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November 1. 1689.

REFLECTIONS
UPON THE
CONDUCT
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Human Life :

With reference to the Study of
Learning and Knowledge.

In a Letter to the Excellent
Lady, the Lady *Masham.*

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and late Fellow of *All-Souls-College*
in *Oxford.*

To which is annex'd, a
Visitation SERMON,
By the same Author.

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MADAM,

SINCE the great Happiness or Misery of Human Life depends wholly upon the right or wrong Conduct of it, he that shall point out any of its Irregularities or Mistakes, ought to be lookt upon as an Universal Friend, and a Promoter of the Public Happiness: And the more severe he is in his Censure (provided it be true and well-grounded) the more charitable is he in his Undertaking, and the more likely to be serviceable in his Performance.

But then especially will he be so, if the Irregularities which

be singles out be such, as are not only Great and of ill Consequence, Popular and Frequent, Inveterate and of long standing; but such as lie secret and unobserved, and have all along passed under the Notion and Character of Excellencies, and been made rather matter of particular Commendation than of Disparagement. If the Light that is in thee be Darkness, said our Blessed Lord, how great is that Darkness! And so may I say, If those things that go for great Excellencies are real Faults, how great are such Faults, and how worthy to be censured! He therefore that reflects upon such Misconducts as these, does a double piece of Service, and obliges by his Discovery as well as by his Reproof.

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This Consideration, Madam, has engaged my present Censure upon that side of Human Life which respects the Study of Learning and Knowledge; the greatest Faults of which (if I mistake not) have been, and are still, by a kind of unaccountable Superstition, Canoniz'd for Vertues; and tho really neither fewer nor less enormous than those of the Moral Part, yet have been so little Discern'd or Consider'd, or at least Animadverted upon, that a Censure of this Nature looks like a sort of a Desideratum in the Learned World, and such as even for the Singularity of it ought no longer to be Omitted.

The Truth is, the Faults of the Intellectual Way have this peculiar

culiar in them, that they are not so liable to be Discover'd. That Light which divulges other Mis-carriages, will be sure to hide these: For besides that they are visible only to a few, like the private Slips of a Religious Con-vent, known only to those of the same Order; (for none can judge of the Faults of the Learned without Learning) I say besides this, those few that do discern them, have yet seldom Ingenuity enough to confess and acknowledg them. For either they are so Proud as not to be willing to own themselves to have been so long under a Mistake; or else so Ill-natured that they don't care others should be directed to a better way than they themselves have travell'd in, but will have Posterity trudge

on in the same dirty miry Road
after their Forefathers.

How far I am from this narrow and illiberal Temper of Soul the following Reflections may give Evidence, in which according to that measure of Understanding God has given me, I have endeavour'd to mark out some of the grosser and less observ'd Mifconducts of Human Life in reference to the Study of Learning and Knowledge, wherewith I myself have been too much and too long impos'd upon, and which after all my Conviction, (so invincible are the Impressions of an early Prejudice) I can hardly yet find power to correct: For Education is the great Bias of Human Life, and there is this double Witch-craft

in it, that 'tis a long time before a Man can see any thing amiss in a way which he has been used to, and when he does, 'tis not very easie after that to change it for a better.

What Success these Reflections may have towards the Reforming the Abuses here toucht upon, is beyond the reach of my eye-sight to presage. I am satisfied that they carry Reason and Evidence enough with them to stand their ground against any Opposite Reason that may be offer'd against them; but whether this will make them an equal Match for Authority and contrary Prescription, is not so certain. But let the Event be what it will, here I fancy will lie the Contest, between Reason on one side, and Education and Authority

riety on the other. Now which of these will prevail, I know not: But I know which should.

In the mean while how some of the rigid Votaries and Professors of Old Learning will relish these Reflections, I can more easily Divine. These are such Bigots in their way, that a Man were as good go to convert the Jews as to reason with any of these stiff-necked Gentlemen. I do not therefore expect to convince many of these. For tho Reason may do great things, yet it can never work Miracles. And a Man may as soon put the Sun out of the Ecliptic, or the Rivers out of their Courses, as turn these Men out of their Way. They are Conjured into a Circle, and nothing less

less than a more powerful Magic
can ever get them out.

I do not therefore expect, I
say, to do great Cures upon the
Men of this Complexion, or to me-
rit any Thanks from them. 'Tis
well if I do not provoke them, and
make them Angry with me for tel-
ling out of School. But if I
happen to bring over here and there
an ingenuous and uninflav'd Spi-
rit, some of those who are not
suck'd in too far within the common
Vortex of the World, I shall not
think my Labour ill bestow'd, nor
much regard the Magisterial Cen-
sures of those State-sowr-Stu-
dents, whose great and long Study
has had no better effect upon them,
but only to make them too wise for
Conviction.

I do not take your Ladyship to be concern'd but only in the last of these Reflections. The two former may give you Entertainment, but they are not intended for your Instruction. Your Ladyship is not to learn either the Object, or the Method of Study, but only to be slackned in your Vehement Prosecution of it. You take the right Path, but you run too fast in it, and are therefore desired to moderate your Pace, not only for fear you should outstrip us, but lest you should grow too wise for your Self, and for the World you live in, and to your own great cost find that weighty Reflection of the Wise Man to be true, which you were better take upon his Authority, that in much Wisdom is
much

much Grief, and that he that
increases Knowledge, increases
Sorrow.

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