is not a sullen, cynical, total, avoiding of society that I recommend, but a proper love of solitude at some times, to enable us to relish with more pleasure, as well as to be essentially the better for conversation at others, and also to select such for our companions as may be likely to answer both these ends.

Nor is it only where there is a difference of sex that I think youth ought to be upon its guard; the dangers in that case are too universally allowed to stand in need of any remonstrances, and yet perhaps are not greater than other which both may happen to falling among those of their own. Are not almost all the extravagances, parents with so much grief behold their children guilty of, owing to ill-chosen company? — Great is the privilege of example, and some are so weak as to think they must do as they see others do. The fear of being laughed at has made many a young gentleman run into vices to which his inclination was at first averse; but, alas! By habitude become more pleasing to him, he has in his turn played the tempter's part, and made it his glory to seduce others as himself had been seduced. It is this love of company, more than the diversions mentioned in the bills, that make our ladies run galloping in troops every evening to masquerades, balls, and assemblies in winter, and in the summer to Vauxhall, Ranelagh, Cuper's Garden, Mary-le-bon, Sadler's wells, both old and new, Goodman's Fields, and twenty other such like places, which in this age of luxury serve as decoys to draw the thoughtless and unwary together, and, as it were, prepare the way for other more vitious excesses: for there are, and of condition too, not a few (as I am informed by the Gnomes who preside over midnight revels) that, going with no other intention, than to partake what seems an innocent recreation are prevailed upon by the love of company, either to remain in these houses, or adjourn to some other place of entertainment, till the sweet harbinger of day, Aurora, awakes, and blushes to behold the order of nature thus perverted; nor then perhaps would separate, did not wearied limbs, heavy languid eyes, and dirty linen, remind them of repairing to their respective habitations, where having lain awhile, they rise, dress, and go again in quest of new company, and new amusements.

Heaven forbid, and I am far from suggesting, that to run such lengths as these should be common to all who hate retirement and reflection: fortune is sometimes kinder than our endeavours merit, and by not throwing any temptations in our way, renders our carelessness of no worse consequence than being deprived of those solid pleasures which flow from a consciousness of having behaved according to the dictates of honour and reason.

But suppose we make some allowances to a few of the very young and gay, especially the beautiful, and high-born, who, by a mistaken fondness in their parents, from the moment they were capable of understanding what was said to them, heard nothing but flattery, and are made to believe they came into the world for no other purpose than to be adored and indulged, what can we say for those who had a different education, and are of riper years? — How little excuse is there for a gadding matron, or for a woman who ought to have the care of a house and family at heart! — How odd a figure does the mother of five or six children make at one of these nocturnal rambles; and how ridiculous is it for a person in any trade or avocation to be, or affect to be, above the thought of all oeconomy, and make one in every party of pleasure that presents itself? Yet such as these are no prodigies. All kinds of regulation and management require some small reflection and recess from company, and these are two things so terrible to some people, that they will rather suffer every thing to be ruined, than endure the fatigue of thought.

A young widow of my acquaintance, rich, beautiful, and gay, had scarce sullied the blackness of her weeds, before she ventured to take for a second husband a man, who, had she once considered on what she was about to do, she would have found had no one quality that could promise her any felicity with him. He had not been married a month before he loaded her with the most gross abuse, turned her innocent babes out of doors, and affronted all her friends who came to reason with him on the injustice and cruelty of his behaviour. The unadvised step he had taken, indeed, but little merited compassion for the event; but the sweetness of disposition with which she had always treated all who knew her, rendered it impossible not to have a fellow-feeling of the calamities she

laboured under. A particular friend of her's, however, took one day the liberty of asking how she could throw away herself on a person so every way undeserving of her? To which she made this short, but sincere reply: — "Ah! Said she, it is a sad thing to live alone." To this the other might have returned, that she could not be said to be alone, who had a mother to advise, and three sweet children to divert her most melancholy hours; but this would have been only adding to her affliction, and her condition, being now irremediable, required consolation.

Perhaps the reading this short detail of the misfortune her inadvertency had brought upon her, may give her some palpitations which I should be sorry to occasion; but as she is a much lamented instance of the danger to which any one may be subjected through want of a due reflection, I could not forbear mentioning it as a warning to other.

When this immoderate desire of company remains in persons of an advanced age, tho' it threatens less mischief, it is more ridiculous than in the younger sort. I know a lady, who, by her own confession, is no less than sixty-five, yet in all that long length of time has treasured up nothing in her mind wherewith she can entertain herself two minutes. She has been a widow for several years, has a jointure sufficient to support a handsome equipage, is without children, or any other incumbrance, and might live as much respected by the world as she is really contemned, could she prevail on herself to reflect what sort of behaviour would be most becoming a woman of her age and circumstances.

But instead of living in a regular decent manner, she roams from place to place, hires lodgings at three or four different houses at the same time, lives one night at ST James's, another at Covent-Garden, a third perhaps at Westminster, and a fourth in the city: — nor does she look on this as a sufficient variety: — she has at this moment apartments at Richmond, — Hammersmith, Kensington, and Chelsea, each of which she visits two or three times at least every month; so that her time is passed in a continual whirl from one home to another, if any can be justly called so; but it seems as if she had an aversion to the very name; for the room she pays for, she dwells in the least, seldom eats in any of them, and forces herself as it were into those of other people, where she sends in a stock of provision sufficient for the whole family, in order to purchase for herself a welcome. But as people of any figure in the world would not accept of such favours, and those of good sense not endure to be deprived of the privilege of thinking their own thoughts, and entertaining their own friends, it can be only the extremely necessitous, or those who have as little on their heads as herself, that will submit to have their lodgings and time taken up in this manner.

Poor woman! How does she lavish away a handsome income! — how forfeit all pretensions to good understanding and good breeding, merely for the sake of being permitted to talk as much as she pleases without contradiction, and being never alone but when asleep! — I have been told by those who are to be depended upon, that the moment she is out of bed, she runs with her stays and petticoats into the next neighbour's chamber, not being able to live without company even till she is dressed.

There are people so uncharitable, as to believe some latent crime hangs heavy on the minds of all those who take so much pains to avoid being alone; but I am far from being of that number; it is my opinion, that neither this old rattle I have mentioned, nor many others who act in the same manner, ever did a real hurt to any one. Those who are incapable of thinking, are certainly incapable of any premeditated mischief; and, as I have already said, seem to me a set of insensibles, who never act of themselves, but are acted upon others.

Before one passes so cruel a censure, one should certainly examine, I mean not the lives and characters, for they may deceive us, but at what point of time this aversion to solitude commenced: — if from childhood, and so continued even to the extremest old age, it can proceed only from a weakness in the mind, and is deserving our compassion; but if from taking that satisfaction in contemplation and retirement, which every reasonable soul finds in it, one sees a person has turned to the reverse, — start, even while in company, at the bare mention of quitting it, and flies solitude as an house on fire, one may very well suspect some secret crime has wrought so great a transition, and that any conversation, though the most insipid and worthless, seems preferable to that which the guilty breast can furnish to itself.

I am well aware, that there is another motive, besides either a want of power to think, or a consciousness of having done what renders thought a pain, that induces many people to avoid being alone as much as possible; and that is, when the mind is oppressed with any very severe affliction. To be able to reflect on our misfortunes, goes a great way towards bearing them with that fortitude which is becoming the dignity of human nature; but

all have not courage to do it, and those who have, would sink beneath the weight of grief, were they to indulge the memory of what occasioned it.

This I am sensible is the case of many who pass for persons of good understanding, and the excuse is allowed by the generality of the world as a reasonable one; but yet I must beg their pardon, when I say, that whatsoever share of fine sense they may shew in other things, they betray a very great deficiency in this. The relaxation which noise and hurry may afford, is but short-lived, and are so far from removing that burden which the spirit labours under, that they afterwards make it felt with double weight.

Some are so madly stupid, as to attempt to lose the thoughts of one evil, by running into others of perhaps worse consequence. I mean that of drinking, and some other excesses, equally pernicious both to fortune and constitution; but how false a relief this gives, I need only appeal to those who have made the trial.

Would such people be prevailed upon to make a little reflection before it is too late, they would certainly have recourse to more solid consolations.

— Would not the works of some of our most celebrated poets divert a melancholy hour much more than all the rhodomontades of a vague idle conversation! Would not the precepts of philosophy, of which so many excellent treatises have been wrote, give them more true courage than all the bottle can inspire! — And above all, would not the duties of an entire submission and resignation to the Almighty Disposer of all things, so often and so strenuously recommended, be infinitely more efficacious to quiet all perturbations of the mind, than any vain amusements of what kind soever!

It is not that I would persuade any one to a continual poring over books; too much reading, tho' of the best authors, is apt to dull the spirits, and destroy that attention which alone can render this employment profitable. A few good maxims, well digested by reflection, dwell upon the memory, and are not only a remedy for present ills, but also a kind of antidote against nay future ones that fate may have in store.

But it may be said, that this advice can only be complied with by persons of condition; and as for the meaner part, it cannot be imagined that they have either time or capacities to enable them to square themselves by such rules: — this indeed must be allowed, but then it must also be allowed, that they can the least afford to waste what time they have in such fruitless attempts as they generally make use of for forgetting their cares; and as to their capacities, we are to suppose that every one understands the trade or business to which he has been bred, and, in my opinion, nothing is more plain than that an industrious application to that, would be his best relief for any vexation he is involved in, as well as the surest means of avoiding falling into others.

Upon the whole, it denotes a meanness of soul, not to be forgiven even in the lowest rank of people, much less those of amore refined education, when, to shun the remembrance perhaps of a trifling affliction, they run into irregularities, each so which their reason might inform them would be productive of greater ills than any they yet had to lament; and is so far from affording any relief, that it serves only to give new additions to their former disquiets, according to the poet, justly describing this sever of the mind,

“Restless they toss, and turn about their severish will,
When all their ease must come by lying still.”

But what can be more amazing, than that persons, who have no one thing upon earth to incommode them, should not be able to take any pleasure in contemplating on the tranquillity of their situation!

— Yet so it is: there are those in the world, and in the great world too, who being possessed of every thing they can wish, and frequently much more than either they deserve, or could ever expect, seem altogether insensible of the benefits they receive from heaven, or any obligations they may have to man. This, methinks, is an indolence of nature, which can never be too much guarded against, because whoever is guilty of it, becomes ungrateful and unjust, without knowing he is so, and incurs the censure of all who are acquainted with him, for omissions which himself is wholly ignorant of, and if he were not so, would perhaps be very far from meriting.

The beautiful and noble widow, who is so good never to fail making one in our little society, was inclined to impute this thoughtless behaviour in many people to the negligence of those who, having the care of their reduction, did not inspire them with proper notions of the necessity there is for every body to enter sometimes into themselves; but we are all against her in this point, and she was easily convinced, that though this was

certainly a duty incumbent on all who had the government of youth, yet without some share of a natural bent that way, no lessons would be effectual; and that where the spirits were too volatile, any confinement, though for never so short a space of time, would rather mope than render them profitable serious.

But after all that has, or can be said, the world is more inclinable to excuse this defect than any other I know of: — a person who loves to be always in company, and accept of any sort rather than be alone, is accounted a good-natured harmless creature; and though it is impossible they can be magnified for any extraordinary virtues or qualifications, what they lose in respect is for the most part made up with love. They have rarely any enemies; and the reason is plain, they are generally merry, never contradict whatever is said of done, nor refuse any thing that is asked of them. People of a middling understanding like their conversation; — the most weak are in no awe of them; and the wisest will sometimes suffer themselves to be diverted by them; — in fine, every body is easy with them, and how easy they are to themselves in all events, there are innumerable instances.

Belinda is descended of a good family among the gentry, is agreeable without being a beauty, and has somewhat of a sparkle in her conversation, which with many people passes for wit; for, as she never gives herself the trouble to think what she is about to say, but speaks all that comes into her head, some very smart things frequently fall from her, which, being reported afterwards in other companies, serve, in this undistinguishing age, to establish her character. She came very early into the great world, and her youth and a new face were sufficient to make her to be taken notice of by Rinaldo, as his quality was to make her please and vain of his addresses; but that great person looks upon it as derogatory to his dignity to attach himself to any particular mistress, so that the amour between them continued no longer than just to say there had been one.

Some women would have been inconsolable to find themselves no sooner gained than abandoned; their pride, if not their love, would have made them regret the loss of so illustrious an admirer; but Belinda as just the same laughing, rallying, romping creature as before; she seemed no more affected by this change, than she had been at the reproofs given to her by her friends on the first rumour of her intimacy with Rinaldo; and Lavallie, a man of no less gallantry and inconstancy, succeeded to her affection, if that kind of liking, which serves only to amuse an idle hour, is worthy to be called so.

Equally gay, inconsiderate, and regardless of the censure of the world, this intrigue was managed with so little circumspection, that it soon reached the ears of Manella, the wife of Lavallie, a lady infinitely fond of her husband, and so tenacious of the rights of love, that even a tender glance to any other woman seemed the most unpardonable injury to her. But though she had been enough accustomed to vexations of that kind, to have inured a person less vehement in her passions to have borne them with more patience, and the little advantage she gained over him by publishing all the discoveries she made of his among, might have made her see that it would have been greater prudence in her to be silent; yet the greatness of her spirit would not suffer her to fit tamely down under the least indignity offered to her love or beauty. She reproached him on the score of Belinda, with a bitterness which, perhaps to revenge, he persisted in his intrigue with that lady much longer than his inclination, without having been thus provoked, would have prompted him to; and the rage she was in, served (being reported to Belinda) to make that thoughtless creature triumph in the power of her own charms, and instead of giving her the least share of shame or remorse, afforded her matter of merriment and ridicule.

Manella, finding all she could say to her husband was far from working the effect she desired, was resolved to fly to any extremities to break off the intercourse between him and this hated rival: — she knew very well that Rinaldo had once a liking to that young lady, and though he seemed at present entirely divested of his former inclinations, yet she imagined it might pique him to be told that one he had honoured with his addresses should condescend to receive those of a person so much his inferior; and therefore flattered herself that he would not fail to lay his commands on Lavallie to desist his visits to her, especially when he had so plausible a pretence for it, as the complaints of a wife.

She therefore threw herself at his feet, informed him of every thing she had heard, and, with a shower of tears, beseeched him to exert the authority he had over her perfidious husband, to oblige him to return to his first vows, and not to entirely break the heart of a woman, who had merited him more for love than interest, and had never swerved, even in thought from the duties of her place.

The noble Rinaldo easily saw into the thing, but would not seem to do so; and would fain have persuaded Manella there was no foundation for her suspicions, but she was not to be so easily put off. She renewed her

intreaties; she repeated the reasons which convinced her of the injustice done her, and became so importunate, that he at last promised to speak to Lavallie to be at least more circumspect in his behaviour.

Whether this great person thought any farther on it is uncertain, but chance and the inadvertency of the parties concerned gave the jealous Manella a sufficient opportunity to vent all her enraged soul was full of, on the persons who had wronged her.

She happened one day to go to a millener's where she was accustomed to buy some trifles belonging to her dress, and finding the mistress of the house not in the shop, ran directly up stairs, where was kept a kind of lace chamber. Though she had been often there, and as perfectly acquainted with the room, by accident she pushed open the door of another, which being but just thrown to, without being locked, easily gave her admittance, and afforded her a prospect she little expected, — her husband and Belinda in a situation, such as might have assured her of their guilt, had she not been so before.

Astonishment at finding them in that place for some moments kept her silent, as shame and vexation to be thus caught did them; but the millener, who hearing she was come up stairs, and fearing the consequence, came running into the room, and was beginning to make some awkward excuses, — such as crying to Lavallie and Belinda, “Good Heaven, how came you here! — And you, Madam! to Manella. Bless me! Sure you have all mistaken the apartment! Nobody ever comes into this room but for! — “But for private purposes, infamous woman!” cried Manella, in a voice quite hoarse with passion, which rose with so much vehemence in her throat, as to render what she said scarce intelligible; then flew at her, at Belinda, and her husband, railing, shrieking, scratching, and throwing promiscuously the patch, powder-boxes, and every thing that stood upon the toilette: — till Lavallie, recovered from the confusion which the surprise of her first entrance had thrown him in, ran to her, held her hands, and told her if she did not behave with more moderation, he would oblige her to it by worse usage.

This menace only served to give fresh addition to her fury, and that increasing her strength she broke for him, and flying to the window, where she perceived he had laid his sword, instantly drew it, and made at Belinda with such precipitation, that it was as much as Lavallie could do to save his mistress from feeling a fatal effect of her desperation.

By superior force, however, he disarmed this enraged amazon, though not without cutting his own hands in the struggle. All this time there was such a mingled fount of curses, shrieks, cries, of murder, and stamping on the floor, as must be very alarming to those who heard it.

As this millener got infinitely more by her private customers than by her public, and kept a house chiefly for the meeting of persons of condition, Rinaldo, who at that time had a new flame, and was come to gratify it with the beloved object, heard this disturbance from an adjacent chamber; and wholly unable to guess the occasion, ran with his sword in his hand to inform himself of the truth, where the noise directed.

He came into the room just as Lavallie had wrenched from his wife's hand that weapon of destruction, and seeing who was there, was no longer at a loss to know what had happened: his presence, however, obliged every one to more moderation, and Belinda took this opportunity of running away, which before she could not do, the furious Manella being between her and the door. The millener now began to account for this accident in a more plausible manner than she had done before. She said, that Belinda being taken with a sudden faintness, she had desired to lie down on her bed in order to recover herself, and that she being afterwards busy with customers, had not seen Lavallie enter, but imagined, that being but little acquainted with the house, he had gone into that room by mistake. Lavallie took the hint she had given, and protested, that being directed up to the lace-chamber, he had opened this door, as being the first he came to, and seeing a lady lie on the bed, he had the curiosity to approach, in order to see if he knew her, and to rally her for trusting herself in that posture in an unlocked chamber. “As I drew nearer, continued he, I found it was Belinda, and also by some groans that she was indisposed: good-manners, as well as good-nature, obliged me to enquire how she did, and as I was stooping towards the bed, that she might hear what I had to say with the more ease, Manella came into the room with a rage little becoming her character, and loaded that innocent lady and myself with the most opprobrious reflection malice could invent.

All the time he was speaking, Manella shook her head, and bit her lips till they even bled with inward vexation, but the presence of Rinaldo forbidding her to continue her reproaches in the same manner she had done before his entrance, she only said, that Heaven, who knew how greatly she was injured, would, one time or other, revenge her cause.

The millener, who knew Rinaldo had reason to be of her side, began now in her turn to resent the aspersion Manella endeavoured to cast upon her house, and said in plain terms, that no reputation could be safe from the idle whims of a jealous wife. Lavallie affected to beg her pardon for the injustice his wife was guilty of to her, and cursed himself for the unhappy mistake which had occasioned all this confusion.

Rinaldo was highly diverted at this scene in his own mind, but would not add to Manella's affliction, by letting her see how little he regarded it; she had, however, too much penetration not to perceive, that neither complaints nor resentment would be of much service to her in that place, and being almost ready to burst with spite and rage, went out of the room, giving a look at Lavallie and the woman of the house, which testified how ill she was satisfied with the shallow excuses they had made, and was indeed so distracted in her thoughts, that she had almost passed the door before the recovered presence enough of mind to pay to Rinaldo the respect his dignity demanded.

Her absence put an end to all the constraint they had been in; Lavallie was obliged to endure a good deal of raillery yon the occasion from Rinado, and afterwards to double the present he always made to the millener, on account of the confusion his wife had caused in her house.

Whether this adventure put an end to the amour he had with Belinda, is uncertain; but if continued, it was with so much caution, that the interviews between them were never afterwards discovered.

Manella finding she could no other way be revenged, took care to render this affair as public as possible; so that Belinda met with the most severe reproofs from all her friends for her ill conduct: yet so insensible was this unthinking lady either of shame, or the prejudice it might be to her interest, to forfeit the love and esteem of her family, that though she heard their admonitions with her sensual ears, those of her minds seemed wholly deaf; nor could all was said to her make the least alteration in her deportment, or prevail on her to give herself one moment's reflection.

Thus with the same unmoved, unshaken indolence she had ever behaved, did she go on, laughing, singing, dancing, coquetting among the gay world for near two years; in which time no material incident happened to her; the truth is, indeed, whatever was reported of her, so little concerned her, that her carelessness blunted the edge of scandal, and had the same effect as not to deserve it would have had: people grew weary of talking of what every one knew, and was made no secret of by the person whose interest it chiefly was to have kept it of.

In a long course of unregarded follies might she have continued, till age and wrinkles had enforced that solitude her own prudence was too weak to make choice of, had not count Loyter professed a passion of a different nature for her than any before him had pretended.

So greatly did he seem enamoured with her, that he never was two hours absent form her; and his quality and attachment obliged all who were looked upon as her former admirer to keep a greater distance. Her kindred and friends were transported to her with what respect and tenderness the addresses he made to her were accompanied; but their rejoicing was very much abated, when, on examining her on this account, they could not find that he had ever once mentioned marriage to her; and though eh swore ten thousand oaths that he was utterly unable to live without professing her, he had not made one that it was his intention to possess her by those ways which alone could do honour to her family. As there seemed some reason, however, to believe the regard he had for her was infinitely more sincere than any who before had called themselves her lovers, they advised, nay conjured her to omit nothing in her power for improving it, and converting the designs he had upon her into honourable ones, if they were not so already; all this she promised them to do, but thought no more of what they had said than the time they were speaking, and being herself quite easy in the matter, made her lover so too, by leaving him to do as inclination should direct him.

This behaviour was an infinite trouble to all who wished to see her retrieve, by a happy marriage, the errors of her past life; but one more sanguine than the rest for her interest, resolved to do that for her which he found there was no possibility of prevailing on her to do for herself, and took an opportunity of discoursing with the count on the affair. He at first would have evaded all talk of it, and made several efforts to give a turn to the conversation, but finding himself closely pressed, he at last replied, that as Belinda and himself were the chief persons concerned, and were perfectly satisfied with each other's intentions, he thought all interfering between them wholly unnecessary.

These words were a little resented by the friends of Belinda, and gave rise to some expressions on both sides, which if either of them demanded not that satisfaction of the other, which is usual in such cases between gentlemen, there wanted but a very little of it. From this time, however, their former intimacy was broke off: — Belinda's kinsman reproached her for that levity which had like to have proved fatal to him; and count Loyter, to shew how little he regarded the displeasure of any of her family, prevailed on that thoughtless lady to come and live publickly at his house.

All the world now looked upon her as his mistress; and indeed how could it be otherwise! — She had an apartment so near his own, that they could with ease pass to each other, without being known to do so by any of the family; she went abroad with him to all publick places; — she had the entire command of all his servants; — she did the honours of his table whatever company was there, yet was there not the least mention of any marriage between them: — but in spite of all these circumstances, it is possible they might be innocent.

After having lived together in this manner, till the talk of it (which never continues long on one subject) began to subside, the count all at once declared his intention of making her his wife. New equipages and new habits were prepared, — invitations sent to the friends on both sides, and they were really married at a time when it was least to be hoped or expected.

It must be owned that there was something spirited, and at the same time truly honourable in the behaviour of count Loyter on this occasion. He would not be compelled to give any definitive answer as to his designs on a woman of Belinda's character; but when he found himself free from the persecutions of her friends, and that they had entirely given her over for lost, then did he shew the sincerity of his passion, and entirely wipe off all the aspersions that had been cast on her upon his account.

I should be glad there was a possibility of excusing Belinda also; but alas! She consented to live in his house without any certainty, or even a promise of ever being his wife, and was, perhaps, not the least surprised of any that heard it, that she was made so.

Her change of fortune has wrought no change in her humour and conduct; and as she would be commended for being no way elated with the grandeur she possesses, so must she also be highly blamed for not remembering her honour is now the property of her lord, and that every light unbecoming action she is guilty of, is a reflection upon him.

I believe it would be very difficult to prove that she has ever wronged him in fact; but it is the duty of every married woman to behave so as not even to be suspected. This Belinda has sense enough to know, but not enough to remember that she knows.

Adonius, no less amorous and inconstant than his brother Rinaldo, and much more endued with those perfections which charm womankind, has found in the now countess Loyter graces, which, till after she was another's, had not been discovered by him. The admiration he expresses to have for her, and the pleasure his conversation affords, are of too much consequence to her happiness not to be indulged. She forgets the obligation she has to her lord, and wholly taken up with this new and illustrious lover, is scarce ever at home, but when he vouchsafes to visit there. It is certain, that in the parties of pleasure she makes with him, her husband frequently is one; yet does not his being seen with them sometimes take off the censure which their being together without him at others too justly incurs.

As yet the count is under no uneasiness on the score: — he looks on the fine things said in his presence by Adonius to his wife, as proceeding only from an excess of complaisance; and imputes the satisfaction she takes in hearing them merely to the little vanity of her sex; — the rambles they take together to the levity of both their humours; and, instead of being angry, often laughs at the recital. Not so the young, the beautiful, the tender Amadea supports the being deprived of the society of her adored Adonius; — she pines in secret, without daring to complain, and now, too late, regrets her easy faith, which flattered her with the hopes of securing to herself so mutable a heart.

Rumour will have it, that not two moons since, deaf to all considerations but those of gratifying their mutual passion, he ran the risk of ruining himself for ever with those on whom he depends, and who had betrothed him to another; and she, of being shamefully repudiated by that authority whence there is no appeal; they both venturing every thing that might ensue, to be united to each other by a clandestine and unlicensed marriage. If so, how great a change! — the sacred ceremony has no power to bind Adonius: — he thinks himself under no

obligations to continue constant to a wife so much beneath him: — and where shall she apply for justice against a husband, whom to acknowledge as such, would only incur the displeasure of those she would oblige.

What sad effects do giving way to any passion, though of the most tender kind, produce, especially in our sex! If Amadea thinks she has satisfied her virtue, in granting nothing to her lover till the sanction of marriage has converted inclination into duty, what will such a marriage avail, when she durst not avow it?— When the very priest that joined their hands, shall be obliged to disown his ever having performed that ceremony between them; and when Adonius, whose perseverance in love, and patience in enduring all that could be inflicted on him, could alone obtain forgiveness; and a sanction of ratifying what he had done, shall be so far from taking any such measures, that he shall testify a joy in having made it void! — What woe, what misery, what despair, would then be the lot of so every way an abandoned wife.

Already has she a taste of what she may justly apprehend will infallibly arrive in his present attachment to Belinda; already does she feel the cruel stings of jealousy and disappointment, and reflects with agonies not to be expressed, on the approaching ills, which following the dictates of a blind heedless disposition, and perhaps some mixture of ill-judged ambition, must involve her in.

It is certain, she is far from being that vain, wild, unthinking creature that Belinda is, yet had she thought justly she never would have consented to marry a person, where the character of wife must lay her under greater inconveniences than even that of a mistress.

As the principal design of these speculations is, therefore, to correct those errors in the mind, which are most imperceptible, and for that reason the most dangerous, such examples are not set down but with a view of shewing how the want of a proper way of thinking in our youth involves our whole futures lives in misfortunes, which frequently no reflection can afterwards retrieve. The anatomists, indeed, will tell you, that where there is a defect in the texture of the brain, this incapacity of reflection is mechanical, and consequently irremediable, but by this way of reasoning they may also pretend, (as it is certain many do) that all vices are constitutional, which I never can be brought to allow, because such an opinion would be imputing an error to the Author of our formation, wholly destroying the doctrine of free-will, and, in fine, levelling human nature with the brutal, which acts merely by instinct. I grant that by the structure of our parts we may have a more or less propensity to good or evil, and also that the soul has greater power of exerting itself, in what we call reason, through the organs of some people, than it ahs in others; yet this is in a great measure to be helped, if those how have the care of us when young, begin the work, and we ourselves carry it on afterwards with that vigour and application which it requires.

Socrates the philosopher was an instance of this truth, who being addicted to all manner of intemperance, gained the victory, by his reason and resolution, over each inordinate passion, and was the pattern of virtue and abstemiousness.

To know ourselves, is agreed by all to be the most useful learning; the first lessons, therefore, given us ought to be upon that subject. The parents or governors of children can never answer to themselves a neglect tin this point. Youth should be tried and fisted; and when the favourite propensity is found out; according as it tends to vice or virtue.

I must confess, that where there is a kind of heavy stupidity, or what they call too much mercury in the disposition, the one requires a great deal of art to enliven, and the other no less to six; and, as they are direct contraries, so contrary methods should be made use of. But this is a duty which ought not to be dispensed with on account of its difficulty, nor is perhaps so hard a matter as it seems, if we consider, that to give spirit and vivacity to the dull, nothing but cheerful objects should be presented; and to the too wild and giddy, those of the most serious and affecting nature.

Where an excess of gaiety and the love of pleasure is predominant, the mind should be early seasoned with the knowledge of the many disappointments, disasters, and calamities, which are the portion of the greatest part of mankind. Pity for the woes of others, and the certainty that no condition or degree can assure itself with being defended from the frown of fate, will give a more serious turn to our ideas, and serve very much to abate that impetuosity which arises from a too great redundancy of fire or air in persons of that disposition.

Few are so happy as to be composed of equal elements; therefore, what is deficient in the constitution, ought to be supplied by judgment. The earthy stupid, and the watry phlegmatic, are to be raised by exercise, music, dancing, and al sprightly amusements; as the fiery choleric, and the airy giddy, are to be tempered with their contraries.

But, as I have already taken notice, this method, though it must not be omitted by the tutors, will fail of success, if not seconded by the endeavours of the pupils, when left to the management of themselves; but where there is a good foundation laid by those who have had the care of instructing us in our youth, it will be entirely our own fault, if we afterwards fall into very gross irregularities.

Reflection, therefore, and recollection, are as necessary for the mind as food is for the body: a little examination into the affections of the heart can be of no prejudice to the most melancholy constitution, and will be infinite service to the too sanguine. The unhappy may, possibly, by indulging thought, hit on some lucky stratagem for the relief of his misfortunes, and the happy may be infinitely more so, by contemplating on his condition.

So great a pleasure do many people find in retiring sometimes into themselves, that they would not be denied that privilege for any other enjoyment whatsoever.

I once knew a gentleman, who had a wife of whom he was infinitely fond, and whose society he preferred to all others in the world, at those times when he was disposed for conversation; —yet, if she offered to disturb his meditations, would grow quite peevish with her. So valuable to him was the freedom of his thoughts, that he could not be an interruption, even tho' he knew it to be a proof of love from her who was by so much the dearest part of himself. I remember I was one day at his house, when his lady thinking he had been too long alone, had, with a gentle force, dragged him from his closet. I wondered to see him more than ordinarily grave, and on inquiring into the cause, was answered by him in these terms: "This dear creature (said he) robs me of half the pleasure of her love, by not permitting me to contemplate on the blessings I possess in her."

How then happens it, that such numbers deny themselves the greatest satisfaction a reasonable being can enjoy, and which is also of such high importance in every accident in life, that without it we have no power, either to attain any good, or defend ourselves from any evil!

But some people are so ignorant as to imagine, or so wicked as to insinuate, that those who think much, and are lovers of solitude, seclude themselves, not from the world, but with a view of doing some mischief to it. According to the stations they are in, they are judged capable of ruminating on greater or lesser evils to mankind. They will have a sedentary statesman to be plotting treason either against his prince or country; — a steward studying new methods to enlarge his bills; a tradesman to impose upon his customers; and so on, from the highest to the lowest degree.

A few examples have, alas! but too much authorized this opinion. We have seen great thinkers who have only thought to aggrandize themselves on the ruins of those they pretend to serve; — great professors, who have spared no pains to gain confidence for no other purpose than to betray; — great advocates for liberty, only to enslave; — and great preachers up of justice, only to purchase security for the worst of criminals.

So gross an abuse of the faculty of thinking is, indeed, turning the arms of heaven against itself, and forcing that sacred reason, which was given us for a guide to virtue, to accompany us in the paths of vice. To think of such purposes, I must confess, is infinitely worse than not to think at all; because the one tends to injure and oppress mankind in general, the other is for the most part hurtful only to the person themselves.

Hypocrisy is detestable both to God and man; — we are told from an unerring mouth, that those found guilty of it "shall have the lowest place in hell": and sure on earth they merit the most contemptible treatment from their fellow creatures! When once the mask of benevolence and sincerity is plucked from the face of the seeming angel, and the grim treacherous fiend appears in his native ugliness, by so much the more as our admiration before was of him, will be our abhorrence of him afterwards: — we shall hate and fly him, as we once loved and followed him: every body will be ready to catch up a stone to throw at him, and no opportunist of insulting him will be omitted.

Proteus by sad experience is convinced, that all his arts are ineffectual to retrieve any part of that esteem he once was happy in from all degress of people. The beguiler can beguile no more. By mistaken measures, vainly aiming at greater homage, like Lucifer, the pride-swollen bubble fell, at once, into the gulph of endless infamy and contempt, whence he can never hope to rise.

Even the very ladies take a pleasure in giving him all the mortification in their power: and as our sex has the privilege of saying whatever we have a mind to, without any danger of resentment from the men, he often meets with the severest sarcasms from those who have wit enough to make them.

He was one day at cards with some persons of condition, when being seized with a sudden violent pain in his side, after distorting his face into several disagreeable positions, he could not forbear at last crying out, "Oh,

my side! My side!! On which Tartilla, who was one of the company, with a malicious sneer rejoined, "Your side, Proteus! I thought you had no side now." These words, which plainly alluded to his being abandoned by both parties, gave him, perhaps, an agony more poignant than that he complained of, and both together rendered him so peevish, that he replied hastily, and in a tone which was far from his accustomed politeness, — "Yes, madam, and a back-side too". This answer, gross as it was, gave not Tartilla the least confusion; and without any hesitation, "I do not know that," said she, "but all the world knows your wife has one."

All the company burst into a loud laughter at this repartee, as the character of Proteus's wife made it no less just than smart; and he, having nothing to return to a piece of satire which had so much truth in it, went out of the room ready to burst between shame and unavailing spite, leaving his fair antagonist to receive all the praises her ready wit and presence of mind deserved.

When people of such consideration in the world are guilty of any notorious, indirect, or ridiculous actions, they can expect no less than to become the theme of every satiric genius: but I think the jeer which old Pompilius met with from his own son, on account of his being lately married to a lady young enough to be his granddaughter, was no less stinging than that I have been relating.

Some little time after these preposterous nuptials were consummated, the father and son were together at an assembly; — several who had not before that time seen old Pompilius since the ceremony, congratulated him upon it in the phrases common on such occasions; and this running the conversation on the happiness of the conjugal state, one of the company happened to ask the young gentleman when he intended to marry? "Really, sir," answered he, "it is a thing I have not yet given myself any trouble about; for (added he, with a sarcastic look) the only lady I wish to have for a wife is the sister of my mother-in-law, and the only inducement I have to that, is because I might have the honour of being called brother by my father."

Not even those whose interest it was to preserve the good-will of Pompilius, had guard enough over themselves to restrain smiling at so unexpected and so severe a reply from his son before his face; but those who regarded neither his favour nor resentment, laughed outright; and the old bride-groom, finding what he had done thus publicly scoffed at by his own blood, was in no less confusion and incapacity of making any return than he had once before been in, when employed to give an account of a battle, while the dreadful roar of the cannons were still in his ears, and all the terrors of death before his eyes; nor could now, as then, recover himself from it, till more than half a dozen bottle of Burgundy (his usual stint) had given him fresh spirits.

It is certain, that of late years the family of the Wrongheads have increased to a prodigious number. We have seen such things as even the very report of in former times would have been treated as mere fiction; and, indeed, all the tales that romance can furnish us with, come infinitely short of many present characters. We have knight-adventures, who, like Don-Quixote, when he spurred Rosinante to encounter with the windmill, by attempting to surmount imaginary dangers, run into real ones. We have hypocrites and self-savers, of whom Sir Huidibrass, in laying the whipping task on the back of his poor 'squire, is but an imperfect model. We have our Thersites, our Pandarus's, our Demagorus's too, in a much higher degree than ever poet or historian painted them. Difficult is it to say, whether wickedness or folly most abounds among us; and whether there are more people who purchase what they call happiness at the expence of their virtue, or who forfeit all pretensions to it by their madness: for there is nothing more common than to see those who, in court, in cap, in town, and in country, take as much pains to be undone, as other do to undo.

In fine, when one looks into the world, and considers the present times and humours of mankind, one cannot help crying out with the poet,

"There is no wonder, or else all is wonder!"

Yet to what can we impute all those mistakes, miscarriages, or those cruelties, oppressions, unnatural actions, and the innumerable train of mischiefs, which we either bring upon ourselves, or inflict on others, but to the want of thought, or to thought misapplied! The latter I again allow to be of much worse consequence than the former; but as we are free-agents, and the choice is in ourselves whether we will be virtuous or vicious, it would be a poor excuse to say, "We durst not think, lest we should think amiss."

Man was created little inferior to the angels, and it is his own fault that he is not very near as happy too. This world is plentifully stored with every thing suited to the nature of his being; and borne on the wings of sacred contemplation, he may also partake of heavenly raptures: but this pint I leave to divines! For though it

is a truth self-evident, yet there are people who chuse rather to be convinced by the learning of others, than by the witnesses in their own breasts.

A friend of mine, who with some other English gentlemen was making the tour of Europe, happened, as he passed through one of the most wild and mountainous parts of France, to lose his company. On his first finding himself alone, he imagined, that having been in a deep musing, they had gone on before without his observing them, therefore clapped spurs to his horse in order to overtake them: but having rode some miles without seeing either any thing of them, or meeting any person who could direct him to the town where they had agreed to put up for that night, he was extremely at a loss, especially when he came where three roads met. To add to his misfortune, there fell a very heavy rain, accompanied with a great wind, insomuch that he was obliged to make towards a wood, which he saw at some distance, to shelter himself and horse from the fury of the storm which every moment seemed to gather strength.

The intermingling boughs of the trees for some little time defended him, but would not have continued to do so much longer, and he was beginning to give way to impatience; when, on a sudden, he heard a human voice call to him to turn towards the right of a little mount, about some twenty yards from him.

He has assured me, that never any music had given him half the pleasure as the sound of one of his own species did in that unfrequented wild. He failed not to obey the summons, and presently perceived a man habited like a hermit, stand at the entrance of a cave beneath the mount. The tempest did not prevent him from coming forth to meet his distressed traveller. He helped him to alight, tied his horse under one of the thickest trees, and then conducted him into his gloomy habitation, with all the politeness of a first-rate courtier. My friend was extremely surprized, not only at his reception, but at the excessive neatness of every thing he saw in his cavern, which he found was divided into two rooms: the first contained a table, two easy chairs, a small beauset with glasses, and some china, loaded with the most excellent fruits: — the other had in it only a couch, with a mattress and coverlid, one chair, and a shelf of books, near which was fixed a little altar with a crucifix. He could not help testifying his admiration at the contrivance of this habitation; and, as he spoke French very well, began to ask some questions concerning it, and in what manner his host could be provided with necessaries, as he saw no town, nor even village, near that place.

To which the other replied with a smile, that his curiosity should be fully satisfied; “But first (said he) you must refresh yourself with such things as this homely cell affords”.

In speaking those words, he spread a curious damask napkin on the table, and then set plates of pickles, several sorts of fresh and dried fruits, fine manchet, fromage, and a bottle of the best Burgundy. In fine, a more elegant afternoon’s collation could not have been presented in the most opulent city, than what this cavern in the midst of an unfrequented wood afforded.

The more danger saw, the more he was surprized; which the seeming hermit perceiving, entertained him, while they were eating, with this account of himself.

He told him, that he was not a constant inhabitant of the place he found him in, but repaired either occasionally, and when he was in the humour to indulge reflection; — that he wore that habit, which was always held sacred, even by the most profligate, to protect him from any insults in case he should happen to be seen by any of those wretches, who, living on the plunder of travellers, frequently, when pursued, took shelter in that wood; and that he was called the count de Montaubin, and his usual residence in a castle of his own about twelve miles distant.

My friend, after paying him those respects which the knowledge of this quality demanded, expressed some amazement that he should have occasion to take the pains to come so far, and subject himself to so many inconveniences, merely for the sake of a retirement, which he might, doubtless, enjoy in as full a manner at home, if he was disposed to let his inclinations for solitude be signified to his acquaintance.

To which the count replied, that he perceived he was a stranger to the humour of the French nation: — that what he mentioned was a thing wholly impracticable to a man of his quality: — that though he lived at a considerable distance from Paris, or any great city, his castle was continually crowded either with the neighbouring gentry, or persons who travelled that way; and that besides, he was married to a lady of gay and volatile a disposition, that it was impossible for him ever to be entirely alone. “To add to all this, continued he, I have

several children, and a numerous retinue of servants, and though I should shut myself up in the most retired room I have, I could not still be free from interruption of one kind or other."

The mind, said he, requires some relaxation as well as the body and when fatigued with the hurry of those pleasures with which it is expected one should entertain one's friends, here I retire, give a loose to contemplation, and when I have recruited my spirits, return again into the world, and taste the joys of love and conversation with a much higher relish than if I never were absent from them.

The English gentleman could not help allowing the justness of his notion in this point, but still thought it strange that he did not make choice of some place where he might be less exposed to accidents, than in the wildness of this wood; but the count, who it seems, was one of the most complaisant obliging persons on earth, would not suffer him to remain in a suspense, which it was in his power to ease, and therefore made no scruple of relating to him some passages of his former life, which entirely banished all the difficulties he had found in himself to reconcile to reason a behaviour that at first appeared to have in it so much oddity.

The count in his younger years had the misfortune to have a reencounter with a nobleman, in which he gave him some wounds which he knew not but were mortal. Besides the law, which in that country is very severe against duelling, his antagonist was a person in great favour with the king, and he had little room to hope for mercy in case the other died. To avoid the prosecution, he fled from, and not doubting but all houses where they might expect to find him would be strictly searched, he concealed himself in this wood, accompanied only by one faithful servant, who having been brought up with him, would not be prevailed upon to quit him in such an extremity.

He assured my friend, that they lived for near three weeks on such provision only as that desolate wild afforded; that for several days they could not find a brook at which they might quench their thirst, so that the fruits they found on some of the hedges served them both as food and drink; and to secure themselves from the wolves by night, which frequently prowled about that forest, they were obliged to take up their lodging in the tallest trees they could find. Nothing, he said, but the protecting hand of heaven could have enabled them to sustain the hardships they were obliged to suffer. At last, quite tired and worn out with despair, death seemed less terrible than the continuance of such a life, and he ventured to send his servant to enquire what was become of the wounded gentleman, and at the same time to procure some place where he might once more be accommodated with the necessaries which the nature of his being required.

The fellow's return brought him the good news that his enemy was not only recovered of the hurts he had received from him, but had also confessed that himself had been the aggressor, and laboured by all his friends to obtain the same pardon for the count as for himself: — that every body expected it would soon be signed, and that, though it was not proper he should appear in public till it was so, yet, as all search after him was entirely over, he might quit that dreadful situation, and repair to the house of a relation, who would meet him at the entrance of the forest, and conduct him with all manner of privacy.

Every thing happened according to his intelligence; and he had not been a week before the royal clemency exerted itself in favour of both the delinquents; who then, as great friends as before they had been the contrary, went together to throw themselves at the foot of the throne, and pay their grateful acknowledgements.

The count concluded his little narrative with saying, that though this adventure was so happily ended, the danger and hardships it had involved him in, gave a much more serious turn to his humour than he had ever known before; — that during his abode in that solitary place, he had found so much matter for contemplation, that the remembrance still dwelt, and ever would do so, upon his mind; and though the ideas which he now had demanded in privacy to indulge, yet they were so far from having anything melancholy or gloomy in them, that they afforded him the most serene and perfect satisfaction.

"You see now, added he, the motives I have for retiring myself sometimes from the noise and hurry of the world; and as this place was my asylum in distress, I cannot help having a kind of love for it, and think I ought in gratitude to make it the scene of my more pleasing meditations; — I therefore made this cavern be cut out of the mount; — furnished it as you see, provided two chairs in case any distressed person should have occasion to take refuge here, as it has now happened; — and I could wish that I had taken the same precaution as to a bed, for it now grows late, and I foresee the storm will not abate while you can depart with any safety; but we will pass the night as well as we can; I have a sufficient quantity of Burgundy within, and by the help of

that and conversation, we may beguile the hours till morning, when my servant will be here, and I will beg the favour of your company to a place, where it will be in my power to entertain you in a fashion more agreeable to my inclination and your merit."

My friend then told him, how having lost his company he could not do himself the honour to accept his invitation, because, he must make the best of his way to the town where they had agreed to stay for that night; and said, he did not doubt but to overtake them, provided he could but find his way out of the forest.

Count Montaubin assured him, that what he talked of was no way to be performed; that the town he mentioned lay quite on the other side of the wood, which was wholly impracticable to be passed without a guide, even though he had the day instead of the night before him, by reason of the many intricate turnings it contained; that the great road was not only the safest but the nearest; and as he had missed it by turning into the wood, he might by the assistance of his servant easily recover it: — "But, said he, as the man will be with me, as he always is, extremely early, the best way will be to send him to your friends, acquaint them where you are, and engage them either to come to you at my castle, which luckily happens to be situated very near the road, or to tarry till you can reach them."

This expedient seemed no less reasonable and convenient to the gentleman, than it was kind an obliging in him that proposed it; and being a man perfectly free from all that troublesome formal ceremony which half-bred people are so full of, he agreed to it without any hesitation of apologies.

The night glided almost insensibly away in such agreeable conversation, and Aurora had scarce given place to the chariot of the sun, before the servant of Count Montaubin arrived with a led horse, it being the day his lord had appointed for his return home, and the wood altogether impassable for any wheel-carriage.

The storm having now entirely subsided, every thing seemed more beautiful for the late ruffle it had sustained. So pleasing a wildness appeared through the whole, that my friend was perfectly charmed with it; and the count did not fail, during the time of their little journey, to set forth all the delights this rural scene afforded. "Here, said he, we see nature in its purity, just as it came from the hand of the Creator. What art, what agriculture can equal the sweet confusion with which every plant springs up spontaneous? — What a solemn reverence do these tall ancient trees excite? — How ravishing is the fragrancy of the air, that their fanning boughs waft to us, unmixed, unadulterated with any of those gross particles which the neighbourhood of cities constantly send forth? — Here we enjoy untainted aether, partake the food of angels, new-wing our souls, and almost spiritualize our dull morality: — yet, added he, how many live, and how many years did I live, without giving myself leave to know that Heaven had bestowed such blessings upon man!"

He further added, that he found an inward satisfaction such as no tongue could express, in his meditations during the times of his thus secluding himself from society, which was ordinarily no more than four or five days together: — that no person whatever knew the place of his retirement but that faithful servant, who came every morning to receive his commands, and to bring him such things as were needful.

With these kind of discourses they beguiled the time, till being come into the great road, the count dispatched his servant to the inn where my friend had informed him it was likely his companions might be found, with his compliments to them unknown, and an earnest intreaty that they would come to his castle in search of him they had lost, and for whom they were doubtless in great trouble.

These orders were no sooner given, than the man who received them clapped spurs to his horse, and was immediately out of sight; the count and his new guest rode slowly, not only that they might converse with the more ease, but also to favour the poor animal, who was very much fatigued with being exposed all night to the severity of the weather, and whom the count had it not in his power to refresh as he had done his rider.

A short time, however, brought them to a stately castle, where the count entered by a back gate, of which he had the key, and having conducted the stranger into a magnificent anti-chamber, intreated his pardon for leaving him a few minutes; after which he returned habited according to his quality, and so much changed from what he had appeared in his hermit's dress, that he was hardly to be known: — he then introduced him to his lady, a very lovely woman, and five children, the eldest not exceeding eleven years of age, but were all extremely beautiful and well made. My friend beheld them with admiration, and after making his proper compliments to each, said to the count, that not all the elegant descriptions he had given him of the charms of contemplation were half so convincing to him, as to find they were capable of rivalling in his esteem those he left at home.

The countess prevented her husband from making any return to this compliment, by replying herself in so gay and gallant a manner, as shewed her a lady whose wit was not at all inferior to her personal perfections.

They all breakfasted in her apartment, after which they entered into an agreeable conversation, which was pleasingly interrupted by the arrival of the English gentlemen. The joy to see their friend safe, and in such good company, after having imagined some very ill accident had befallen him, did not hinder them from receiving the welcome given them by their illustrious hosts, with a politeness that did not shame the appearance they made, and both together concurred to convince those who saw them, that they were in reality persons of family and fortune.

The first civilities being over, the count led them into his gardens, which were laid out with all the exactness, propriety, and good fancy imaginable. Here, parterres of flowers charmed the senses with their fragrancy and beauty: — there, bubbling fountains, encompassed with grotts, ornamented with the richest treasure of the sea, invited to soft repose: most curious statues of ancient heroes and philosophers, placed at the corner of each avenue, reminded the beholder of the happiness past times enjoyed; and the spacious walks, bordered with trees, which met on the top, forming long arbours, afforded a most delightful shade, and gave room to those who walked to converse without the trouble of turning back to each other, as in the narrow pent-alleys of some gardens. He then conducted them into the chief apartments of the castle, where they found every thing splendid and magnificent. In a word, according to the description given me of it, grandeur and elegance seemed to vie with each other, which should excel in the attractive power.

When the time of dining arrived, the table was spread with all the delicacies of the season; — a continued round of sprightly wit rendered the repast yet more agreeable, and for the space of ten days, (for so long the count detained them) they were entertained in a manner, which shewed the hospitality and politeness of the French nation.

But my friend informed me, that during the whole time they were there, scarce an hour passed without introducing some new guest, and that every night there was either a ball or concert. In fine, they seemed to live only for diversion: and the count, though no man appeared more gay in company, would often in the midst of his hurry take him aside, and speak in this manner: — “You see, sir, how impossible it is to indulge contemplation in this place, and may judge if a little recess from such a profusion of these noisy pleasures, is not entirely necessary for a man who would not chuse to forget himself, and the ends for which he was created.

I must confess, that when I first heard this story, the veracity of which I had no reason to call in question, the person who related it being of undoubted integrity, I could not believe but this count Montaubin had some defect in the composure of his brain, which rendered him at some certain times a little delirious, and asked my friend in what altitude of the moon this nobleman was accustomed to go into this voluntary banishment. The gentleman, who by this question saw into my thoughts, assured me I was greatly mistaken in my conjectures; — that the person I took to be mad or whimsical, was so far from either, that he never knew a man of amore just way of thinking; that not only his conversation, but manner of deportment in every things as perfectly unexceptionable, and that its being so might greatly be imputed to those reflections he made in his retirements.

I was then too gay, and Heaven knows too little a lover of solitude, to be brought into his opinion, and really made a jest of it to all my acquaintance; but I have since been of another mind, and find there was much more to be admired than condemned in his thus secluding himself from the world for a time, that he might know the better how to conduct himself in it at his return.

But I still think there was a possibility for him to have enjoyed his beloved retirement in a place more commodious and less dangerous than that he made choice of. I am very well assured there are impertinents in the world, who, if they know where one is, will come with a great deal of officious love, and in a manner drag one into company, but that could not be the case of the French count, who doubtless had many little houses, to any of which he might have withdrawn, and with the same precaution been as effectually concealed as in this cavern.

I should have been glad to have had my curiosity satisfied in one point, and that was, whether the countess his wife was let into the secret of the place of his abode, and his reasons for such frequent absenting himself from her; but this my friend was an ignorant of as myself, no mention being ever made of it in the family that he heard of; but he seemed inclined, as well as myself, to believe that she was not kept in the dark in this article, by the perfect harmony that seemed to be between them, which, without she was a very extraordinary woman indeed, could not have subsisted, if ignorant from what motives he deprived her of his society.

It is certain there are very few married women, especially if they love their husbands, who would approve of such a behaviour, even though they were convinced they had no other excitements to it than the count, but would be quite outrageous to be left alone, without a perfect knowledge of every particular that occasioned it. Madam de Montaubin, therefore, could have no such thing as jealousy in her nature, or she must, without all doubt, be acquainted with the whole of the affair.

But however that was, it is nothing to my present purpose: I only wish that some of our inconsiderates would impose upon themselves the task of being sometimes alone, and am apt to believe that those, to whom reflection is now the most irksome thing imaginable, would, by frequent using themselves to it, find it at last sufficient to compensate for all they suffered at first from their reluctance.

I know nothing more difficult than for persons of too airy and volatile a disposition, to bring themselves to that habitude I am endeavouring to recommend; nor is such a change to be expected all at once, much less is it to be hoped for from compulsion. You may shut them all day into a room, yet ask them on what they have been thinking, and they will tell you, on nothing but their confinement. That, therefore, is the most wrong method can be taken: — such people must be soothed, not menaced into reflection; and unknow no better means, than by laying before them such books as maybe most liked to hit their fancy: — even those which seem the lest calculated for improvement, provided they have nothing immoral or indecent in them, will be of excellent service to bring the mind to take delight in reading; and when that is once accomplished, others of a more serious nature may by degrees be recommended.

Painting, especially history, landscape, and sea-pieces, is also an excellent promoter or reflection: — such prospects charm the eye, and thence gain an easy passage to the soul, exciting curiosity in the most indolent. It is impossible to behold nature thus delineated, without receiving an impression which will dwell upon the mind: — we shall think of the great transactions of past times, — the different scenes which this wide earth affords in its mountains, its vallies, its meadows, and its rivers, and all the loveliness and horrors of the surrounding deep, — the ships smooth failing with a prosperous gale, and the wrecked vessel bulged against a rock, or just sinking in those sands which lurk beneath the waves. These representations on the canvass, I say, will remain in our remembrance when the object is withdrawn, and cannot but inspire us with ideas at once delightful and instructive: — they will afford us an agreeable entertainment within ourselves, and we shall no longer be under a necessity of seeking it elsewhere.

It is true, that most of our nobility and gentry profess themselves great admirers of this art and that when notice is given of any capital pictures to be disposed of by way of auction, the rooms where they are to be exhibited are sufficiently crowded, but the misfortune is, that three parts in four of those numerous assemblies are drawn thither more by the desire of seeing one another, than any other motive: — they look on it as one of the many ways of killing time; — a morning's amusement, and meet and laugh, make appointments for parties of pleasure, and sometimes for gallantry: — on such as these the works of a Tititan, or a Raphael, will have little force. — There are general, who seem wholly unaffected by the triumphs of old Rome orators, who are unmoved with the attitude of a Cicero or a Demosthenes; and ladies, whose hearts are incapable of feeling either compassion for a dying Lucretia, or admiration of that same English princess, who sucked the poison from her husband's wound.

The same may likewise be said of many who frequent the theatres: — they regard the actors more than the characters they represent, and seem more interested in the little quarrels they sometimes have among themselves, than in the fate of the real heroes and heroines. The dress, the voice, the manner of Mr. Quin, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Cibber, Mrs. Horton, Mrs. Clive, Mrs. Woffington, &c. &c. shall be the subject of long conversations, when not the least comment is made, or notice taken of the cruelties of king Richard, the causeless jealousy of Othello, the filial piety of Hamlet, the virtue of Andromache, the reformation of lady Townly, and all those striking characters which the poets either attempt to perpetuate or invent, as excitements to great actions in some, and lessons of morality and good conduct in others.

Yet what is more truly pleasing to a thinking mind, than to see the most remarkable passages of antiquity, the various manners of far distant nations, exhibited in the touching scenes of well-wrote tragedy! Or what more conducive to reforming whatever follies we are

guilty of, than to find them artfully exposed in the ungalling satire of genteel comedy!

To reform our manners and correct our errors, — to inspire us with high ideas of honour and virtue through the canal of pleasure, as the most likely means of conveying them into the soul, was undeniably the great end proposed in the institution of the Drama; and very many of the ancient, and some modern poets have happily succeeded in it. I have heard of persons, who⁹ conscious of some secret crime, have been so struck with the representation of it on the stage, they t have gone come, confessed all, and passed their whole future lives in a kind of penance for their past transgressions. Herbert says,

“A verse may catch him who a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice.”

But then to be amended either by this or any other method which can be taken for that purpose, we must be a little attentive to the objects presented to us; which h, I am sorry to observe, is seldom the case of the audiences that of late frequent the theatres: — they seem disposed to regard only what makes them laugh: and even many of those, who, in complaisance to persons of a different way of judging, affect to be most dissatisfied with the managers of the playhouses for introducing Pantomine, are in their hearts pleased with nothing else.

Some again will boldly argue in the defence of those dumb representations: — they will tell you, that the Italians, who are a very wise nation, vouchsafe the highest encouragement to them: — that there is a great deal of wit and ingenuity in the contrivance of them; and that it shew the sagacity and penetration of an audience to comprehend, by the motions of the performers, every design of the piece, as well as if it were delivered in speech. There is, I confess, some truth in this, where people give themselves the pains of observation; but where they are too indolent to do that, and are diverted only with the transformations of a Harlequin, without any regard to the motives he has for them, I see no benefit they can receive from such an entertainment, but what might arise from seeing a common tumbler or rope-dancer.

In fine, there is nothing but what a thinking mind may reap some advantage from; nor is there any thing, be its intrinsic merit never so great, that a person without thought can be the better for: — it is like music to the deaf, or a beautiful landscape to the blind.

There is a mode of expression in every one’s mouth, though I am afraid understood by a few, and that is, when you would give the highest compliment to any one you say he has a good taste.

This is a character which all are ambitious of acquiring, as it is looked upon to imply the utmost perfection of elegance and propriety in any thing you undertake. To explain the difference of the true and false taste, has employed the pens of many great authors, and yet I think none have done it effectually enough to give the reader that distinct idea of it which is necessary; for what is the true taste, but a fine fancy blended with a strong judgment! — What indeed, but that just manner of thinking I have been all this time recommending; and what the false, but a heedless following the notions of others! — aiming to do as some persons, whose reputation for a fine genius is established, have done, without considering that what is infinitely becoming in one, often happens to be the reverse in another. There are a thousand circumstances which may render such an imitation awkward and preposterous, and justly deserve to be called false taste.

It is therefore the business of every one, who would make a shining figure in life, avoid any inconveniences, reap any benefits, enjoy any permanent felicity themselves, or bestow it on others, to gain as perfect an acquaintance as in them lies, by thought and application, both with what they are, and what they ought to attempt to be.