

Invention, Depravation of Mannners, or Ignorance of Mankind, but I have often wondered that our ordinary Poets cannot frame to themselves the Idea of a fine Man who is not a Whore-master, or of a fine Woman that is not a Jilt.

I have sometimes thought of compiling a System of Ethics out of the Writings of those corrupt Poets, under the Title of *Stage Morality*. But I have been diverted from this Thought, by a Project which has been executed by an ingenious Gentleman of my Acquaintance. He has compos'd, it seems, the History of a young Fellow, who has taken all his Notions of the World from the Stage, and who has directed himself in every Circumstance of his Life and Conversation, by the Maxims and Examples of the Fine Gentlemen in *English* Comedies. If I can prevail upon him to give me a Copy of this new fashioned Novel, I will bestow on it a Place in my Works, and question not but it may have as good an Effect upon the Drama, as *Don Quixote* had upon Romance. C



N^o 447. *Saturday, August 2.*

Φημι πολυχρονίω μελέτῳ ἔρβαι, φίλε· καὶ δὴ
Ταύτῃ ἀνδρώποισι τελευτῶσαν φύσιν ἔει.

THERE is not a Common Saying which has a better Turn of Sense in it, than what we often hear in the Mouths of the Vulgar, that Custom is a second Nature. It is indeed able to form the Man anew, and to give him Inclinations and Capacities altogether different from those he was born with. Dr. Plot, in his History of *Staffordshire*, tells us of an Idiot that chancing to live within the Sound of a Clock, and always amusing himself with counting the Hour of the Day whenever the Clock struck, the Clock being spoiled by some Accident, the Idiot continued to strike and count the Hour without the help of it, in the same manner as he had done when it was intire. Though I dare not vouch for the

the Truth of this Story, it is very certain that Custom has a Mechanical Effect upon the Body, at the same time that it has a very extraordinary Influence upon the Mind.

I shall in this Paper consider one very remarkable Effect which Custom has upon Human Nature; and which, if rightly observed, may lead us into very useful Rules of Life. What I shall here take notice of in Custom, is its wonderful Efficacy in making every thing pleasant to us. A Person who is addicted to Play or Gaming, though he took but little delight in it at first, by degrees contracts so strong an Inclination towards it, and gives himself up so intirely to it, that it seems the only End of his Being. The Love of a retired or busy Life will grow upon a Man insensibly, as he is conversant in the one or the other, till he is utterly unqualified for relishing that to which he has been for some time disused. Nay, a Man may Smoke, or Drink, or take Snuff, till he is unable to pass away his Time without it; not to mention how our Delight in any particular Study, Art, or Science, rises and improves in Proportion, to the Application which we bestow upon it. Thus what was at first an Exercise, becomes at length an Entertainment. Our Employments are changed into our Diversions. The Mind grows fond of those Actions she is accustomed to, and is drawn with Reluctancy from those Paths in which she has used to walk.

NOT only such Actions as were at first Indifferent to us, but even such as were Painful, will by Custom and Practice become pleasant. Sir *Francis Bacon* observes in his natural Philosophy, that our Taste is never pleased better than with those things which at first created a Disgust in it. He gives particular Instances of Claret, Coffee, and other Liquors, which the Palate seldom approves upon the first Taste; but when it has once got a Relish of them, generally retains it for Life. The Mind is constituted after the same manner, and after having habituated herself to any particular Exercise or Employment, not only loses her first Aversion towards it, but conceives a certain Fondness and Affection for it. I have heard one of the greatest Genius's this Age has produced, who had been trained up in all the Polite Studies of Antiquity assure me, upon his being obliged to search into several

Rolls and Records, that notwithstanding such an Employment was at first very dry and irksome to him, he at last took an incredible Pleasure in it, and preferred it even to the reading of *Virgil* or *Cicero*. The Reader will observe, that I have not here considered Custom as it makes things easy, but as it renders them delightful; and though others have often made the same Reflexions, it is possible they may not have drawn those Uses from it, with which I intend to fill the remaining Part of this Paper.

IF we consider attentively this Property of Human Nature, it may instruct us in very fine Moralities. In the first Place, I would have no Man discouraged with that kind of Life or Series of Action, in which the Choice of others, or his own Necessities, may have engaged him. It may perhaps be very disagreeable to him at first; but Use and Application will certainly render it not only less painful, but pleasing and satisfactory.

IN the second place I would recommend to every one that admirable Precept which *Pythagoras* is said to have given to his Disciples, and which that Philosopher must have drawn from the Observation I have enlarged upon. *Optimum vitæ genus eligito, nam consuetudo faciet jucundissimum*, Pitch upon that Course of Life which is the most Excellent, and Custom will render it the most Delightful. Men, whose Circumstances will permit them to choose their own way of Life, are inexcusable if they do not pursue that which their Judgment tells them is the most laudable. The Voice of Reason is more to be regarded than the Bent of any present Inclination, since by the Rule above-mentioned, Inclination will at length come over to Reason, though we can never force Reason to comply with Inclination.

IN the third place, this Observation may teach the most sensual and irreligious Man, to overlook those Hardships and Difficulties, which are apt to discourage him from the Prosecution of a virtuous Life. *The Gods, said Hesiod, have placed Labour before Virtue, the Way to her is at first rough and difficult, but grows more smooth and easy the further you advance in it.* The Man who proceeds in it, with Steadiness and Resolution, will in a little time find that *her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and that all her Paths are Peace.*

TO

TO enforce this Consideration, we may further observe, that the Practice of Religion will not only be attended with that Pleasure, which naturally accompanies those Actions to which we are habituated, but with those Supernumerary Joys of Heart, that rise from the Consciousness of such a Pleasure, from the Satisfaction of acting up to the Dictates of Reason, and from the Prospect of an happy Immortality.

IN the fourth place, we may learn from this Observation which we have made on the Mind of Man, to take particular Care, when we are once settled in a regular Course of Life, how we too frequently indulge ourselves in any the most innocent Diversions and Entertainments, since the Mind may insensibly fall off from the Relish of virtuous Actions, and, by degrees, exchange that Pleasure which it takes in the Performance of its Duty, for Delights of a much more inferior and unprofitable Nature.

THE last Use which I shall make of this remarkable Property in Human Nature, of being delighted with those Actions to which it is accustomed, is to shew how absolutely necessary it is for us to gain Habits of Virtue in this Life, if we would enjoy the Pleasures of the next. The State of Bliss we call Heaven will not be capable of affecting those Minds, which are not thus qualified for it; we must, in this World, gain a Relish of Truth and Virtue, if we would be able to taste that Knowledge and Perfection, which are to make us happy in the next. The Seeds of those spiritual Joys and Raptures, which are to rise up and flourish in the soul to all Eternity, must be planted in her, during this her present State of Probation. In short, Heaven is not to be look'd upon only as the Reward, but as the natural Effect of a religious Life.

On the other hand, those evil Spirits, who, by long Custom, have contracted in the Body Habits of Lust and Sensuality, Malice and Revenge, an Aversion to every thing that is good, just or laudable, are naturally seasoned and prepared for Pain and Misery. Their Torments have already taken root in them, they cannot be happy when divested of the Body, unless we may suppose, that Providence will, in a manner, create them anew, and work a Miracle in the Rectification of their Faculties. They may,

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indeed,