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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE COMEDIES OF WILLIAM CONGREVE: VOLUME 1 [OF 2] ***

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THE COMEDIES OF WILLIAM CONGREVE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION

I.

Before repeating such known facts of Congreve's life as seem agreeable to the present occasion, and before attempting (with the courage of one's office) to indicate with truth what manner of man he was, and what are the varying qualities of his four comedies, it seems well to discuss and have done with two questions, obviously pertinent indeed, but of a wider scope than the works of any one writer.

The first is a stupid question, which may be happily dismissed with brief ceremony. Grossness of language—the phrase is an assumption—is a matter of time and place, a relative matter altogether. There is a thing, and a generation finds a name for it. The delicacy which prompts a later generation to reject that name is by no means necessarily a result of stricter habits, is far more often due to the flatness which comes of untiring repetition and to the greater piquancy of litotes. I am told that there are, or were, people in America who reject the word 'leg' as a gross word, but they must have found a synonym. So there is not a word in Congreve for which there is not some equivalent expression in contemporary writing. He says this or that: your modern writers say so-and-so. One man may even think the monosyllables in better taste than the periphrases. Another may sacrifice to his intolerance thereof such enjoyment as he was capable of taking from the greatest triumphs of diction or observation: he is free to choose. It may be granted that to one unfamiliar with the English of two centuries since the grossness of Congreve's language may seem excessive—like splashes of colour occurring too frequently in the arrangement of a wall. But that is merely a result of novelty: given time and habit, a more artistic perspective will be achieved. p. viii

The second question is more complex. Since Jeremy Collier let off his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, there has never lacked a critic to chastise or to deplore—the more effective and irritating course—not simply the coarseness but, the immorality of our old comedies, their attitude towards and their peculiar interests in life. Without affirming that we are now come to the Golden Age of criticism, one may rejoice that modern methods have taught quite humble critics to discriminate between issues, and to deal with such a matter as this with some mental detachment. The great primal fallacy comes from a habit of expecting everything in everything. Just as in a picture it is not enough for some people that it is well drawn and well painted, but they demand an interesting story, a fine sentiment, a great thought: so since our national glory is understood to be the happy home, the happy home must be triumphant everywhere, even in satiric comedy. The best expression of this fallacy is in Thackeray. Concluding a most eloquent, and a somewhat patronising examination of Congreve, 'Ah!' he exclaims, 'it's a weary feast, that banquet of wit where no love is.' The answer is plain: comedy of manners is comedy of manners, and satire is satire; introduce 'love'—an appeal, one supposes, to sympathy with strictly legitimate and common affection and a glorification of the happy home—and the rules of your art compel you to satirise affection and to make the happy home ridiculous: a truly deplorable work, which the incriminated dramatists were discreet enough for the most part to avoid. The remark brings us to the first of the half-truths, which cause the complexity of the subject. The dramatists whose withers the well-intentioned and disastrous Collier wrung seem to have thought their best answer was to pose as people with a mission—certainly Congreve so posed—to reform the world with an exhibition of its follies. An amusing answer, no doubt, of which the absurdity is obvious! It does, however, contain a half-truth. The idea of *The Way of the World's* reforming adulterers—observe the quotation from Horace on the title-page—is a little delicious; yet the exhibition in a ludicrous light of the thing satirised is surely an end of satiric comedy? The right of the matter is indicated in a sentence which occurs in the dedication of *The Double-Dealer* far more wisely than in Congreve's answer to Collier: 'I should be very glad of an opportunity to make my compliment to those ladies who are offended: but they can no more expect it in a comedy, than to be tickled by a surgeon, when he's letting 'em blood.' Something more than a half-truth is in Charles Lamb's theory, that the old comedy 'has no reference whatever to the world that is': that it is 'the Utopia of Gallantry' merely. Literally, historically, the theory is a fantasy. What the Restoration dramatists did not borrow from France was inspired directly by the court of Charles the Second, and nobody conversant with the memoirs of that court can have any difficulty in matching the fiction with reality. I imagine that Congreve in part accepted a tradition of the stage, but I am also perfectly well assured that he depicted what he saw. How far the virtues we should associate with the Charles the Second spirit may atone for its vices is a question which would take us far into moral philosophy. It is enough to remark that those vices are the exclusive possession of no period: so long as society is constituted in anything like its present order, there must be a section of it for which those vices are the main interest in life. But Charles Lamb's gay and engaging defiance of the kill-joys of his day has this value: it is most certainly just to say that, in appreciating satiric comedy, 'our coxcombical moral sense' must be 'for a little transitory ease excluded.' p. ix

For one may apprehend the whole truth to be somewhat thus. Satiric comedy, or comedy of manners, is the art of making ludicrous in dramatic form some phase of life. The writers of our old comedy thought that certain vices—gambling, adultery, and the like—formed a phase of life which for divers reasons, essential and accidental, lent itself best to their purpose. They may, or may not, have thought they were doing society a service: their real justification is that, as artists, they had to take for their art that material they could use best. They used it according to their lights: Wycherley with a coarse and heavy hand, so that it became nauseous; Etherege with a light touch and a gay perception; Congreve with an instinct of good-breeding, with a sure and extensive observation, and with an incomparable style. But all were justified in choosing for their p. x

material just what they chose. They sinned artistically, now here, now there; but to complain of this old comedy as a whole, that vice in it is crammed too closely, is to forget that a play is a picture, not a photograph, of life—is life arranged and coloured—and that comedy of manners is composed of foibles or vices condensed and relieved by one another. In so far as they overdid this work, the comic writers were artistically at fault, and Jeremy Collier was a good critic; but when he and his successors go beyond the artistic objection, one takes leave to say, they misapprehend the thing criticised. To complain that 'love' and common morality have no place in satiric comedy is either to contemplate ridicule of them or to ask comedy to be other than satiric. We know what happened when the dramatists gave way: there followed, Hazlitt says, 'those *do-me-good*, lack-a-daisical, whining, make-believe comedies in the next age, which are enough to set one to sleep, and where the author tries in vain to be merry and wise in the same breath.' These in place of 'the court, the gala day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry, and Charles the Second!' And all because people would not keep their functions distinct, and remember that at a comedy they were in a court of art and not in a court of law! The old comedy is dead, and its spirit gone from the stage: I have but endeavoured to show that no harm need come to our phylacteries, if a flame start from its ashes in the printed book.

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II.

William Congreve was born at Bardsey, near Leeds, and was baptized on 10th February 1669 [1670]. The Congreves were a Staffordshire family, of an antiquity of four hundred years at the date of the poet's birth. Richard, his grandfather, was a redoubtable Cavalier, and William, his father, an officer in the army. The latter was given a command at Youghal, while his son was still an infant, and becoming shortly afterwards agent to Lord Cork, removed to Lismore. So it chanced that the poet had his schooling at Kilkenny (with Swift), and proceeded to Trinity College, Dublin, in 1685, rejoining Swift, and like his friend becoming a pupil of St. George Ashe, the mathematician. In 1688 he left Dublin, remained with his people in Staffordshire for some two years, entered himself at the Temple, and came upon the town with *The Old Bachelor* in January 1692. *The Double-Dealer* was produced in November 1693. In 1694 a storm in the theatre led to a secession of Betterton and other renowned players from Drury Lane: with the result that a new playhouse was opened in Lincoln's Inn Fields, on 30th April 1695, with *Love for Love*. In the same year Congreve was appointed 'Commissioner for Licensing Hackney Coaches.' *The Mourning Bride* was produced in 1697, and was followed, oddly enough, by the controversy, or rather 'row,' with Jeremy Collier. In March 1700 came *The Way of the World*. The poet was made Commissioner of Wine-Licences in 1705, and in 1714 with his Jamaica secretaryship and his places in the Customs and the delightful 'Pipe-Office,' he had an income of twelve hundred pounds a year. He died at his house in Surrey Street, Strand, on 19th January 1728 [1729].

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One or two comments on these dates are obvious. They dissipate the Thackerayan fable that on the production of *The Old Bachelor*, the fortunate young author received a shower of sinecures, 'all for writing a comedy.'

> 'And crazy Congreve scarce could spare
> A shilling to discharge a chair,'

writes Swift, and 'crazy' indicates that Congreve was gouty before he was rich. But then, the gout was a very early factor in his life, and one may call the line an exaggeration. Another couplet:

> 'Thus Congreve spent in writing plays,
> And one poor office, half his days:'

probably expresses the truth. With his plays and his hackney coaches he doubtless got through his twenties and thirties with no very hardly grinding poverty, and at forty or so was comfortably secure. But another fact, which the dates bring out very sharply, has a different interest. At an age when Swift was beginning to try his powers, Congreve's work was done. A few odes, a few letters he was still to write, but no more comedies. Was it ill-health? or because the town had all but damned his greatest play? or because he cared more for life than for art?

III.

The question brings one to an attempted appreciation of the man. Mr. Gosse, for whose *Life* I would express my gratitude, confesses that 'it is not very easy to construct a definite portrait of Congreve.' But that it baffled that very new journalist, Mrs. Manley, in his own day, and Mr. Gosse, with his information, in ours, to give 'salient points' to Congreve's character, proves in itself an essential characteristic, which need be negatively stated only by choice. That no amusing eccentricities are recorded, no ludicrous adventures, no persistent quarrels, implies, taken with other facts we know, that he was a well-bred man of the world, with the habit of society: that in itself is a definite personal quality. One supposes him an ease-loving man, not inclined to clown for the amusement of his world. He was loved by his friends, being tolerant, and understanding the art of social life. He was successful, and must therefore have had enemies, but he was careless to improve hostilities. For the temperament which is so plain in the best of his writings must have been present in his life—an unobtrusive, because a never directly implied, superiority and an ironical humour. The picture of swaggering snobbishness which

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Thackeray was inspired to make of him is proved bad by all that we know. A swaggerer could not have made a fast friend of Dryden—grown mellow, indeed, but by no means beggared of his fire—on his first coming to town, nor kept the intimacy of Swift, nor avoided the fault-finding of Dennis. It is quite unnecessary to suppose that Congreve's famous remark to Voltaire, that he wished to be visited as a plain gentleman, was the remark (if it was made) of a snob: it was clearly a legitimate deprecation, spoken by a man who had written nothing notable for twenty-six years, which Voltaire misunderstood in a moment of stupidity, or in one of forgetfulness misrepresented. His superiority and his irony came from a just sense of the perspective of things, and, not preventing affection for his friends, left him indifferent to his foes. Probably, also, a course of dissipation (at which Swift hints) in his youth, acting on a temperament not particularly ardent, had left him with such passions for war and love as were well under control. p. xiv
The two women with whom his name is connected were Mrs. Bracegirdle and the Duchess of Marlborough; but nobody knew—though the latter's mother hinted the worst—how far the intimacy went. That is to say, no patent scandal was necessary to the connexion, if in either case Congreve was a lover. And (once more) Congreve was a gentleman.

But why did he become sterile at thirty? Where, if not in dealing with motives and causes, may one be fancy-free? Here there are many, of which the first to be given is mere conjecture, but conjecture, I fancy, not inconsistent with such facts as are known. When Congreve produced his first comedy, he was but twenty-three, fresh from college and the country, ignorant, as we are told, of the world. He discovered very soon that he had an aptitude for social life, that, no doubt, living humours and follies were as entertaining as printed ones, that for a popular and witty man the world was pleasant. But no man may be socially finished all at once. In the course of the seven years between *The Old Bachelor* and *The Way of the World*, Congreve must have found his wit becoming readier, his tact surer, his appreciation of natural comedy finer and (as personal keenness decreased) more equable, his popularity greater, and—in fine—the world more pleasant and the attractions of the study waning and waning in comparison. He was a finished artist, he was born, one might almost say, with a style; but his inclination was to put his art into life rather than into print. Even in our days (thank God for all His mercies!) everybody is not writing a book. There are people whose talk has inimitable touches, and whose lives are art, but who never sit down to a quire of foolscap. I believe that Congreve naturally was one of these, that his literary ambition was a result of accidental necessity, and that had he lived as a boy in the society he was of as a very young man—for all its literary ornaments—we should have had of him only p. xv
odes and songs. His generation was idler and took itself less seriously than ours. The primal curse was not imposed on everybody as a duty. In seven years of growing appreciation Congreve came to think the little graces and humours the better part. That I believe to have been the first cause of his early sterility; but others helped to determine the effect. A certain indolence is of course implied in what has been said. There was the gout, and there were his unfortunate obesity and his failing sight. There was Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, an absorbing dame. There were the success of *Love for Love* and the failure of *The Way of the World*. For all that may be said of the indifference of the true artist to the verdict of the many-headed beast—and Congreve's contempt was as fine as any—it is not amusing when your play or your book falls flat, and Congreve must have known that he might write another, and possibly a better, *Way of the World*, but no more *Love for Loves*. Not to anticipate a later division of the subject, it may be said here that a man of thirty, of a fine intellect and a fine taste, of a languid habit withal, and with an invalided constitution, while he might repeat the triumphs of diction and intellect of *The Way of the World*, was most unlikely to return to the broader humours and the more popular gaiety of the other play. Congreve, like Rochester before him, despised the judgment of the town in these matters, but by the town he would have to be judged.

He was a witty, handsome man of the world, of imperturbable temper and infinite tact, who could make and keep the friendship of very various men, and be intimate with a woman without quarrelling with her lovers. He had a taste for pictures and a love for music. He must have hated violence and uproar, and liked the finer shades of life. He wore the mode of his day, and was free from the superficial protests of the narrow-minded. Possibly not a very 'definite portrait,' possibly a very negative characterisation. Possibly, also, a tolerably sure foundation for p. xvi
a structure of sympathetic imagination.

IV.

Passing from necessarily vague and not obviously pertinent remarks to criticism, which may fairly be less diffident, we leave Congreve's life and come to his work, to his 'tawdry playhouse taper,' as Thackeray called it. It is only after the man has appeared that we recognise that he came at the hour; but the nature of the hour is in this case not difficult to be discerned. The habit of playgoing was well-established; the turmoil of the Revolution was over; De Jure was at a comfortable distance, and De Facto's wife was a patroness of the arts. But playgoers had but to be shown something better than that they had, to discover that the convention of the Restoration needed new blood. A justification of its choice of material has been attempted: there is no inconsistency in affirming that the tendency to use it with a mere monotony of ribaldry was emphatic. Of this tendency the most notable and useful illustration is Wycherley, because in point of wit and dramatic skill he dwarfed his colleagues. As Mr. Swinburne has said, the art of Congreve is different in kind, not merely in degree, from the cruder and more boisterous product of the 'brawny' dramatist. Happily, however, for his success, the difference was not instantly clear. His first play links him with Wycherley, not with that rare and faint embryo of the later Congreve, George Etherege. 'You was always a gentleman, Mr. George,' as the valet says in

Beau Austin. Happily for his popularity Congreve first followed the more popular man. It is not, indeed, until he wrote his last play that he was a whole Etherege idealised, albeit a greater than Etherege in the meantime. The peculiar effect which Etherege achieved in *Sir Fopling Flutter*—at whom and with whom you laugh at once—was not sublimated (the fineness left, the faintness become firmness) until Congreve created Witwoud, the inimitable, in *The Way of the World*. p. xvii

At the very first Congreve had good fortune in his players. It was a brave time for them. True, their salaries were not wonderfully large. Colley Cibber complains of the days before the revolt in 1694: 'at what unequal salaries the hired actors were held by the absolute authority of their frugal masters, the patentees.' But the example was not faded of those gay days when they were the pets of the most artistic court that England has known: when great ladies carried Kynaston in his woman's dress to Hyde Park after the play, and the King was the most persistent and the most interested playgoer in his realm. They were not thus petted for irrelevant reasons—for their respectability, their piety, or their domestic virtues; and their recognition as artists by an artistic society did not spoil their art. When Congreve started on his course of play-writing, Queen Mary kept up, in a measure, the amiable custom of her uncle. He was very fortunate in his casts. There was Betterton, first of all, the versatile, the restrained, and, witness everybody, the incomparable. There was Underhill, 'a correct and natural comedian'—one must quote Cibber pretty often in this connexion—not well suited, one must suppose, to play Setter to Betterton's Heartwell in *The Old Bachelor*, but by reason of his admirable assumption of stupidity to make an excellent Sir Sampson in *Love for Love*. There were Powel, Williams, Verbruggen, Bowen, and Dogget (Fondlewife in the first play: afterwards Ben Legend, a part which made his fame and turned his head)—all notable comedians. Kynaston, graceful in old age as he had been beautiful in youth, was not in *The Old Bachelor*, but created Lord Touchwood in *The Double-Dealer*. Mountfort had been murdered by my Lord Mohun, and Leigh had followed him to the grave, but their names lived in their wives. Mrs. Mountfort 'was mistress of more variety of humour than I ever knew in any one woman actress . . . nothing, though ever so barren, if within the bounds of nature, could be flat in her hands.' Indeed 'she was so fond of humour, in what low part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair form to come heartily into it'—assuredly a rare actress! About Mrs. Leigh Cibber is less enthusiastic, but grants her 'a good deal of humour': her old women were famous. Mrs. Barry was a stately, dignified actress, best, no doubt, in tragedy. Lastly, there was Mrs. Bracegirdle, the innocent *publica cura*, whom authors courted through their plays, and who had all the men in the house for longing lovers. Who shall say how far 'her youth and lively aspect' influenced the criticisms that have come down to us? She played Millamant to Congreve's satisfaction. p. xviii

V.

It is not difficult to understand how it was that Dryden thought *The Old Bachelor* the best first play he had seen, and the town applauded to the echo. But it is a little hard to understand why later critics, with the three other comedies before them, have not more expressly marked the difference between the first and those. There is no new tune in *The Old Bachelor*: it is an old tune more finely played, and for that very reason it met with immediate acceptance. It is not likely that Dryden—a great poet and a great and generous critic, it may be, but an old man—would have bestowed such unhesitating approval on a play which ignored the conventions in which he had lived. As it was, he saw those conventions reverently followed, yet served by a master wit. The fact that Congreve allowed Dryden and others to 'polish' his play, by giving it an air of the stage and the town which it lacked, need not of course spoil it for us. The stamp of Congreve is clearly marked on the dialogue, though not on every page. You may see its essentials in two passages taken absolutely at random. 'Come, come,' says Bellmour in the very first scene, 'leave business to idlers and wisdom to fools; they have need of 'em: wit be my faculty and pleasure my occupation, and let Father Time shake his glass.' Or Fondlewife soliloquises: 'Tell me, Isaac, why art thee jealous? Why art thee distrustful of the wife of thy bosom? Because she is young and vigorous, and I am old and impotent. Then why didst thee marry, Isaac? Because she was beautiful and tempting, and because I was obstinate and doating. . . .' In the one passage is the gay and skilfully light paradox, in the other the clean, rhythmical, and balanced, yet dramatic and appropriate English that are elements of Congreve's style. It is in the conventions of its characterisation that *The Old Bachelor* belongs, not to true Congrevean comedy but, to that of the models from which he was to break away. The characterisation of *The Way of the World* is light and true, that of *The Old Bachelor* is heavy and yet vague. Vainlove indeed, the 'mumper in love,' who 'lies canting at the gate,' is individual and Congrevean. But Heartwell, the blustering fool, Bellmour, the impersonal rake, Wittol and Bluffe, the farcical sticks, Fondlewife, the immemorial city husband, and the troop of undistinguished women—what can be said of them but that they are glaring stage properties, speaking better English than the comic stage had before attracted? Germs, possibly, of better things to come, that is all, so far as characterisation goes. The Fondlewife episode, in particular, which doubtless was mightily popular—what is there more in it than the mutton fisted wit and brutality of Wycherley, with some of Congreve's English? Such scenes as these, it may be hazarded, so contemptible in the light of Congreve's better work, are ineffective now because they fall between two stools: between the comedy (or tragedy) of a crude physical fact, naked and impossible, as in Rochester, and the comedy (or tragedy) of delicately-phrased intrigue. The latter was yet to come when this play was produced, and meantime such episodes went very well, and their popularity is intelligible. For the rest *The Old Bachelor*, though to us in these days its plot appear a somewhat uninspiring piece of fairyland, was a good acting play, fitted with great skill to its actual players. The part of Fondlewife, created by Dogget, was on a revival played (to his own immense p. xix p. xx

satisfaction) by Colley Cibber. In Araminta Mrs. Bracegirdle began (in a faint outline as it were) the series of lively, sympathetic, intelligent heroines which Congreve wrote for her. Lord Falkland's Prologue is as funny as it is indecently suggestive, which is saying a great deal. The one actually spoken gave an opportunity of the merriest archness to Mrs. Bracegirdle, and was calculated to put the audience in the best of good humours.

The faults of *The Double-Dealer* are obvious on a first reading, and were very justly condemned on a first acting. The intrigue is wearisome: its involutions are ineffectively puzzling. Maskwell's villainy and Mellefont's folly are both unconvincing. The tragedy of Lady Touchwood, less tragic than that of Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World*, is more obviously than that out of the picture. The play is, in fact, not pure comedy of manners: it is that *plus* tragedy, an element less offensive than the sentimentality which spoils *The School for Scandal*, but yet a notable fault. For while you can resolve the tragedy of Lady Wishfort into wicked and very grim comedy, you can do nothing with the tragedy of Lady Touchwood but try to ignore it. In his epistle dedicatory to Charles Montague, Congreve admits that his play has faults, but does not take in hand those adduced above, with the exception of the objections to Maskwell and Mellefont. 'They have mistaken cunning in one character for folly in another': an ineffectual answer, because the extremity of cunning is equally destructive of dramatic balance. He defends his use of soliloquy p. xxi very warmly: of which it may be said that, so long as his rule—that no character may overhear the soliloquiser—is observed, it is a tolerable convention, but a confession of weakness in construction. He declares he 'would rather disoblige all the critics in the world than one of the fair sex,' and, having made his bow, he turns upon the ladies and rends them. An author campaigning against his critics is always a pleasant spectacle, but Congreve's defence of *The Double-Dealer* is rather amusing than convincing.

It needed no defence; for with all its faults, such as they are, upon it, there are in it scenes and characters which only Congreve could have made. Brisk is a worthy forerunner of Witwoud, Sir Paul Plyant a delicious old credulous fool; while the tyrannical and vain Lady Plyant is so drawn that you almost love her. But the triumph is Lady Froth, 'a great coquet, pretender to poetry, wit, and learning,' and one would almost as lief have seen Mrs. Mountfort in the part as the Bracegirdle's Millamant. Her serious folly and foolish wisdom, her poem and malice and compliments and babbling vivacity—set off, it is fair to remember, by a pretty face—are atonement for a dozen Maskwells. She is a female Witwoud, her author's first success in a sort of character he draws to perfection. The scene between Mellefont and Lady Plyant, where she insists on believing that the gallant, under cover of a marriage with her stepdaughter, purposes to lead her astray, and where she goes through a delightful farce of answering her scruples before the bewildered man—the scene that for some far-fetched reason led Macaulay's mind to the incest in the *Oedipus Rex*—is perhaps the best comedy of situation in the piece. But the scene of defamation between the Froths and Brisk is notable as (with the Cabal idea in *The Way of the World*) the inspiration of the Scandal Scenes in Sheridan's play. When we remember that p. xxii less than two years were gone since the production of *The Old Bachelor*, the improvement in Congreve is remarkable. Almost his only concession to the groundlings is the star-gazing episode of Lady Froth and Brisk: a mistake, because it spoils her inconsequent folly, but a small matter. In his second play Congreve was himself, the wittiest and most polished writer of comedy in English. In the face of this fact 'the public' conducted itself characteristically: it more or less damned *The Double-Dealer* until the queen approved, when it applauded lustily. That occasion gave Colley Cibber his first chance as Kynaston's substitute in Lord Touchwood. When one remembers Dryden's long, struggling, cudgelling and cudgelled life, it is impossible to read without emotion his tribute to a very young and successful author in the verses prefixed to this play:

> Firm Doric pillars found your solid base:
> The fair Corinthian crowns the higher space;
> Thus all below is strength, and all above is grace.
> . . . . .
> We cannot envy you, because we love.
> . . . . .
> Time, place, and action may with pains be wrought,
> But Genius must be born, and never can be taught.
> This is your portion, this your native store;
> Heav'n, that but once was prodigal before.
> To Shakespeare gave as much; she could not give him more.

The tribute is indubitably sincere; in point of Congreve's wit and diction it is as indubitably true.

Love for Love was the most popular of Congreve's comedies: it held the stage so long that Hazlitt could say, 'it still acts and is still acted well.' Being wise after the event, one may give some obvious reasons. It is more human than any other of his plays, and at the same time more farcical. By 'more human' it is not meant that the characters are truer to life than those in *The* p. xxiii *Way of the World*, but that they are truer to average life, and therefore more easily recognisable by the average spectator. Tattle, for instance, is so gross a fool, that any fool in the pit could see his folly; Witwoud might deceive all but the elect. No familiarity—direct or indirect—with a particular mode of life and speech is necessary to the appreciation of *Love for Love*. Sir Sampson Legend is your unmistakable heavy father, cross-grained and bullying. Valentine is no ironical, fine gentleman like Mirabell, but a young rake from Cambridge, all debts and high spirits. Scandal is a plain railer at things, especially women; Ben Legend a sea-dog who cannot speak

without a nautical metaphor; Jeremy an idealised comic servant; and Foresight grotesque farce. Angelica is a shrewd but hearty 'English girl,' and Miss Prue a veritable country Miss; while Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight are broadly skittish matrons. There is nothing in the play to strain the attention or to puzzle the intellect, and it is full of laughter: no wonder it was a success. It is, intellectually, on an altogether different plane from *The Way of the World*, on a slightly lower one than *The Double-Dealer*. But in its own way it is irresistibly funny, and by reason of its diction it is never for a moment other than distinguished.

I imagine the bodkin scene will always take the palm in it for mere mirth. Delightful sisters!

> I suppose you would not go alone to the World's End?
>
> The World's End! What, do you mean to banter me?
>
> Poor innocent! You don't know that there's a place called the World's End? I'll swear you can keep your countenance purely; you'd make an admirable player. . . . But look you here, now—where did you lose this gold bodkin?—Oh, sister, sister!
>
> My bodkin?
>
> Nay, 'tis yours; look at it.
>
> Well, if you go to that, where did you find this bodkin? Oh, sister, sister!—sister every way.

Broad, popular comedy, it is admirable; but it is not especially Congrevean. Tattle's love-lesson to Miss Prue and his boasting of his duchesses are in the same broad vein. Valentine's mad scene is more remarkable, in that Congreve gives rein to his fancy, and that his diction is at its very best. 'Hark'ee, I have a secret to tell you. Endymion and the Moon shall meet us upon Mount Latmos, and will be married in the dead of night. But say not a word. Hymen shall put his torch into a dark lanthorn, that it may be secret; and Juno shall give her peacock poppy-water, that he may fold his ogling tail, and Argus's hundred eyes be shut, ha? Nobody shall know, but Jeremy.' p. xxiv

> TATTLE. Do you know me, Valentine?
>
> VALENTINE. You? Who are you? No, I hope not.
>
> TATTLE. I am Jack Tattle, your friend.
>
> VALENTINE. My friend, what to do? I am no married man, and thou canst not lie with my wife. I am very poor, and thou canst not borrow money of me. Then, what employment have I for a friend?
>
> ANGELICA. Do you know me, Valentine?
>
> VALENTINE. Oh, very well.
>
> ANGELICA. Who am I?
>
> VALENTINE. You're a woman, one to whom Heaven gave beauty when it grafted roses on a briar. You are the reflection of Heaven in a pond, and he that leaps at you is sunk. You are all white, a sheet of lovely, spotless paper, when you first are born; but you are to be scrawled and blotted by every goose's quill. I know you; for I loved a woman, and loved her so long, that I found out a strange thing: I found out what a woman was good for.

Imagine Betterton, the greatest actor of his time, delivering that last speech, with its incomparable rhythm! I like to think that he gave the spectators an idea that Valentine's self-sacrifice for Angelica was nothing but a bold device, a calculated effect; otherwise the sacrifice is an excrescence in this comedy, which, popular and broad though it be, is cynical in Congreve's manner throughout. One is consoled, however, by the pleasant fate of the ingenious Mr. Tattle and the intriguing Mrs. Frail, who are left tied for life against their will. The trick, by the way, of a tricked marriage is constant in Congreve, and reveals his poverty of construction. He can devise you comic situations unflaggingly, but when he approaches the end of a play his *deus ex machinâ* is invariably this flattest and most battered old deity in fairyland. p. xxv

The dedication to Lord Dorset contains nothing of interest beyond the confession that the play is too long, and the information that part of it was omitted in the playing. A line in the prologue, 'We grieve One falling Adam and one tempted Eve,' is explained by Colley Cibber to refer to Mrs. Mountford, who, having cast her lot with Betterton and migrated to Lincoln's Inn Fields, threw up her part on a question of cash, and to Williams, an actor who 'loved his bottle better than his business,' who deserted at the same time. It serves to show the interest the town took in the players, that the fact was referred to on the stage. The lady's part was taken by Mrs. Ayliff; Mrs. Leigh played the nurse—a very poor part after Lady Plyant; Dogget's success as Ben Legend has been noted. Mrs. Bracegirdle's Angelica was doubtless ravishing: a 'virtuous young woman,' as our ancestors phrased it, but quite relieved from insipidity.

It would need a greater presumption than the writer is gifted withal to add his contribution to the praises critics have lavished on *The Way of the World*. It is better to quote Mr. Swinburne. 'In 1700 Congreve replied to Collier with the crowning work of his genius—the unequalled and

unapproached masterpiece of English comedy. The one play in our language which may fairly claim a place beside, or but just beneath, the mightiest work of Molière, is *The Way of the World*.' But he continues: 'On the stage, which had recently acclaimed with uncritical applause the author's more questionable appearance in the field of tragedy,'—*The Mourning Bride*,—'this p. xxvi
final and flawless evidence of his incomparable powers met with a rejection then and ever since inexplicable on any ground of conjecture.' There the critics are not unanimous. Mr. Gosse, for instance, has his explanation: that the spectators must have fidgeted, and wished 'that the actors and actresses would be doing something.' Very like, indeed: the spectators, then as now, would no doubt have preferred 'knock-about farce.' But, I venture to think, the explanation is not complete. The construction of the play is weak, certainly, but the actors and actresses do a great deal after all. For that matter, audiences will stand scenes of still wit—but they like to comprehend it; and the characters in *The Way of the World*, or most of them, represent a society whose attitude and speech are entirely ironical and paradoxical, a society of necessity but a small fraction of any community. Some sort of study or some special experience is necessary to the enjoyment of such a set. It is not the case of a few witticisms and paradoxes firing off at intervals, like crackers, from the mouths of one or two actors with whom the audience is taught to laugh as a matter of course: the vein is unbroken. Now, literalness and common sense are the qualities of the average uninstructed spectator, and *The Way of the World* was high over the heads of its audience.

To come to details. The tragedy of Lady Wishfort has often been remarked—the veritable tragedy of a lovesick old woman. All the grotesque touches, her credulity, her vanity, her admirable dialect ('as I'm a person!'), but serve to make the tragedy the more pitiable. Either, therefore, our appreciation of satiric comedy is defective, or Congreve made a mistake. To regard this poor old soul as mere comedy is to attain to an almost satanic height of contempt: the comedy is more than grim, it is savagely cruel. To be pitiless, on the other hand, is a satirist's virtue. On the whole, we may reasonably say that the tragedy is not too keen in itself, but that it is too obviously p. xxvii
indicated. Witwoud is surely a great character? The stage is alive with mirth when he is on it. His entrance in the very first part of the play is delightful. 'Afford me your compassion, my dears; pity me, Fainall; Mirabell, pity me. . . . Fainall, how does your lady? Gad, I say anything in the world to get this fellow out of my head. I beg pardon that I should ask a man of pleasure, and the town, a question at once so foreign and domestic. But I talk like an old maid at a marriage, I don't know what I say.' But one might quote for ever. Witwoud, almost as much as Millamant herself, is an eternal type. His little exclamations, his assurance of sympathy, his terror of the commonplace—surely one knows them well? His tolerance of any impertinence, lest he should be thought to have misunderstood a jest, is a great distinction. But Congreve's gibe in the dedication at the critics, who failed 'to distinguish betwixt the character of a Witwoud and a Truewit,' is hardly fair: as Dryden said of Etherege's Sir Fopling, he is 'a fool so nicely writ, The ladies might mistake him for a wit.' Then, Millamant is the ultimate expression of those who, having all the material goods which nature and civilisation can give, live on paradoxes and artifices. Her insolence is the inoffensive insolence only possible to the well-bred. 'O ay, letters, —I had letters,—I am persecuted with letters,—I hate letters,—nobody knows how to write letters; and yet one has 'em, one does not know why,—they serve one to pin up one's hair.' 'Beauty the lover's gift!—Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases; and then if one pleases one makes more.'

In parts of its characterisation *The Way of the World* is extremely bold in observation, extremely careless of literary types and traditions. Mrs. Fainall, a woman who is the friend, and assists in p. xxviii
the intrigues, of a man who has ceased to be her lover, is most unconventionally human. Of all the inimitable scenes, that in which Millamant and Mirabell make their conditions of marriage is perhaps the most unquestionable triumph. 'Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange and well-bred'—there is its keynote. The dialogue is as sure and perfect in diction, in balance of phrases, and in musical effectiveness as can be conceived, and for all its care is absolutely free in its gaiety. It is the ultimate expression of the joys of the artificial. As for the prologue, it is an invitation to the dullards to damn the play, and is anything but serenely confident. The dedication, to 'Ralph, Earl of Mountague,' has an interesting fact: it tells us that the comedy was written immediately after staying with him, 'in your retirement last summer from the town,' and pays a tribute to the influence of the society the dramatist met there. 'Vous y voyez partout,' said Voltaire of Congreve, 'le langage des honnêtes gens avec des actions de fripon; ce qui prouve qu'il connaissait bien son monde, et qu'il vivait dans ce qu'on appelle la bonne compagnie.'

The want of dramatic skill which has been alleged against Congreve is simply a question of construction—of the construction of his plays as a whole. His plots hang fire, are difficult to follow, and are not worth remembering. But many things besides go to the making of good plays, and few playwrights have had all the theatrical virtues. Do we not pardon a lack of incident in a novel of character? In this connexion it is worth while to contrast Congreve with Sheridan, who in the matter of construction was a far abler craftsman. But is there not in the elder poet enough to turn the scale, even the theatrical scale, ten times over? Compare the petty indignation, with which the dramatist of *The School for Scandal* deals with his scandalmongers, and the amused p. xxix
indifference of Congreve towards the cabalists in *The Way of the World*. Or take any hero of Congreve's and contrast him with that glorification of vulgar lavishness and canting generosity, that very barmaid's hero, Charles Surface. It is all very well to say that Joseph is the real hero; but Sheridan made it natural for the stupid sentimentality of later days to make him the villain, and Congreve would have made it impossible. Of wit (of course) there is more in a scene of

Congreve than in a play of Sheridan. Moreover, faulty in construction as his main plots are, in detail his construction is often admirable: as in play of character upon character, in countless opportunities for delightful archness and cruelty in the women, for the display of every comic emotion in the men. He lived in the playhouse, and his characters, true to life though they be, have about them as it were an ideal essence of the boards. With Hazlitt, 'I would rather have seen Mrs. Abington's Millamant than any Rosalind that ever appeared on the stage.' A lover and a constant frequenter of the theatre—albeit the plays he sees bore him to death—cannot, in reading Congreve, choose but see the glances and hear the intonations of imaginary players.

VI.

Congreve's choice of material has been defended at an early stage of these remarks. There is the further and more interesting question of his point of view, his attitude towards it. Mr. Henley speaks of his 'deliberate and unmitigable baseness of morality.' Differing with deference, I think it may be shown that his attitude is a pose merely, and an artistic and quite innocent pose. It is the amusing pose of the boyish cynic turned into an artistic convention. The lines:

> 'He alone won't betray in whom none will confide,
> And the nymph may be chaste that has never been tried:'

which conclude the characteristic song in the third act of *Love for Love*, are typical of his attitude. Does anybody suppose that an intelligent man of the world meant that sentiment in all seriousness? p. xxx

> 'Nothing's new besides our faces,
> Every woman is the same'—

those lines (in his first play), which seemed so shocking to Thackeray, what more do they express than the green cynicism of youth? When Mr. Leslie Stephen speaks of his 'gush of cynical sentiment,' he speaks unsympathetically, but the phrase, to be an enemy's, is just. It is cynical sentiment, and the hostility comes from taking it seriously. I think it the most artistic attitude for a writer of gay, satiric comedies, and that its very excess should prevent its being taken for more than a convention. We are not called upon to see satiric comedies all day long, and the question, everlastingly asked by implication of every work of art—'Would you like to live with it?'—is here, as in most other cases, irrelevant. One is reminded that there is more in life than intrigues and cynical comments on them. And one is inclined to put the questions in answer: 'Does a man who really feels the sorrowful things of life, its futile endeavours and piteous separations, find relief in seeing his emotions mimicked on the stage in a 'wholesome' play of sentiment with a happy ending? Is he not rather comforted by the distractions of cheerful frivolity, of conventional denial of his pains?' The demand is as inartistic and irrelevant as the criticism which suggested it, but it returns a sufficient reply. It does not touch the 'catharsis' of tragedy, which is another matter. For the rest, Congreve's attitude, cynicism apart, is an attitude of irony and superiority over common emotions, the attitude, artificial and inoffensive, of the society he depicts in his greatest play. He enjoys the humours of his puppets, he is never angry with them. It is the attitude of an artist in expounding human nature, of an expert in observation of life: an attitude attainable but by very few, and disliked as a rule by the rest, who want to clap or to hiss—who can laugh but who cannot smile. p. xxxi

VII.

When Congreve left the stage, said Dennis the critic, 'comedy left it with him.' Vanburgh and Farquhar were left to expound comedy of manners, the one with a vigorous gusto, the other with a romantic gaiety. The peculiar perfume of *The Way of the World* was given to neither, yet they wrote comedy of manners. But if Congreve left colleagues, he left no sons, and most certainly, one may say, that when those colleagues died, English comedy took to her bed. 'The Comic Muse, long sick, is now a-dying,' wrote Garrick in his prologue to *She Stoops to Conquer*, and she had not to apologise, like Charles the Second, for the unconscionable time she was about it. It is a little crude to attribute her demise to Jeremy Collier and his *Short View*—a block painted to look like a thunderbolt. It is not a matter of decency, of alteration or improvement in manners. A comedy might be wholly Congrevean without a coarse word from beginning to end. It is a matter of the exclusion (not the stultification), the suspension of moral prepossessions, the absence of sympathetic sentimentalism, the habit of shirking nothing and smiling at all things. These qualities are not characteristic of the average Englishman. Now, satiric comedy did not in its initiation depend upon the average Englishman. It took its cue from the court of Charles the Second, who—with a dash of thoroughly English humour—was more than half-French in temperament, and attracted to himself all that was artistically frivolous in his kingdom. Questions of decency and morality—which after all are not perpetually amusing—apart, the social spirit typified in this exceptional king is one of sceptical humour and ironical smiles: it takes common emotions for granted—is bored by them, in fact—and is a foe to sentimentality and gush and virtuously happy endings. It was the spirit of Charles the Second that inspired English comedy, and inspired it most thoroughly in Congreve but a few years after Charles's death. Under changed conditions, one is apt to underestimate the influence of the Court upon the Town two hundred years ago. Well, the Georges became our defenders of the faith, and they hated 'boets and bainters.' English comedy was thrown back upon the patronage and the inspiration of average England, and up to the time of writing has shown few signs of recovery. Of course, the p. xxxii

decay was gradual: you may see it at a most interesting stage in *The School for Scandal*, a comedy of manners with a strong dash of common sentimentality. It would be just possible, one conceives, to play *The School for Scandal* as Charles Lamb says he saw it played, with Joseph for a hero, as a comedy of manners: you can just imagine Sir Peter as a sort of Sir Paul Plyant, and as not played to raise a lump in your throat. But Sheridan made it a difficult task. Perhaps you may see the evil influence at its worst in the so-called comedies which were our glory twenty-five years ago: in such a play as *Caste*, an even river of sloppy sentiment, where the acme of chivalrous delicacy is to refrain from lighting a cigarette in a woman's presence, where the triumph of humour is for a guardsman to take a kettle off the fire, and where the character of Eccles shows what excellent comedy the author might (alas!) have written.

One is fain to ask if the spirit of Congrevean comedy will ever come back to our stage. An echo of it has been heard in dialogue once or twice in the last few years: not a trace has been seen in action. And yet we permit our dramatists a pretty wide range of subjects. We allow the subjects: it is the Congrevean attitude towards them which we should condemn. But the stage would be all the merrier if we could only understand that that attitude is harmless; that to see the humorous aspect of a thing is not to ignore the pathetic or the sociological; and that we should return all the heartier to our serious and sentimental considerations of the problems of life for allowing them to be laughed at for an evening at a comedy. Meantime we can read the book.

p. xxxiii

G. S. STREET.

THE OLD BACHELOR

Quem tulit ad scenam ventoso Gloria curru,
Exanimat lentus spectator; sedulus inflat:
Sic leve, sic parvum est, animum quod laudis avarum
Subruit, and reficit.

HORAT. *Epist.* I. lib. ii.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CHARLES, LORD CLIFFORD OF LANESBOROUGH, etc.

My Lord,—It is with a great deal of pleasure that I lay hold on this first occasion which the accidents of my life have given me of writing to your lordship: for since at the same time I write to all the world, it will be a means of publishing (what I would have everybody know) the respect and duty which I owe and pay to you. I have so much inclination to be yours that I need no other engagement. But the particular ties by which I am bound to your lordship and family have put it out of my power to make you any compliment, since all offers of myself will amount to no more than an honest acknowledgment, and only shew a willingness in me to be grateful.

I am very near wishing that it were not so much my interest to be your lordship's servant, that it might be more my merit; not that I would avoid being obliged to you, but I would have my own choice to run me into the debt: that I might have it to boast, I had distinguished a man to whom I would be glad to be obliged, even without the hopes of having it in my power ever to make him a return.

It is impossible for me to come near your lordship in any kind and not to receive some favour; and while in appearance I am only making an acknowledgment (with the usual underhand dealing of the world) I am at the same time insinuating my own interest. I cannot give your lordship your due, without tacking a bill of my own privileges. 'Tis true, if a man never committed a folly, he would never stand in need of a protection. But then power would have nothing to do, and good nature no occasion to show itself; and where those qualities are, 'tis pity they should want objects to shine upon. I must confess this is no reason why a man should do an idle thing, nor indeed any good excuse for it when done; yet it reconciles the uses of such authority and goodness to the necessities of our follies, and is a sort of poetical logic, which at this time I would make use of, to argue your lordship into a protection of this play. It is the first offence I have committed in this kind, or indeed, in any kind of poetry, though not the first made public, and therefore I hope will the more easily be pardoned. But had it been acted, when it was first written, more might have been said in its behalf: ignorance of the town and stage would then have been excuses in a young writer, which now almost four years' experience will scarce allow of. Yet I must declare myself sensible of the good nature of the town, in receiving this play so kindly, with all its faults, which I must own were, for the most part, very industriously covered by the care of the players; for I think scarce a character but received all the advantage it would admit of from the justness of the action.

As for the critics, my lord, I have nothing to say to, or against, any of them of any kind: from those who make just exceptions, to those who find fault in the wrong place. I will only make this general answer in behalf of my play (an answer which Epictetus advises every man to make for himself to his censurers), viz.: 'That if they who find some faults in it, were as intimate with it as I am, they would find a great many more.' This is a confession, which I needed not to have made; but however, I can draw this use from it to my own advantage: that I think there are no faults in

it but what I do know; which, as I take it, is the first step to an amendment.

Thus I may live in hopes (sometime or other) of making the town amends; but you, my lord, I never can, though I am ever your lordship's most obedient and most humble servant,

WILL. CONGREVE.

TO MR. CONGREVE.

When virtue in pursuit of fame appears,
And forward shoots the growth beyond the years.
We timely court the rising hero's cause,
And on his side the poet wisely draws,
Bespeaking him hereafter by applause.
The days will come, when we shall all receive
Returning interest from what now we give,
Instructed and supported by that praise
And reputation which we strive to raise.
Nature so coy, so hardly to be wooed,
Flies, like a mistress, but to be pursued.
O Congreve! boldly follow on the chase:
She looks behind and wants thy strong embrace:
She yields, she yields, surrenders all her charms,
Do you but force her gently to your arms:
Such nerves, such graces, in your lines appear,
As you were made to be her ravisher.
Dryden has long extended his command,
By right divine, quite through the muses' land,
Absolute lord; and holding now from none,
But great Apollo, his undoubted crown.
That empire settled, and grown old in power
Can wish for nothing but a successor:
Not to enlarge his limits, but maintain
Those provinces, which he alone could gain.
His eldest Wycherly, in wise retreat,
Thought it not worth his quiet to be great.
Loose, wand'ring Etherege, in wild pleasures tost,
And foreign int'rests, to his hopes long lost:
Poor Lee and Otway dead! Congreve appears,
The darling, and last comfort of his years.
May'st thou live long in thy great master's smiles,
And growing under him, adorn these isles.
But when—when part of him (be that but late)
His body yielding must submit to fate,
Leaving his deathless works and thee behind
(The natural successor of his mind),
Then may'st thou finish what he has begun:
Heir to his merit, be in fame his son.
What thou hast done, shews all is in thy pow'r,
And to write better, only must write more.
'Tis something to be willing to commend;
But my best praise is, that I am your friend,

THO. SOUTHERNE.

TO MR. CONGREVE.

The danger's great in these censorious days,
When critics are so rife to venture praise:
When the infectious and ill-natured brood
Behold, and damn the work, because 'tis good,
And with a proud, ungenerous spirit, try
To pass an ostracism on poetry.
But you, my friend, your worth does safely bear
Above their spleen; you have no cause for fear;
Like a well-mettled hawk, you took your flight
Quite out of reach, and almost out of sight.
As the strong sun, in a fair summer's day,
You rise, and drive the mists and clouds away,
The owls and bats, and all the birds of prey.
Each line of yours, like polished steel's so hard,
In beauty safe, it wants no other guard.
Nature herself's beholden to your dress,
Which though still like, much fairer you express.
Some vainly striving honour to obtain,

Leave to their heirs the traffic of their brain:
Like China under ground, the ripening ware,
In a long time, perhaps grows worth our care.
But you now reap the fame, so well you've sown;
The planter tastes his fruit to ripeness grown.
As a fair orange-tree at once is seen
Big with what's ripe, yet springing still with green,
So at one time, my worthy friend appears,
With all the sap of youth, and weight of years.
Accept my pious love, as forward zeal,
Which though it ruins me I can't conceal:
Exposed to censure for my weak applause,
I'm pleased to suffer in so just a cause;
And though my offering may unworthy prove,
Take, as a friend, the wishes of my love.

J. MARSH.

TO MR. CONGREVE, ON HIS PLAY CALLED THE OLD BACHELOR.

Wit, like true gold, refined from all allay,
Immortal is, and never can decay:
'Tis in all times and languages the same,
Nor can an ill translation quench the flame:
For, though the form and fashion don't remain,
The intrinsic value still it will retain.
Then let each studied scene be writ with art,
And judgment sweat to form the laboured part.
Each character be just, and nature seem:
Without th' ingredient, wit, 'tis all but phlegm:
For that's the soul, which all the mass must move,
And wake our passions into grief or love.
But you, too bounteous, sow your wit so thick,
We are surprised, and know not where to pick;
And while with clapping we are just to you,
Ourselves we injure, and lose something new.
What mayn't we then, great youth, of thee presage,
Whose art and wit so much transcend thy age?
How wilt thou shine at thy meridian height,
Who, at thy rising, giv'st so vast a light?
When Dryden dying shall the world deceive,
Whom we immortal, as his works, believe,
Thou shalt succeed, the glory of the stage,
Adorn and entertain the coming age.

BEVIL. HIGGONS.

PROLOGUE INTENDED FOR THE OLD BACHELOR. Written by the Lord Falkland.

Most authors on the stage at first appear
Like widows' bridegrooms, full of doubt and fear:
They judge, from the experience of the dame,
How hard a task it is to quench her flame;
And who falls short of furnishing a course
Up to his brawny predecessor's force,
With utmost rage from her embraces thrown,
Remains convicted as an empty drone.
Thus often, to his shame, a pert beginner
Proves in the end a miserable sinner.
  As for our youngster, I am apt to doubt him,
With all the vigour of his youth about him;
But he, more sanguine, trusts in one and twenty,
And impudently hopes he shall content you:
For though his bachelor be worn and cold,
He thinks the young may club to help the old,
And what alone can be achieved by neither,
Is often brought about by both together.
The briskest of you all have felt alarms,
Finding the fair one prostitute her charms
With broken sighs, in her old fumbler's arms:
But for our spark, he swears he'll ne'er be jealous
Of any rivals, but young lusty fellows.
Faith, let him try his chance, and if the slave,

After his bragging, prove a washy knave,
May he be banished to some lonely den
And never more have leave to dip his pen.
But if he be the champion he pretends,
Both sexes sure will join to be his friends,
For all agree, where all can have their ends.
And you must own him for a man of might,
If he holds out to please you the third night.

PROLOGUE.
Spoken by Mrs. Bracegirdle.

How this vile world is changed! In former days
Prologues were serious speeches before plays,
Grave, solemn things, as graces are to feasts,
Where poets begged a blessing from their guests.
But now no more like suppliants we come;
A play makes war, and prologue is the drum.
Armed with keen satire and with pointed wit,
We threaten you who do for judges sit,
To save our plays, or else we'll damn your pit.
But for your comfort, it falls out to-day,
We've a young author and his first-born play;
So, standing only on his good behaviour,
He's very civil, and entreats your favour.
Not but the man has malice, would he show it,
But on my conscience he's a bashful poet;
You think that strange—no matter, he'll outgrow it.
Well, I'm his advocate: by me he prays you
(I don't know whether I shall speak to please you),
He prays—O bless me! what shall I do now?
Hang me if I know what he prays, or how!
And 'twas the prettiest prologue as he wrote it!
Well, the deuce take me, if I han't forgot it.
O Lord, for heav'n's sake excuse the play,
Because, you know, if it be damned to-day,
I shall be hanged for wanting what to say.
For my sake then—but I'm in such confusion,
I cannot stay to hear your resolution.

[*Runs off.*]

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

Heartwell, a surly old bachelor, pretending to slight women, secretly in love with Silvia—Mr. Betterton.
Bellmour, in love with Belinda—Mr. Powell
Vainlove, capricious in his love; in love with Araminta—Mr. Williams
Sharper,—Mr. Verbruggen
Sir Joseph Wittol,—Mr. Bowen
Captain Bluffe,—Mr. Haines.
Fondlewife, a banker—Mr. Dogget
Setter, a pimp—Mr Underhill
Servant to Fondlewife.

WOMEN.

Araminta, in love with Vainlove—Mrs. Bracegirdle
Belinda, her cousin, an affected lady, in love with Bellmour—Mrs. Mountfort
Lætitia, wife to Fondlewife—Mrs. Barry
Sylvia, Vainlove's forsaken mistress—Mrs. Bowman
Lucy, her maid—Mrs. Leigh
Betty.
Boy and Footmen.

Scene: London.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

SCENE: *The Street*.

BELLMOUR *and* VAINLOVE *meeting*.

BELL. Vainlove, and abroad so early! Good-morrow; I thought a contemplative lover could no more have parted with his bed in a morning than he could have slept in't.

VAIN. Bellmour, good-morrow. Why, truth on't is, these early sallies are not usual to me; but business, as you see, sir—[*Showing Letters*.] And business must be followed, or be lost.

BELL. Business! And so must time, my friend, be close pursued, or lost. Business is the rub of life, perverts our aim, casts off the bias, and leaves us wide and short of the intended mark.

VAIN. Pleasure, I guess you mean.

BELL. Ay; what else has meaning?

VAIN. Oh, the wise will tell you—

BELL. More than they believe—or understand.

VAIN. How, how, Ned! A wise man say more than he understands?

BELL. Ay, ay! Wisdom's nothing but a pretending to know and believe more than we really do. You read of but one wise man, and all that he knew was, that he knew nothing. Come, come, leave business to idlers and wisdom to fools; they have need of 'em. Wit be my faculty, and pleasure my occupation; and let Father Time shake his glass. Let low and earthly souls grovel till they have worked themselves six foot deep into a grave. Business is not my element—I roll in a higher orb, and dwell—

VAIN. In castles i' th' air of thy own building. That's thy element, Ned. Well, as high a flier as you are, I have a lure may make you stoop. [*Flings a Letter*.]

BELL. I, marry, sir, I have a hawk's eye at a woman's hand. There's more elegancy in the false spelling of this superscription [*takes up the Letter*] than in all Cicero. Let me see.—How now!—Dear *perfidious Vainlove*. [*Reads*.]

VAIN. Hold, hold, 'slife, that's the wrong.

BELL. Nay, let's see the name—Sylvia!—how canst thou be ungrateful to that creature? She's extremely pretty, and loves thee entirely—I have heard her breathe such raptures about thee—

VAIN. Ay, or anybody that she's about—

BELL. No, faith, Frank, you wrong her; she has been just to you.

VAIN. That's pleasant, by my troth, from thee, who hast had her.

BELL. Never—her affections. 'Tis true, by heaven: she owned it to my face; and, blushing like the virgin morn when it disclosed the cheat which that trusty bawd of nature, night, had hid, confessed her soul was true to you; though I by treachery had stolen the bliss.

VAIN. So was true as turtle—in imagination—Ned, ha? Preach this doctrine to husbands, and the married women will adore thee.

BELL. Why, faith, I think it will do well enough, if the husband be out of the way, for the wife to show her fondness and impatience of his absence by choosing a lover as like him as she can; and what is unlike, she may help out with her own fancy.

VAIN. But is it not an abuse to the lover to be made a blind of?

BELL. As you say, the abuse is to the lover, not the husband. For 'tis an argument of her great zeal towards him, that she will enjoy him in effigy.

VAIN. It must be a very superstitious country where such zeal passes for true devotion. I doubt it will be damned by all our Protestant husbands for flat idolatry. But, if you can make Alderman Fondlewife of your persuasion, this letter will be needless.

BELL. What! The old banker with the handsome wife?

VAIN. Ay.

BELL. Let me see—*Lætitia*! Oh, 'tis a delicious morsel. Dear Frank, thou art the truest friend in the world.

VAIN. Ay, am I not? To be continually starting of hares for you to course. We were certainly cut out for one another; for my temper quits an amour just where thine takes it up. But read that; it is an appointment for me, this evening—when Fondlewife will be gone out of town, to meet the master of a ship, about the return of a venture which he's in danger of losing. Read, read.

BELL. [*reads*.] Hum, Hum—Out of town this evening, and talks of sending for Mr. Spintext to keep me company; but I'll take care he shall not be at home. Good! Spintext! Oh, the fanatic one-eyed parson!

VAIN. Ay.

BELL. [*reads*.] Hum, Hum—That your conversation will be much more agreeable, if you can

counterfeit his habit to blind the servants. Very good! Then I must be disguised?—With all my heart!—It adds a gusto to an amour; gives it the greater resemblance of theft; and, among us lewd mortals, the deeper the sin the sweeter. Frank, I'm amazed at thy good nature—

VAIN. Faith, I hate love when 'tis forced upon a man, as I do wine. And this business is none of my seeking; I only happened to be, once or twice, where Lætitia was the handsomest woman in company; so, consequently, applied myself to her—and it seems she has taken me at my word. Had you been there, or anybody, 't had been the same.

BELL. I wish I may succeed as the same.

VAIN. Never doubt it; for if the spirit of cuckoldom be once raised up in a woman, the devil can't lay it, until she has done't.

BELL. Prithee, what sort of fellow is Fondlewife?

VAIN. A kind of mongrel zealot, sometimes very precise and peevish. But I have seen him pleasant enough in his way; much addicted to jealousy, but more to fondness; so that as he is often jealous without a cause, he's as often satisfied without reason.

BELL. A very even temper, and fit for my purpose. I must get your man Setter to provide my disguise.

VAIN. Ay; you may take him for good and all, if you will, for you have made him fit for nobody else. Well—

BELL. You're going to visit in return of Sylvia's letter. Poor rogue! Any hour of the day or night will serve her. But do you know nothing of a new rival there?

VAIN. Yes; Heartwell—that surly, old, pretended woman-hater—thinks her virtuous; that's one reason why I fail her. I would have her fret herself out of conceit with me, that she may entertain some thoughts of him. I know he visits her every day.

BELL. Yet rails on still, and thinks his love unknown to us. A little time will swell him so, he must be forced to give it birth; and the discovery must needs be very pleasant from himself, to see what pains he will take, and how he will strain to be delivered of a secret, when he has miscarried of it already.

VAIN. Well, good-morrow. Let's dine together; I'll meet at the old place.

BELL. With all my heart. It lies convenient for us to pay our afternoon services to our mistresses. I find I am damnably in love, I'm so uneasy for not having seen Belinda yesterday.

VAIN. But I saw my Araminta, yet am as impatient.

SCENE II.

BELLMOUR *alone*.

BELL. Why, what a cormorant in love am I! Who, not contented with the slavery of honourable love in one place, and the pleasure of enjoying some half a score mistresses of my own acquiring, must yet take Vainlove's business upon my hands, because it lay too heavy upon his; so am not only forced to lie with other men's wives for 'em, but must also undertake the harder task of obliging their mistresses. I must take up, or I shall never hold out. Flesh and blood cannot bear it always.

SCENE III.

[*To him*] SHARPER.

SHARP. I'm sorry to see this, Ned. Once a man comes to his soliloquies, I give him for gone.

BELL. Sharper, I'm glad to see thee.

SHARP. What! is Belinda cruel, that you are so thoughtful?

BELL. No, faith, not for that. But there's a business of consequence fallen out to-day that requires some consideration.

SHARP. Prithee, what mighty business of consequence canst thou have?

BELL. Why, you must know, 'tis a piece of work toward the finishing of an alderman. It seems I must put the last hand to it, and dub him cuckold, that he may be of equal dignity with the rest of his brethren: so I must beg Belinda's pardon.

SHARP. Faith, e'en give her over for good and all; you can have no hopes of getting her for a mistress; and she is too proud, too inconstant, too affected and too witty, and too handsome for a wife.

BELL. But she can't have too much money. There's twelve thousand pound, Tom. 'Tis true she is excessively foppish and affected; but in my conscience I believe the baggage loves me: for she never speaks well of me herself, nor suffers anybody else to rail at me. Then, as I told you, there's twelve thousand pound. Hum! Why, faith, upon second thoughts, she does not appear to

be so very affected neither.—Give her her due, I think the woman's a woman, and that's all. As such, I'm sure I shall like her; for the devil take me if I don't love all the sex.

SHARP. And here comes one who swears as heartily he hates all the sex.

SCENE IV.

[*To them*] HEARTWELL.

BELL. Who? Heartwell? Ay, but he knows better things. How now, George, where hast thou been snarling odious truths, and entertaining company, like a physician, with discourse of their diseases and infirmities? What fine lady hast thou been putting out of conceit with herself, and persuading that the face she had been making all the morning was none of her own? For I know thou art as unmannerly and as unwelcome to a woman as a looking-glass after the smallpox.

HEART. I confess I have not been sneering fulsome lies and nauseous flattery; fawning upon a little tawdry whore, that will fawn upon me again, and entertain any puppy that comes, like a tumbler, with the same tricks over and over. For such, I guess, may have been your late employment.

BELL. Would thou hadst come a little sooner. Vainlove would have wrought thy conversion, and been a champion for the cause.

HEART. What! has he been here? That's one of love's April fools; is always upon some errand that's to no purpose; ever embarking in adventures, yet never comes to harbour.

SHARP. That's because he always sets out in foul weather, loves to buffet with the winds, meet the tide, and sail in the teeth of opposition.

HEART. What! Has he not dropt anchor at Araminta?

BELL. Truth on't is she fits his temper best, is a kind of floating island; sometimes seems in reach, then vanishes and keeps him busied in the search.

SHARP. She had need have a good share of sense to manage so capricious a lover.

BELL. Faith I don't know, he's of a temper the most easy to himself in the world; he takes as much always of an amour as he cares for, and quits it when it grows stale or unpleasant.

SHARP. An argument of very little passion, very good understanding, and very ill nature.

HEART. And proves that Vainlove plays the fool with discretion.

SHARP. You, Bellmour, are bound in gratitude to stickle for him; you with pleasure reap that fruit, which he takes pains to sow: he does the drudgery in the mine, and you stamp your image on the gold.

BELL. He's of another opinion, and says I do the drudgery in the mine. Well, we have each our share of sport, and each that which he likes best; 'tis his diversion to set, 'tis mine to cover the partridge.

HEART. And it should be mine to let 'em go again.

SHARP. Not till you had mouthed a little, George. I think that's all thou art fit for now.

HEART. Good Mr. Young-Fellow, you're mistaken; as able as yourself, and as nimble, too, though I mayn't have so much mercury in my limbs; 'tis true, indeed, I don't force appetite, but wait the natural call of my lust, and think it time enough to be lewd after I have had the temptation.

BELL. Time enough, ay, too soon, I should rather have expected, from a person of your gravity.

HEART. Yet it is oftentimes too late with some of you young, termagant, flashy sinners—you have all the guilt of the intention, and none of the pleasure of the practice—'tis true you are so eager in pursuit of the temptation, that you save the devil the trouble of leading you into it. Nor is it out of discretion that you don't swallow that very hook yourselves have baited, but you are cloyed with the preparative, and what you mean for a whet, turns the edge of your puny stomachs. Your love is like your courage, which you show for the first year or two upon all occasions; till in a little time, being disabled or disarmed, you abate of your vigour; and that daring blade which was so often drawn, is bound to the peace for ever after.

BELL. Thou art an old fornicator of a singular good principle indeed, and art for encouraging youth, that they may be as wicked as thou art at thy years.

HEART. I am for having everybody be what they pretend to be: a whoremaster be a whoremaster, and not like Vainlove, kiss a lap-dog with passion, when it would disgust him from the lady's own lips.

BELL. That only happens sometimes, where the dog has the sweeter breath, for the more cleanly conveyance. But, George, you must not quarrel with little gallantries of this nature: women are often won by 'em. Who would refuse to kiss a lap-dog, if it were preliminary to the lips of his lady?

SHARP. Or omit playing with her fan, and cooling her if she were hot, when it might entitle him

to the office of warming her when she should be cold?

BELL. What is it to read a play in a rainy day? Though you should be now and then interrupted in a witty scene, and she perhaps preserve her laughter, till the jest were over; even that may be borne with, considering the reward in prospect.

HEART. I confess you that are women's asses bear greater burdens: are forced to undergo dressing, dancing, singing, sighing, whining, rhyming, flattering, lying, grinning, cringing, and the drudgery of loving to boot.

BELL. O brute, the drudgery of loving!

HEART. Ay! Why, to come to love through all these incumbrances is like coming to an estate overcharged with debts, which, by the time you have paid, yields no further profit than what the bare tillage and manuring of the land will produce at the expense of your own sweat.

BELL. Prithee, how dost thou love?

SHARP. He! He hates the sex.

HEART. So I hate physic too—yet I may love to take it for my health.

BELL. Well come off, George, if at any time you should be taken straying.

SHARP. He has need of such an excuse, considering the present state of his body.

HEART. How d'ye mean?

SHARP. Why, if whoring be purging, as you call it, then, I may say, marriage is entering into a course of physic.

BELL. How, George! Does the wind blow there?

HEART. It will as soon blow north and by south—marry, quotha! I hope in heaven I have a greater portion of grace, and I think I have baited too many of those traps to be caught in one myself.

BELL. Who the devil would have thee? unless 'twere an oysterwoman to propagate young fry for Billingsgate—thy talent will never recommend thee to anything of better quality.

HEART. My talent is chiefly that of speaking truth, which I don't expect should ever recommend me to people of quality. I thank heaven I have very honestly purchased the hatred of all the great families in town.

SHARP. And you in return of spleen hate them. But could you hope to be received into the alliance of a noble family—

HEART. No; I hope I shall never merit that affliction, to be punished with a wife of birth, be a stag of the first head and bear my horns aloft, like one of the supporters of my wife's coat. S'death I would not be a Cuckold to e'er an illustrious whore in England.

BELL. What, not to make your family, man and provide for your children?

SHARP. For her children, you mean.

HEART. Ay, there you've nicked it. There's the devil upon devil. Oh, the pride and joy of heart 'twould be to me to have my son and heir resemble such a duke; to have a fleering coxcomb scoff and cry, 'Mr. your son's mighty like his Grace, has just his smile and air of's face.' Then replies another, 'Methinks he has more of the Marquess of such a place about his nose and eyes, though he has my Lord what-d'ye-call's mouth to a tittle.' Then I, to put it off as unconcerned, come chuck the infant under the chin, force a smile, and cry, 'Ay, the boy takes after his mother's relations,' when the devil and she knows 'tis a little compound of the whole body of nobility.

BELL+SHARP. Ha, ha, ha!

BELL. Well, but, George, I have one question to ask you—

HEART. Pshaw, I have prattled away my time. I hope you are in no haste for an answer, for I shan't stay now. [*Looking on his watch.*]

BELL. Nay, prithee, George—

HEART. No; besides my business, I see a fool coming this way. Adieu.

SCENE V.

SHARPER, BELLMOUR.

BELL. What does he mean? Oh, 'tis Sir Joseph Wittoll with his friend; but I see he has turned the corner and goes another way.

SHARP. What in the name of wonder is it?

BELL. Why, a fool.

SHARP. 'Tis a tawdry outside.

BELL. And a very beggarly lining—yet he may be worth your acquaintance; a little of thy chymistry, Tom, may extract gold from that dirt.

SHARP. Say you so? 'Faith I am as poor as a chymist, and would be as industrious. But what was he that followed him? Is not he a dragon that watches those golden pippins?

BELL. Hang him, no, he a dragon! If he be, 'tis a very peaceful one. I can ensure his anger dormant; or should he seem to rouse, 'tis but well lashing him, and he will sleep like a top.

SHARP. Ay, is he of that kidney?

BELL. Yet is adored by that bigot, Sir Joseph Wittoll, as the image of valour. He calls him his back, and indeed they are never asunder—yet, last night, I know not by what mischance, the knight was alone, and had fallen into the hands of some night-walkers, who, I suppose, would have pillaged him. But I chanced to come by and rescued him, though I believe he was heartily frightened; for as soon as ever he was loose, he ran away without staying to see who had helped him.

SHARP. Is that bully of his in the army?

BELL. No; but is a pretender, and wears the habit of a soldier, which nowadays as often cloaks cowardice, as a black gown does atheism. You must know he has been abroad—went purely to run away from a campaign; enriched himself with the plunder of a few oaths, and here vents them against the general, who, slighting men of merit, and preferring only those of interest, has made him quit the service.

SHARP. Wherein no doubt he magnifies his own performance.

BELL. Speaks miracles, is the drum to his own praise—the only implement of a soldier he resembles, like that, being full of blustering noise and emptiness—

SHARP. And like that, of no use but to be beaten.

BELL. Right; but then the comparison breaks, for he will take a drubbing with as little noise as a pulpit cushion.

SHARP. His name, and I have done?

BELL. Why, that, to pass it current too, he has gilded with a title: he is called Capt. Bluffe.

SHARP. Well, I'll endeavour his acquaintance—you steer another course, are bound—

> For love's island: I, for the golden coast.
> May each succeed in what he wishes most.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Sir Joseph Wittoll, Sharper *following*.

SHARP. Sure that's he, and alone.

SIR JO. Um—Ay, this, this is the very damned place; the inhuman cannibals, the bloody-minded villains, would have butchered me last night. No doubt they would have flayed me alive, have sold my skin, and devoured, etc.

SHARP. How's this!

SIR JO. An it hadn't been for a civil gentleman as came by and frighted 'em away—but, agad, I durst not stay to give him thanks.

SHARP. This must be Bellmour he means. Ha! I have a thought—

SIR JO. Zooks, would the captain would come; the very remembrance makes me quake; agad, I shall never be reconciled to this place heartily.

SHARP. 'Tis but trying, and being where I am at worst, now luck!—cursed fortune! this must be the place, this damned unlucky place—

SIR JO. Agad, and so 'tis. Why, here has been more mischief done, I perceive.

SHARP. No, 'tis gone, 'tis lost—ten thousand devils on that chance which drew me hither; ay, here, just here, this spot to me is hell; nothing to be found, but the despair of what I've lost. [*Looking about as in search.*]

SIR JO. Poor gentleman! By the Lord Harry I'll stay no longer, for I have found too—

SHARP. Ha! who's that has found? What have you found? Restore it quickly, or by—

SIR JO. Not I, sir, not I; as I've a soul to be saved, I have found nothing but what has been to my loss, as I may say, and as you were saying, sir.

SHARP. Oh, your servant, sir; you are safe, then, it seems. 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody

good. Well, you may rejoice over my ill fortune, since it paid the price of your ransom.

SIR JO. I rejoice! agad, not I, sir: I'm very sorry for your loss, with all my heart, blood and guts, sir; and if you did but know me, you'd ne'er say I were so ill-natured.

SHARP. Know you! Why, can you be so ungrateful to forget me?

SIR JO. O Lord, forget him! No, no, sir, I don't forget you—because I never saw your face before, agad. Ha, ha, ha!

SHARP. How! [*Angrily.*]

SIR JO. Stay, stay, sir, let me recollect—he's a damned angry fellow—I believe I had better remember him, until I can get out of his sight; but out of sight out of mind, agad. [*Aside.*]

SHARP. Methought the service I did you last night, sir, in preserving you from those ruffians, might have taken better root in your shallow memory.

SIR JO. Gads-daggers-belts-blades and scabbards, this is the very gentleman! How shall I make him a return suitable to the greatness of his merit? I had a pretty thing to that purpose, if he ha'n't frighted it out of my memory. Hem! hem! sir, I most submissively implore your pardon for my transgression of ingratitude and omission; having my entire dependence, sir, upon the superfluity of your goodness, which, like an inundation, will, I hope, totally immerge the recollection of my error, and leave me floating, in your sight, upon the full-blown bladders of repentance—by the help of which, I shall once more hope to swim into your favour. [*Bows.*]

SHARP. So-h, oh, sir, I am easily pacified, the acknowledgment of a gentleman—

SIR JO. Acknowledgment! Sir, I am all over acknowledgment, and will not stick to show it in the greatest extremity by night or by day, in sickness or in health, winter or summer; all seasons and occasions shall testify the reality and gratitude of your superabundant humble servant, Sir Joseph Wittoll, knight. Hem! hem!

SHARP. Sir Joseph Wittoll?

SIR JO. The same, sir, of Wittoll Hall in *Comitatu* Bucks.

SHARP. Is it possible! Then I am happy to have obliged the mirror of knighthood and pink of courtesie in the age. Let me embrace you.

SIR JO. O Lord, sir!

SHARP. My loss I esteem as a trifle repaid with interest, since it has purchased me the friendship and acquaintance of the person in the world whose character I admire.

SIR JO. You are only pleased to say so, sir. But, pray, if I may be so bold, what is that loss you mention?

SHARP. Oh, term it no longer so, sir. In the scuffle last night I only dropt a bill of a hundred pound, which, I confess, I came half despairing to recover; but, thanks to my better fortune—

SIR JO. You have found it, sir, then, it seems; I profess I'm heartily glad—

SHARP. Sir, your humble servant. I don't question but you are, that you have so cheap an opportunity of expressing your gratitude and generosity, since the paying so trivial a sum will wholly acquit you and doubly engage me.

SIR JO. What a dickens does he mean by a trivial sum? [*Aside.*] But ha'n't you found it, sir!

SHARP. No otherwise, I vow to Gad, but in my hopes in you, sir.

SIR JO. Humh.

SHARP. But that's sufficient. 'Twere injustice to doubt the honour of Sir Joseph Wittoll.

SIR JO. O Lord, sir.

SHARP. You are above, I'm sure, a thought so low, to suffer me to lose what was ventured in your service; nay, 'twas in a manner paid down for your deliverance; 'twas so much lent you. And you scorn, I'll say that for you—

SIR JO. Nay, I'll say that for myself, with your leave, sir, I do scorn a dirty thing. But, agad, I'm a little out of pocket at present.

SHARP. Pshaw, you can't want a hundred pound. Your word is sufficient anywhere. 'Tis but borrowing so much dirt. You have large acres, and can soon repay it. Money is but dirt, Sir Joseph—mere dirt.

SIR JO. But, I profess, 'tis a dirt I have washed my hands of at present; I have laid it all out upon my Back.

SHARP. Are you so extravagant in clothes, Sir Joseph?

SIR JO. Ha, ha, ha, a very good jest, I profess, ha, ha, ha, a very good jest, and I did not know that I had said it, and that's a better jest than t'other. 'Tis a sign you and I ha'n't been long

acquainted; you have lost a good jest for want of knowing me—I only mean a friend of mine whom I call my Back; he sticks as close to me, and follows me through all dangers—he is indeed back, breast, and head-piece, as it were, to me. Agad, he's a brave fellow. Pauh, I am quite another thing when I am with him: I don't fear the devil (bless us) almost if he be by. Ah! had he been with me last night—

SHARP. If he had, sir, what then? he could have done no more, nor perhaps have suffered so much. Had he a hundred pound to lose? [*Angrily.*]

SIR JO. O Lord, sir, by no means, but I might have saved a hundred pound: I meant innocently, as I hope to be saved, sir (a damned hot fellow), only, as I was saying, I let him have all my ready money to redeem his great sword from limbo. But, sir, I have a letter of credit to Alderman Fondlewife, as far as two hundred pound, and this afternoon you shall see I am a person, such a one as you would wish to have met with—

SHARP. That you are, I'll be sworn. [*Aside.*] Why, that's great and like yourself.

SCENE II.

[*To them*] Captain Bluffe.

SIR JO. Oh, here a' comes—Ay, my Hector of Troy, welcome, my bully, my Back; agad, my heart has gone a pit pat for thee.

BLUFF. How now, my young knight? Not for fear, I hope; he that knows me must be a stranger to fear.

SIR JO. Nay, agad, I hate fear ever since I had like to have died of a fright. But—

BLUFF. But? Look you here, boy, here's your antidote, here's your Jesuits' powder for a shaking fit. But who hast thou got with thee? is he of mettle? [*Laying his hand upon his sword.*]

SIR JO. Ay, bully, a devilish smart fellow: 'a will fight like a cock.

BLUFF. Say you so? Then I honour him. But has he been abroad? for every cock will fight upon his own dunghill.

SIR JO. I don't know, but I'll present you—

BLUFF. I'll recommend myself. Sir, I honour you; I understand you love fighting, I reverence a man that loves fighting. Sir, I kiss your hilts.

SHARP. Sir, your servant, but you are misinformed, for, unless it be to serve my particular friend, as Sir Joseph here, my country, or my religion, or in some very justifiable cause, I'm not for it.

BLUFF. O Lord, I beg your pardon, sir, I find you are not of my palate: you can't relish a dish of fighting without sweet sauce. Now, I think fighting for fighting sake's sufficient cause; fighting to me's religion and the laws.

SIR JO. Ah, well said, my Hero; was not that great, sir? by the Lord Harry he says true; fighting is meat, drink, and cloth to him. But, Back, this gentleman is one of the best friends I have in the world, and saved my life last night—you know I told you.

BLUFF. Ay! Then I honour him again. Sir, may I crave your name?

SHARP. Ay, sir, my name's Sharper.

SIR JO. Pray, Mr. Sharper, embrace my Back. Very well. By the Lord Harry, Mr. Sharper, he's as brave a fellow as Cannibal, are not you, Bully-Back?

SHARP. Hannibal, I believe you mean, Sir Joseph.

BLUFF. Undoubtedly he did, sir; faith, Hannibal was a very pretty fellow—but, Sir Joseph, comparisons are odious—Hannibal was a very pretty fellow in those days, it must be granted—but alas, sir! were he alive now, he would be nothing, nothing in the earth.

SHARP. How, sir! I make a doubt if there be at this day a greater general breathing.

BLUFF. Oh, excuse me, sir! Have you served abroad, sir?

SHARP. Not I, really, sir.

BLUFF. Oh, I thought so. Why, then, you can know nothing, sir: I am afraid you scarce know the history of the late war in Flanders, with all its particulars.

SHARP. Not I, sir, no more than public letters or gazettes tell us.

BLUFF. Gazette! Why there again now. Why, sir, there are not three words of truth the year round put into the Gazette. I'll tell you a strange thing now as to that. You must know, sir, I was resident in Flanders the last campaign, had a small post there, but no matter for that. Perhaps, sir, there was scarce anything of moment done but an humble servant of yours, that shall be nameless, was an eye-witness of. I won't say had the greatest share in't, though I might say that too, since I name nobody you know. Well, Mr. Sharper, would you think it? In all this time, as I

hope for a truncheon, this rascally gazette-writer never so much as once mentioned me—not once, by the wars—took no more notice than as if Nol. Bluffe had not been in the land of the living.

SHARP. Strange!

SIR JO. Yet, by the Lord Harry, 'tis true, Mr. Sharper, for I went every day to coffee-houses to read the gazette myself.

BLUFF. Ay, ay, no matter. You see, Mr. Sharper, after all I am content to retire; live a private person. Scipio and others have done it.

SHARP. Impudent rogue. [*Aside.*]

SIR JO. Ay, this damned modesty of yours. Agad, if he would put in for't he might be made general himself yet.

BLUFF. Oh, fie! no, Sir Joseph; you know I hate this.

SIR JO. Let me but tell Mr. Sharper a little, how you ate fire once out of the mouth of a cannon. Agad, he did; those impenetrable whiskers of his have confronted flames—

BLUFF. Death, what do you mean, Sir Joseph?

SIR JO. Look you now. I tell you he's so modest he'll own nothing.

BLUFF. Pish, you have put me out, I have forgot what I was about. Pray hold your tongue, and give me leave. [*Angrily.*]

SIR JO. I am dumb.

BLUFF. This sword I think I was telling you of, Mr. Sharper. This sword I'll maintain to be the best divine, anatomist, lawyer, or casuist in Europe; it shall decide a controversy or split a cause —

SIR JO. Nay, now I must speak; it will split a hair, by the Lord Harry, I have seen it.

BLUFF. Zounds, sir, it's a lie; you have not seen it, nor sha'n't see it; sir, I say you can't see; what d'ye say to that now?

SIR JO. I am blind.

BLUFF. Death, had any other man interrupted me—

SIR JO. Good Mr. Sharper, speak to him; I dare not look that way.

SHARP. Captain, Sir Joseph's penitent.

BLUFF. Oh, I am calm, sir, calm as a discharged culverin. But 'twas indiscreet, when you know what will provoke me. Nay, come, Sir Joseph, you know my heat's soon over.

SIR JO. Well, I am a fool sometimes, but I'm sorry.

BLUFF. Enough.

SIR JO. Come, we'll go take a glass to drown animosities. Mr. Sharper, will you partake?

SHARP. I wait on you, sir. Nay, pray, Captain; you are Sir Joseph's back.

SCENE III.

ARAMINTA, BELINDA, BETTY *waiting, in Araminta's apartment.*

BELIN. Ah! nay, dear; prithee, good, dear, sweet cousin, no more. O Gad! I swear you'd make one sick to hear you.

ARAM. Bless me! what have I said to move you thus?

BELIN. Oh, you have raved, talked idly, and all in commendation of that filthy, awkward, two-legged creature man. You don't know what you've said; your fever has transported you.

ARAM. If love be the fever which you mean, kind heaven avert the cure. Let me have oil to feed that flame, and never let it be extinct till I myself am ashes.

BELIN. There was a whine! O Gad, I hate your horrid fancy. This love is the devil, and, sure, to be in love is to be possessed. 'Tis in the head, the heart, the blood, the—all over. O Gad, you are quite spoiled. I shall loathe the sight of mankind for your sake.

ARAM. Fie! this is gross affectation. A little of Bellmour's company would change the scene.

BELIN. Filthy fellow! I wonder, cousin—

ARAM. I wonder, cousin, you should imagine I don't perceive you love him.

BELIN. Oh, I love your hideous fancy! Ha, ha, ha, love a man!

ARAM. Love a man! yes, you would not love a beast.

BELIN. Of all beasts not an ass—which is so like your Vainlove. Lard, I have seen an ass look so chagrin, ha, ha, ha (you must pardon me, I can't help laughing), that an absolute lover would have concluded the poor creature to have had darts, and flames, and altars, and all that in his breast. Araminta, come, I'll talk seriously to you now; could you but see with my eyes the buffoonery of one scene of address, a lover, set out with all his equipage and appurtenances; O Gad I sure you would—But you play the game, and consequently can't see the miscarriages obvious to every stander by.

ARAM. Yes, yes; I can see something near it when you and Bellmour meet. You don't know that you dreamt of Bellmour last night, and called him aloud in your sleep.

BELIN. Pish, I can't help dreaming of the devil sometimes; would you from thence infer I love him?

ARAM. But that's not all; you caught me in your arms when you named him, and pressed me to your bosom. Sure, if I had not pinched you until you waked, you had stifled me with kisses.

BELIN. O barbarous aspersion!

ARAM. No aspersion, cousin, we are alone. Nay, I can tell you more.

BELIN. I deny it all.

ARAM. What, before you hear it?

BELIN. My denial is premeditated like your malice. Lard, cousin, you talk oddly. Whatever the matter is, O my Sol, I'm afraid you'll follow evil courses.

ARAM. Ha, ha, ha, this is pleasant.

BELIN. You may laugh, but—

ARAM. Ha, ha, ha!

BELIN. You think the malicious grin becomes you. The devil take Bellmour. Why do you tell me of him?

ARAM. Oh, is it come out? Now you are angry, I am sure you love him. I tell nobody else, cousin. I have not betrayed you yet.

BELIN. Prithee tell it all the world; it's false.

ARAM. Come, then, kiss and friends.

BELIN. Pish.

ARAM. Prithee don't be so peevish.

BELIN. Prithee don't be so impertinent. Betty!

ARAM. Ha, ha, ha!

BETTY. Did your ladyship call, madam?

BELIN. Get my hoods and tippet, and bid the footman call a chair.

ARAM. I hope you are not going out in dudgeon, cousin.

SCENE IV.

[*To them*] Footman.

FOOT. Madam, there are—

BELIN. Is there a chair?

FOOT. No, madam, there are Mr. Bellmour and Mr. Vainlove to wait upon your ladyship.

ARAM. Are they below?

FOOT. No, madam, they sent before, to know if you were at home.

BELIN. The visit's to you, cousin; I suppose I am at my liberty.

ARAM. Be ready to show 'em up.

SCENE V.

[*To them*] Betty, *with Hoods and Looking-glass*.

I can't tell, cousin; I believe we are equally concerned. But if you continue your humour, it won't be very entertaining. (I know she'd fain be persuaded to stay.) [*Aside*.]

BELIN. I shall oblige you, in leaving you to the full and free enjoyment of that conversation you admire.

BELIN. Let me see; hold the glass. Lard, I look wretchedly to-day!

ARAM. Betty, why don't you help my cousin? [*Putting on her hoods.*]

BELIN. Hold off your fists, and see that he gets a chair with a high roof, or a very low seat. Stay, come back here, you Mrs. Fidget—you are so ready to go to the footman. Here, take 'em all again, my mind's changed; I won't go.

SCENE VI.

ARAMINTA, BELINDA.

ARAM. So, this I expected. You won't oblige me, then, cousin, and let me have all the company to myself?

BELIN. No; upon deliberation, I have too much charity to trust you to yourself. The devil watches all opportunities; and in this favourable disposition of your mind, heaven knows how far you may be tempted: I am tender of your reputation.

ARAM. I am obliged to you. But who's malicious now, Belinda?

BELIN. Not I; witness my heart, I stay out of pure affection.

ARAM. In my conscience I believe you.

SCENE VII.

[*To them*] VAINLOVE, BELLMOUR, FOOTMAN.

BELL. So, fortune be praised! To find you both within, ladies, is—

ARAM. No miracle, I hope.

BELL. Not o' your side, madam, I confess. But my tyrant there and I, are two buckets that can never come together.

BELIN. Nor are ever like. Yet we often meet and clash.

BELL. How never like! marry, Hymen forbid. But this it is to run so extravagantly in debt; I have laid out such a world of love in your service, that you think you can never be able to pay me all. So shun me for the same reason that you would a dun.

BELIN. Ay, on my conscience, and the most impertinent and troublesome of duns—a dun for money will be quiet, when he sees his debtor has not wherewithal. But a dun for love is an eternal torment that never rests—

BELL. Until he has created love where there was none, and then gets it for his pains. For importunity in love, like importunity at Court, first creates its own interest and then pursues it for the favour.

ARAM. Favours that are got by impudence and importunity, are like discoveries from the rack, when the afflicted person, for his ease, sometimes confesses secrets his heart knows nothing of.

VAIN. I should rather think favours, so gained, to be due rewards to indefatigable devotion. For as love is a deity, he must be served by prayer.

BELIN. O Gad, would you would all pray to love, then, and let us alone.

VAIN. You are the temples of love, and 'tis through you, our devotion must be conveyed.

ARAM. Rather poor silly idols of your own making, which upon the least displeasure you forsake and set up new. Every man now changes his mistress and his religion as his humour varies, or his interest.

VAIN. O madam—

ARAM. Nay, come, I find we are growing serious, and then we are in great danger of being dull. If my music-master be not gone, I'll entertain you with a new song, which comes pretty near my own opinion of love and your sex. Who's there? Is Mr. Gavot gone? [*Calls.*]

FOOT. Only to the next door, madam. I'll call him.

SCENE VIII.

ARAMINTA, BELINDA, VAINLOVE, *and* BELLMOUR.

BELL. Why, you won't hear me with patience.

ARAM. What's the matter, cousin?

BELL. Nothing, madam, only—

BELIN. Prithee hold thy tongue. Lard, he has so pestered me with flames and stuff, I think I sha'n't endure the sight of a fire this twelvemonth.

BELL. Yet all can't melt that cruel frozen heart.

BELIN. O Gad, I hate your hideous fancy—you said that once before—if you must talk impertinently, for Heaven's sake let it be with variety; don't come always, like the devil, wrapt in flames. I'll not hear a sentence more, that begins with an 'I burn'—or an 'I beseech you, madam.'

BELL. But tell me how you would be adored. I am very tractable.

BELIN. Then know, I would be adored in silence.

BELL. Humph, I thought so, that you might have all the talk to yourself. You had better let me speak; for if my thoughts fly to any pitch, I shall make villainous signs.

BELIN. What will you get by that; to make such signs as I won't understand?

BELL. Ay, but if I'm tongue-tied, I must have all my actions free to—quicken your apprehension —and I—gad let me tell you, my most prevailing argument is expressed in dumb show.

SCENE IX.

[*To them*] MUSIC-MASTER.

ARAM. Oh, I am glad we shall have a song to divert the discourse. Pray oblige us with the last new song.

SONG.

I.

Thus to a ripe, consenting maid,
Poor, old, repenting Delia said,
Would you long preserve your lover?
Would you still his goddess reign?
Never let him all discover,
Never let him much obtain.

II.

Men will admire, adore and die,
While wishing at your feet they lie:
But admitting their embraces,
Wakes 'em from the golden dream;
Nothing's new besides our faces,
Every woman is the same.

ARAM. So, how de'e like the song, gentlemen?

BELL. Oh, very well performed; but I don't much admire the words.

ARAM. I expected it; there's too much truth in 'em. If Mr. Gavot will walk with us in the garden, we'll have it once again; you may like it better at second hearing. You'll bring my cousin.

BELL. Faith, madam, I dare not speak to her, but I'll make signs. [*Addresses Belinda in dumb show.*]

BELIN. Oh, foh, your dumb rhetoric is more ridiculous than your talking impertinence, as an ape is a much more troublesome animal than a parrot.

ARAM. Ay, cousin, and 'tis a sign the creatures mimic nature well; for there are few men but do more silly things than they say.

BELL. Well, I find my apishness has paid the ransom for my speech, and set it at liberty—though, I confess, I could be well enough pleased to drive on a love-bargain in that silent manner —'twould save a man a world of lying and swearing at the year's end. Besides, I have had a little experience, that brings to mind—

When wit and reason both have failed to move;
Kind looks and actions (from success) do prove,
Ev'n silence may be eloquent in love.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

SCENE: *The Street.*

SILVIA *and* LUCY.

SILV. Will he not come, then?

LUCY. Yes, yes; come, I warrant him, if you will go in and be ready to receive him.

SILV. Why did you not tell me? Whom mean you?

LUCY. Whom you should mean, Heartwell.

SILV. Senseless creature, I meant my Vainlove.

LUCY. You may as soon hope to recover your own maiden-head as his love. Therefore, e'en set your heart at rest, and in the name of opportunity mind your own business. Strike Heartwell home before the bait's worn off the hook. Age will come. He nibbled fairly yesterday, and no doubt will be eager enough to-day to swallow the temptation.

SILV. Well, since there's no remedy—yet tell me—for I would know, though to the anguish of my soul, how did he refuse? Tell me, how did he receive my letter—in anger or in scorn?

LUCY. Neither; but what was ten times worse, with damned senseless indifference. By this light I could have spit in his face. Receive it! Why, he received it as I would one of your lovers that should come empty-handed; as a court lord does his mercer's bill or a begging dedication—he received it as if 't had been a letter from his wife.

SILV. What! did he not read it?

LUCY. Hummed it over, gave you his respects, and said he would take time to peruse it—but then he was in haste.

SILV. Respects, and peruse it! He's gone, and Araminta has bewitched him from me. Oh, how the name of rival fires my blood. I could curse 'em both; eternal jealousy attend her love, and disappointment meet his. Oh that I could revenge the torment he has caused; methinks I feel the woman strong within me, and vengeance kindles in the room of love.

LUCY. I have that in my head may make mischief.

SILV. How, dear Lucy?

LUCY. You know Araminta's dissembled coyness has won, and keeps him hers—

SILV. Could we persuade him that she loves another—

LUCY. No, you're out; could we persuade him that she dotes on him, himself. Contrive a kind letter as from her, 'twould disgust his nicety, and take away his stomach.

SILV. Impossible; 'twill never take.

LUCY. Trouble not your head. Let me alone—I will inform myself of what passed between 'em to-day, and about it straight. Hold, I'm mistaken, or that's Heartwell, who stands talking at the corner—'tis he—go get you in, madam, receive him pleasantly, dress up your face in innocence and smiles, and dissemble the very want of dissimulation. You know what will take him.

SILV. 'Tis as hard to counterfeit love as it is to conceal it: but I'll do my weak endeavour, though I fear I have not art.

LUCY. Hang art, madam, and trust to nature for dissembling.

Man was by nature woman's cully made:
We never are but by ourselves betrayed.

SCENE II.

HEARTWELL, VAINLOVE *and* BELLMOUR *following*.

BELL. Hist, hist, is not that Heartwell going to Silvia?

VAIN. He's talking to himself, I think; prithee let's try if we can hear him.

HEART. Why, whither in the devil's name am I agoing now? Hum—let me think—is not this Silvia's house, the cave of that enchantress, and which consequently I ought to shun as I would infection? To enter here is to put on the envenomed shirt, to run into the embraces of a fever, and in some raving fit, be led to plunge myself into that more consuming fire, a woman's arms. Ha! well recollected, I will recover my reason, and be gone.

BELL. Now Venus forbid!

VAIN. Hush—

HEART. Well, why do you not move? Feet, do your office—not one inch; no, fore Gad I'm caught. There stands my north, and thither my needle points. Now could I curse myself, yet cannot repent. O thou delicious, damned, dear, destructive woman! S'death, how the young fellows will hoot me! I shall be the jest of the town: nay, in two days I expect to be chronicled in ditty, and sung in woful ballad, to the tune of the Superannuated Maiden's Comfort, or the Bachelor's Fall; and upon the third, I shall be hanged in effigy, pasted up for the exemplary ornament of necessary houses and cobblers' stalls. Death, I can't think on't—I'll run into the danger to lose the apprehension.

SCENE III.

BELLMOUR, VAINLOVE.

BELL. A very certain remedy, probatum est. Ha, ha, ha, poor George, thou art i' th' right, thou hast sold thyself to laughter; the ill-natured town will find the jest just where thou hast lost it.

Ha, ha, how a' struggled, like an old lawyer between two fees.

VAIN. Or a young wench between pleasure and reputation.

BELL. Or as you did to-day, when half afraid you snatched a kiss from Araminta.

VAIN. She has made a quarrel on't.

BELL. Pauh, women are only angry at such offences to have the pleasure of forgiving them.

VAIN. And I love to have the pleasure of making my peace. I should not esteem a pardon if too easily won.

BELL. Thou dost not know what thou wouldst be at; whether thou wouldst have her angry or pleased. Couldst thou be content to marry Araminta?

VAIN. Could you be content to go to heaven?

BELL. Hum, not immediately, in my conscience not heartily. I'd do a little more good in my generation first, in order to deserve it.

VAIN. Nor I to marry Araminta till I merit her.

BELL. But how the devil dost thou expect to get her if she never yield?

VAIN. That's true; but I would—

BELL. Marry her without her consent; thou 'rt a riddle beyond woman—

SCENE IV.

[*To them*] SETTER.

Trusty Setter, what tidings? How goes the project?

SETTER. As all lewd projects do, sir, where the devil prevents our endeavours with success.

BELL. A good hearing, Setter.

VAIN. Well, I'll leave you with your engineer.

BELL. And hast thou provided necessaries?

SETTER. All, all, sir; the large sanctified hat, and the little precise band, with a swinging long spiritual cloak, to cover carnal knavery—not forgetting the black patch, which Tribulation Spintext wears, as I'm informed, upon one eye, as a penal mourning for the ogling offences of his youth; and some say, with that eye he first discovered the frailty of his wife.

BELL. Well, in this fanatic father's habit will I confess Lætitia.

SETTER. Rather prepare her for confession, sir, by helping her to sin.

BELL. Be at your master's lodging in the evening; I shall use the robes.

SCENE V.

SETTER *alone*.

SETTER. I shall, sir. I wonder to which of these two gentlemen I do most properly appertain: the one uses me as his attendant; the other (being the better acquainted with my parts) employs me as a pimp; why, that's much the more honourable employment—by all means. I follow one as my master, the other follows me as his conductor.

SCENE VI.

[*To him*] LUCY.

LUCY. There's the hang-dog, his man—I had a power over him in the reign of my mistress; but he is too true a *Valet de Chambre* not to affect his master's faults, and consequently is revolted from his allegiance.

SETTER. Undoubtedly 'tis impossible to be a pimp and not a man of parts. That is without being politic, diligent, secret, wary, and so forth—and to all this valiant as Hercules—that is, passively valiant and actively obedient. Ah, Setter, what a treasure is here lost for want of being known.

LUCY. Here's some villainy afoot; he's so thoughtful. May be I may discover something in my mask. Worthy sir, a word with you. [*Puts on her mask.*]

SETTER. Why, if I were known, I might come to be a great man—

LUCY. Not to interrupt your meditation—

SETTER. And I should not be the first that has procured his greatness by pimping.

LUCY. Now poverty and the pox light upon thee for a contemplative pimp.

SETTER. Ha! what art who thus maliciously hast awakened me from my dream of glory? Speak, thou vile disturber—

LUCY. Of thy most vile cogitations—thou poor, conceited wretch, how wert thou valuing thyself upon thy master's employment? For he's the head pimp to Mr. Bellmour.

SETTER. Good words, damsel, or I shall—But how dost thou know my master or me?

LUCY. Yes; I know both master and man to be—

SETTER. To be men, perhaps; nay, faith, like enough: I often march in the rear of my master, and enter the breaches which he has made.

LUCY. Ay, the breach of faith, which he has begun: thou traitor to thy lawful princess.

SETTER. Why, how now! prithee who art? Lay by that worldly face and produce your natural vizor.

LUCY. No, sirrah, I'll keep it on to abuse thee and leave thee without hopes of revenge.

SETTER. Oh! I begin to smoke ye: thou art some forsaken Abigail we have dallied with heretofore—and art come to tickle thy imagination with remembrance of iniquity past.

LUCY. No thou pitiful flatterer of thy master's imperfections; thou maukin made up of the shreds and parings of his superfluous fopperies.

SETTER. Thou art thy mistress's foul self, composed of her sullied iniquities and clothing.

LUCY. Hang thee, beggar's cur, thy master is but a mumper in love, lies canting at the gate; but never dares presume to enter the house.

SETTER. Thou art the wicket to thy mistress's gate, to be opened for all comers. In fine thou art the highroad to thy mistress.

LUCY. Beast, filthy toad, I can hold no longer, look and tremble. [*Unmasks*.]

SETTER. How, Mrs. Lucy!

LUCY. I wonder thou hast the impudence to look me in the face.

SETTER. Adsbud, who's in fault, mistress of mine? who flung the first stone? who undervalued my function? and who the devil could know you by instinct?

LUCY. You could know my office by instinct, and be hanged, which you have slandered most abominably. It vexes me not what you said of my person; but that my innocent calling should be exposed and scandalised—I cannot bear it.

SETTER. Nay, faith, Lucy, I'm sorry, I'll own myself to blame, though we were both in fault as to our offices—come, I'll make you any reparation.

LUCY. Swear.

SETTER. I do swear to the utmost of my power.

LUCY. To be brief, then; what is the reason your master did not appear to-day according to the summons I brought him?

SETTER. To answer you as briefly—he has a cause to be tried in another court.

LUCY. Come, tell me in plain terms, how forward he is with Araminta.

SETTER. Too forward to be turned back—though he's a little in disgrace at present about a kiss which he forced. You and I can kiss, Lucy, without all that.

LUCY. Stand off—he's a precious jewel.

SETTER. And therefore you'd have him to set in your lady's locket.

LUCY. Where is he now?

SETTER. He'll be in the Piazza presently.

LUCY. Remember to-day's behaviour. Let me see you with a penitent face.

SETTER. What, no token of amity, Lucy? You and I don't use to part with dry lips.

LUCY. No, no, avaunt—I'll not be slabbered and kissed now—I'm not i' th' humour.

SETTER. I'll not quit you so. I'll follow and put you into the humour.

SCENE VII.

Sir Joseph Wittoll, Bluffe.

BLUFF. And so, out of your unwonted generosity—

SIR JO. And good-nature, Back; I am good-natured and I can't help it.

BLUFF. You have given him a note upon Fondlewife for a hundred pound.

SIR JO. Ay, ay, poor fellow; he ventured fair for't.

BLUFF. You have disobliged me in it—for I have occasion for the money, and if you would look me in the face again and live, go, and force him to redeliver you the note. Go, and bring it me hither. I'll stay here for you.

SIR JO. You may stay until the day of judgment, then, by the Lord Harry. I know better things than to be run through the guts for a hundred pounds. Why, I gave that hundred pound for being saved, and de'e think, an there were no danger, I'll be so ungrateful to take it from the gentleman again?

BLUFF. Well, go to him from me—tell him, I say, he must refund—or Bilbo's the world, and slaughter will ensue. If he refuse, tell him—but whisper that—tell him—I'll pink his soul. But whisper that softly to him.

SIR JO. So softly that he shall never hear on't, I warrant you. Why, what a devil's the matter, Bully; are you mad? or de'e think I'm mad? Agad, for my part, I don't love to be the messenger of ill news; 'tis an ungrateful office—so tell him yourself.

BLUFF. By these hilts I believe he frightened you into this composition: I believe you gave it him out of fear, pure, paltry fear—confess.

SIR JO. No, no, hang't; I was not afraid neither—though I confess he did in a manner snap me up—yet I can't say that it was altogether out of fear, but partly to prevent mischief—for he was a devilish choleric fellow. And if my choler had been up too, agad, there would have been mischief done, that's flat. And yet I believe if you had been by, I would as soon have let him a' had a hundred of my teeth. Adsheart, if he should come just now when I'm angry, I'd tell him—Mum.

SCENE VIII.

[*To them*] BELLMOUR, SHARPER.

BELL. Thou 'rt a lucky rogue; there's your benefactor; you ought to return him thanks now you have received the favour.

SHARP. Sir Joseph! Your note was accepted, and the money paid at sight. I'm come to return my thanks—

SIR JO. They won't be accepted so readily as the bill, sir.

BELL. I doubt the knight repents, Tom. He looks like the knight of the sorrowful face.

SHARP. This is a double generosity: do me a kindness and refuse my thanks. But I hope you are not offended that I offered them.

SIR JO. May be I am, sir, may be I am not, sir, may be I am both, sir; what then? I hope I may be offended without any offence to you, sir.

SHARP. Hey day! Captain, what's the matter? You can tell.

BLUFF. Mr. Sharper, the matter is plain: Sir Joseph has found out your trick, and does not care to be put upon, being a man of honour.

SHARP. Trick, sir?

SIR JO. Ay, trick, sir, and won't be put upon, sir, being a man of honour, sir, and so, sir—

SHARP. Harkee, Sir Joseph, a word with ye. In consideration of some favours lately received, I would not have you draw yourself into a *premunire*, by trusting to that sign of a man there—that pot-gun charged with wind.

SIR JO. O Lord, O Lord, Captain, come justify yourself—I'll give him the lie if you'll stand to it.

SHARP. Nay, then, I'll be beforehand with you, take that, oaf. [*Cuffs him.*]

SIR JO. Captain, will you see this? Won't you pink his soul?

BLUFF. Husht, 'tis not so convenient now—I shall find a time.

SHARP. What do you mutter about a time, rascal? You were the incendiary. There's to put you in mind of your time.—A memorandum. [*Kicks him.*]

BLUFF. Oh, this is your time, sir; you had best make use on't.

SHARP. I—Gad and so I will: there's again for you. [*Kicks him.*]

BLUFF. You are obliging, sir, but this is too public a place to thank you in. But in your ear, you are to be seen again?

SHARP. Ay, thou inimitable coward, and to be felt—as for example. [*Kicks him.*]

BELL. Ha, ha, ha, prithee come away; 'tis scandalous to kick this puppy unless a man were cold and had no other way to get himself aheat.

SCENE IX.

SIR JOSEPH, BLUFFE.

BLUFF. Very well—very fine—but 'tis no matter. Is not this fine, Sir Joseph?

SIR JO. Indifferent, agad, in my opinion, very indifferent. I'd rather go plain all my life than wear such finery.

BLUFF. Death and hell to be affronted thus! I'll die before I'll suffer it. [*Draws.*]

SIR JO. O Lord, his anger was not raised before. Nay, dear Captain, don't be in passion now he's gone. Put up, put up, dear Back, 'tis your Sir Joseph begs, come let me kiss thee; so, so, put up, put up.

BLUFF. By heaven, 'tis not to be put up.

SIR JO. What, Bully?

BLUFF. The affront.

SIR JO. No, aged, no more 'tis, for that's put up all already; thy sword, I mean.

BLUFF. Well, Sir Joseph, at your entreaty—But were not you, my friend, abused, and cuffed, and kicked? [*Putting up his sword.*]

SIR JO. Ay, ay, so were you too; no matter, 'tis past.

BLUFF. By the immortal thunder of great guns, 'tis false—he sucks not vital air who dares affirm it to this face. [*Looks big.*]

SIR JO. To that face I grant you, Captain. No, no, I grant you—not to that face, by the Lord Harry. If you had put on your fighting face before, you had done his business—he durst as soon have kissed you, as kicked you to your face. But a man can no more help what's done behind his back than what's said—Come, we'll think no more of what's past.

BLUFF. I'll call a council of war within to consider of my revenge to come.

SCENE X.

HEARTWELL, SILVIA. *Silvia's apartment.*

SONG.

As Amoret and Thyrsis lay
Melting the hours in gentle play,
Joining faces, mingling kisses,
And exchanging harmless blisses:
He trembling cried, with eager haste,
O let me feed as well as taste,
I die, if I'm not wholly blest.

[*After the song a dance of antics.*]

SILV. Indeed it is very fine. I could look upon 'em all day.

HEART. Well has this prevailed for me, and will you look upon me?

SILV. If you could sing and dance so, I should love to look upon you too.

HEART. Why, 'twas I sung and danced; I gave music to the voice, and life to their measures. Look you here, Silvia, [*pulling out a purse and chinking it*] here are songs and dances, poetry and music—hark! how sweetly one guinea rhymes to another—and how they dance to the music of their own chink. This buys all t'other—and this thou shalt have; this, and all that I am worth, for the purchase of thy love. Say, is it mine then, ha? Speak, Syren—Oons, why do I look on her! Yet I must. Speak, dear angel, devil, saint, witch; do not rack me with suspense.

SILV. Nay, don't stare at me so. You make me blush—I cannot look.

HEART. O manhood, where art thou? What am I come to? A woman's toy, at these years! Death, a bearded baby for a girl to dandle. O dotage, dotage! That ever that noble passion, lust, should ebb to this degree. No reflux of vigorous blood: but milky love supplies the empty channels; and prompts me to the softness of a child—a mere infant and would suck. Can you love me, Silvia? Speak.

SILV. I dare not speak until I believe you, and indeed I'm afraid to believe you yet.

HEART. Death, how her innocence torments and pleases me! Lying, child, is indeed the art of love, and men are generally masters in it: but I'm so newly entered, you cannot distrust me of any skill in the treacherous mystery. Now, by my soul, I cannot lie, though it were to serve a friend or gain a mistress.

SILV. Must you lie, then, if you say you love me?

HEART. No, no, dear ignorance, thou beauteous changeling—I tell thee I do love thee, and tell it

for a truth, a naked truth, which I'm ashamed to discover.

SILV. But love, they say, is a tender thing, that will smooth frowns, and make calm an angry face; will soften a rugged temper, and make ill-humoured people good. You look ready to fright one, and talk as if your passion were not love, but anger.

HEART. 'Tis both; for I am angry with myself when I am pleased with you. And a pox upon me for loving thee so well—yet I must on. 'Tis a bearded arrow, and will more easily be thrust forward than drawn back.

SILV. Indeed, if I were well assured you loved; but how can I be well assured?

HEART. Take the symptoms—and ask all the tyrants of thy sex if their fools are not known by this party-coloured livery. I am melancholic when thou art absent; look like an ass when thou art present; wake for thee when I should sleep; and even dream of thee when I am awake; sigh much, drink little, eat less, court solitude, am grown very entertaining to myself, and (as I am informed) very troublesome to everybody else. If this be not love, it is madness, and then it is pardonable. Nay, yet a more certain sign than all this, I give thee my money.

SILV. Ay, but that is no sign; for they say, gentlemen will give money to any naughty woman to come to bed to them. O Gemini, I hope you don't mean so—for I won't be a whore.

HEART. The more is the pity. [*Aside*.]

SILV. Nay, if you would marry me, you should not come to bed to me—you have such a beard, and would so prickle one. But do you intend to marry me?

HEART. That a fool should ask such a malicious question! Death, I shall be drawn in before I know where I am. However, I find I am pretty sure of her consent, if I am put to it. [*Aside*.] Marry you? No, no, I'll love you.

SILV. Nay, but if you love me, you must marry me. What, don't I know my father loved my mother and was married to her?

HEART. Ay, ay, in old days people married where they loved; but that fashion is changed, child.

SILV. Never tell me that; I know it is not changed by myself: for I love you, and would marry you.

HEART. I'll have my beard shaved, it sha'n't hurt thee, and we'll go to bed—

SILV. No, no, I'm not such a fool neither, but I can keep myself honest. Here, I won't keep anything that's yours; I hate you now, [*throws the purse*] and I'll never see you again, 'cause you'd have me be naught. [*Going*.]

HEART. Damn her, let her go, and a good riddance. Yet so much tenderness and beauty and honesty together is a jewel. Stay, Silvia—But then to marry; why, every man plays the fool once in his life. But to marry is playing the fool all one's life long.

SILV. What did you call me for?

HEART. I'll give thee all I have, and thou shalt live with me in everything so like my wife, the world shall believe it. Nay, thou shalt think so thyself—only let me not think so.

SILV. No, I'll die before I'll be your whore—as well as I love you.

HEART. [*Aside*.] A woman, and ignorant, may be honest, when 'tis out of obstinacy and contradiction. But, s'death, it is but a may be, and upon scurvy terms. Well, farewell then—if I can get out of sight I may get the better of myself.

SILV. Well—good-bye. [*Turns and weeps*.]

HEART. Ha! Nay, come, we'll kiss at parting. [*Kisses her*.] By heaven, her kiss is sweeter than liberty. I will marry thee. There, thou hast done't. All my resolves melted in that kiss—one more.

SILV. But when?

HEART. I'm impatient until it be done; I will not give myself liberty to think, lest I should cool. I will about a licence straight—in the evening expect me. One kiss more to confirm me mad; so.

SILV. Ha, ha, ha, an old fox trapped—

SCENE XI.

[*To her*] LUCY.

Bless me! you frighted me; I thought he had been come again, and had heard me.

LUCY. Lord, madam, I met your lover in as much haste as if he had been going for a midwife.

SILV. He's going for a parson, girl, the forerunner of a midwife, some nine months hence. Well, I find dissembling to our sex is as natural as swimming to a negro; we may depend upon our skill to save us at a plunge, though till then, we never make the experiment. But how hast thou succeeded?

LUCY. As you would wish—since there is no reclaiming Vainlove. I have found out a pique she has taken at him, and have framed a letter that makes her sue for reconciliation first. I know that will do—walk in and I'll show it you. Come, madam, you're like to have a happy time on't; both your love and anger satisfied! All that can charm our sex conspire to please you.

That woman sure enjoys a blessed night,
Whom love and vengeance both at once delight.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

SCENE: *The Street*.

BELLMOUR, *in fanatic habit*, SETTER.

BELL. 'Tis pretty near the hour. [*Looking on his watch*.] Well, and how, Setter, hae, does my hypocrisy fit me, hae? Does it sit easy on me?

SET. Oh, most religiously well, sir.

BELL. I wonder why all our young fellows should glory in an opinion of atheism, when they may be so much more conveniently lewd under the coverlet of religion.

SET. S'bud, sir, away quickly: there's Fondlewife just turned the corner, and 's coming this way.

BELL. Gad's so, there he is: he must not see me.

SCENE II.

FONDLEWIFE, BARNABY.

FOND. I say I will tarry at home.

BAR. But, sir.

FOND. Good lack! I profess the spirit of contradiction hath possessed the lad—I say I will tarry at home, varlet.

BAR. I have done, sir; then farewell five hundred pound.

FOND. Ha, how's that? Stay, stay, did you leave word, say you, with his wife? With Comfort herself?

BAR. I did; and Comfort will send Tribulation hither as soon as ever he comes home. I could have brought young Mr. Prig to have kept my mistress company in the meantime. But you say—

FOND. How, how, say, varlet! I say let him not come near my doors. I say, he is a wanton young Levite, and pampereth himself up with dainties, that he may look lovely in the eyes of women. Sincerely, I am afraid he hath already defiled the tabernacle of our sister Comfort; while her good husband is deluded by his godly appearance. I say that even lust doth sparkle in his eyes and glow upon his cheeks, and that I would as soon trust my wife with a lord's high-fed chaplain.

BAR. Sir, the hour draws nigh, and nothing will be done here until you come.

FOND. And nothing can be done here until I go; so that I'll tarry, de'e see.

BAR. And run the hazard to lose your affair, sir!

FOND. Good lack, good lack—I profess it is a very sufficient vexation for a man to have a handsome wife.

BAR. Never, sir, but when the man is an insufficient husband. 'Tis then, indeed, like the vanity of taking a fine house, and yet be forced to let lodgings to help pay the rent.

FOND. I profess a very apt comparison, varlet. Go and bid my Cocky come out to me; I will give her some instructions, I will reason with her before I go.

SCENE III.

FONDLEWIFE *alone*.

And in the meantime I will reason with myself. Tell me, Isaac, why art thee jealous? Why art thee distrustful of the wife of thy bosom? Because she is young and vigorous, and I am old and impotent. Then why didst thee marry, Isaac? Because she was beautiful and tempting, and because I was obstinate and doting; so that my inclination was (and is still) greater than my power. And will not that which tempted thee, also tempt others, who will tempt her, Isaac? I fear it much. But does not thy wife love thee, nay, dote upon thee? Yes. Why then! Ay, but to say truth, she's fonder of me than she has reason to be; and in the way of trade, we still suspect the smoothest dealers of the deepest designs. And that she has some designs deeper than thou canst reach, thou hast experimented, Isaac. But, mum.

SCENE IV.

FONDLEWIFE, LÆTITIA.

LÆT. I hope my dearest jewel is not going to leave me—are you, Nykin?

FOND. Wife—have you thoroughly considered how detestable, how heinous, and how crying a sin the sin of adultery is? Have you weighed it, I say? For it is a very weighty sin; and although it may lie heavy upon thee, yet thy husband must also bear his part. For thy iniquity will fall upon his head.

LÆT. Bless me, what means my dear?

FOND. [*Aside.*] I profess she has an alluring eye; I am doubtful whether I shall trust her, even with Tribulation himself. Speak, I say, have you considered what it is to cuckold your husband?

LÆT. [*Aside.*] I'm amazed. Sure he has discovered nothing. Who has wronged me to my dearest? I hope my jewel does not think that ever I had any such thing in my head, or ever will have.

FOND. No, no, I tell you I shall have it in my head—

LÆT. [*Aside.*] I know not what to think. But I'm resolved to find the meaning of it. Unkind dear! Was it for this you sent to call me? Is it not affliction enough that you are to leave me, but you must study to increase it by unjust suspicions? [*Crying.*] Well—well—you know my fondness, and you love to tyrannise—Go on, cruel man, do: triumph over my poor heart while it holds, which cannot be long, with this usage of yours. But that's what you want. Well, you will have your ends soon. You will—you will. Yes, it will break to oblige you. [*Sighs.*]

FOND. Verily, I fear I have carried the jest too far. Nay, look you now if she does not weep—'tis the fondest fool. Nay, Cocky, Cocky, nay, dear Cocky, don't cry, I was but in jest, I was not, ifeck.

LÆT. [*Aside.*] Oh then, all's safe. I was terribly frighted. My affliction is always your jest, barbarous man! Oh, that I should love to this degree! Yet—

FOND. Nay, Cocky.

LÆT. No, no, you are weary of me, that's it—that's all, you would get another wife—another fond fool, to break her heart—Well, be as cruel as you can to me, I'll pray for you; and when I am dead with grief, may you have one that will love you as well as I have done: I shall be contented to lie at peace in my cold grave—since it will please you. [*Sighs.*]

FOND. Good lack, good lack, she would melt a heart of oak—I profess I can hold no longer. Nay, dear Cocky—ifeck, you'll break my heart—ifeck you will. See, you have made me weep—made poor Nykin weep. Nay, come kiss, buss poor Nykin—and I won't leave thee—I'll lose all first.

LÆT. [*Aside.*] How! Heaven forbid! that will be carrying the jest too far indeed.

FOND. Won't you kiss Nykin?

LÆT. Go, naughty Nykin, you don't love me.

FOND. Kiss, kiss, ifeck, I do.

LÆT. No, you don't. [*She kisses him.*]

FOND. What, not love Cocky!

LÆT. No-h. [*Sighs.*]

FOND. I profess I do love thee better than five hundred pound—and so thou shalt say, for I'll leave it to stay with thee.

LÆT. No you sha'n't neglect your business for me. No, indeed, you sha'n't, Nykin. If you don't go, I'll think you been dealous of me still.

FOND. He, he, he, wilt thou, poor fool? Then I will go, I won't be dealous. Poor Cocky, kiss Nykin, kiss Nykin, ee, ee, ee. Here will be the good man anon, to talk to Cocky and teach her how a wife ought to behave herself.

LÆT. [*Aside.*] I hope to have one that will show me how a husband ought to behave himself. I shall be glad to learn, to please my jewel. [*Kiss.*]

FOND. That's my good dear. Come, kiss Nykin once more, and then get you in. So—get you in, get you in. Bye, bye.

LÆT. Bye, Nykin.

FOND. Bye, Cocky.

LÆT. Bye, Nykin.

FOND. Bye, Cocky, bye, bye.

SCENE V.

VAINLOVE, SHARPER.

SHARP. How! Araminta lost!

VAIN. To confirm what I have said, read this. [*Gives a letter*.]

SHARP. [*Reads*.] Hum, hum! And what then appeared a fault, upon reflection seems only an effect of a too powerful passion. I'm afraid I give too great a proof of my own at this time. I am in disorder for what I have written. But something, I know not what, forced me. I only beg a favourable censure of this and your ARAMINTA.

SHARP. Lost! Pray heaven thou hast not lost thy wits. Here, here, she's thy own, man, signed and sealed too. To her, man—a delicious melon, pure and consenting ripe, and only waits thy cutting up: she has been breeding love to thee all this while, and just now she's delivered of it.

VAIN. 'Tis an untimely fruit, and she has miscarried of her love.

SHARP. Never leave this damned ill-natured whimsey, Frank? Thou hast a sickly, peevish appetite; only chew love and cannot digest it.

VAIN. Yes, when I feed myself. But I hate to be crammed. By heaven, there's not a woman will give a man the pleasure of a chase: my sport is always balked or cut short. I stumble over the game I would pursue. 'Tis dull and unnatural to have a hare run full in the hounds' mouth, and would distaste the keenest hunter. I would have overtaken, not have met, my game.

SHARP. However, I hope you don't mean to forsake it; that will be but a kind of mongrel cur's trick. Well, are you for the Mall?

VAIN. No; she will be there this evening. Yes, I will go too, and she shall see her error in—

SHARP. In her choice, I-gad. But thou canst not be so great a brute as to slight her.

VAIN. I should disappoint her if I did not. By her management I should think she expects it.

All naturally fly what does pursue:
'Tis fit men should be coy when women woo.

SCENE VI.

A Room in Fondlewife's House.

A SERVANT *introducing* BELLMOUR, *in fanatic habit, with a patch upon one eye and a book in his hand*.

SERV. Here's a chair, sir, if you please to repose yourself. My mistress is coming, sir.

BELL. Secure in my disguise I have out-faced suspicion and even dared discovery. This cloak my sanctity, and trusty Scarron's novels my prayer-book; methinks I am the very picture of Montufar in the Hypocrites. Oh! she comes.

SCENE VII.

BELLMOUR, LÆTITIA.

So breaks Aurora through the veil of night,
Thus fly the clouds, divided by her light,
And every eye receives a new-born sight.
[*Throwing off his cloak, patch, etc.*]

LÆT. Thus strewed with blushes, like—Ah! Heaven defend me! Who's this? [*Discovering him, starts*.]

BELL. Your lover.

LÆT. Vainlove's friend! I know his face, and he has betrayed me to him. [*Aside*.]

BELL. You are surprised. Did you not expect a lover, madam? Those eyes shone kindly on my first appearance, though now they are o'ercast.

LÆT. I may well be surprised at your person and impudence: they are both new to me. You are not what your first appearance promised: the piety of your habit was welcome, but not the hypocrisy.

BELL. Rather the hypocrisy was welcome, but not the hypocrite.

LÆT. Who are you, sir? You have mistaken the house sure.

BELL. I have directions in my pocket which agree with everything but your unkindness. [*Pulls out the letter*.]

LÆT. My letter! Base Vainlove! Then 'tis too late to dissemble. [*Aside*.] 'Tis plain, then, you have mistaken the person. [*Going*.]

BELL. If we part so I'm mistaken. Hold, hold, madam! I confess I have run into an error. I beg your pardon a thousand times. What an eternal blockhead am I! Can you forgive me the disorder I have put you into? But it is a mistake which anybody might have made.

LÆT. What can this mean? 'Tis impossible he should be mistaken after all this. A handsome fellow if he had not surprised me. Methinks, now I look on him again, I would not have him mistaken. [*Aside.*] We are all liable to mistakes, sir. If you own it to be so, there needs no farther apology.

BELL. Nay, faith, madam, 'tis a pleasant one, and worth your hearing. Expecting a friend last night, at his lodgings, till 'twas late, my intimacy with him gave me the freedom of his bed. He not coming home all night, a letter was delivered to me by a servant in the morning. Upon the perusal I found the contents so charming that I could think of nothing all day but putting 'em in practice, until just now, the first time I ever looked upon the superscription, I am the most surprised in the world to find it directed to Mr. Vainlove. Gad, madam, I ask you a million of pardons, and will make you any satisfaction.

LÆT. I am discovered. And either Vainlove is not guilty, or he has handsomely excused him. [*Aside.*]

BELL. You appear concerned, madam.

LÆT. I hope you are a gentleman;—and since you are privy to a weak woman's failing, won't turn it to the prejudice of her reputation. You look as if you had more honour—

BELL. And more love, or my face is a false witness and deserves to be pilloried. No, by heaven, I swear—

LÆT. Nay, don't swear if you'd have me believe you; but promise—

BELL. Well, I promise. A promise is so cold: give me leave to swear, by those eyes, those killing eyes, by those healing lips. Oh! press the soft charm close to mine, and seal 'em up for ever.

LÆT. Upon that condition. [*He kisses her.*]

BELL. Eternity was in that moment. One more, upon any condition!

LÆT. Nay, now—I never saw anything so agreeably impudent. [*Aside.*] Won't you censure me for this, now?—but 'tis to buy your silence. [*Kiss.*] Oh, but what am I doing!

BELL. Doing! No tongue can express it—not thy own, nor anything, but thy lips. I am faint with the excess of bliss. Oh, for love-sake, lead me anywhither, where I may lie down —quickly, for I'm afraid I shall have a fit.

LÆT. Bless me! What fit?

BELL. Oh, a convulsion—I feel the symptoms.

LÆT. Does it hold you long? I'm afraid to carry you into my chamber.

BELL. Oh, no: let me lie down upon the bed; the fit will be soon over.

SCENE VIII.

SCENE: *St. James's Park.*

ARAMINTA *and* BELINDA *meeting.*

BELIN. Lard, my dear, I am glad I have met you; I have been at the Exchange since, and am so tired—

ARAM. Why, what's the matter?

BELIN. Oh the most inhuman, barbarous hackney-coach! I am jolted to a jelly. Am I not horribly touzed? [*Pulls out a pocket-glass.*]

ARAM. Your head's a little out of order.

BELIN. A little! O frightful! What a furious phiz I have! O most rueful! Ha, ha, ha. O Gad, I hope nobody will come this way, till I have put myself a little in repair. Ah! my dear, I have seen such unhewn creatures since. Ha, ha, ha. I can't for my soul help thinking that I look just like one of 'em. Good dear, pin this, and I'll tell you—very well—so, thank you, my dear—but as I was telling you—pish, this is the untowardest lock—so, as I was telling you—how d'ye like me now? Hideous, ha? Frightful still? Or how?

ARAM. No, no; you're very well as can be.

BELIN. And so—but where did I leave off, my dear? I was telling you—

ARAM. You were about to tell me something, child, but you left off before you began.

BELIN. Oh; a most comical sight: a country squire, with the equipage of a wife and two daughters, came to Mrs. Snipwel's shop while I was there—but oh Gad! two such unlicked cubs!

ARAM. I warrant, plump, cherry-cheeked country girls.

BELIN. Ay, o' my conscience, fat as barn-door fowl: but so bedecked, you would have taken 'em for Friesland hens, with their feathers growing the wrong way. O such outlandish creatures! Such Tramontanæ, and foreigners to the fashion, or anything in practice! I had not patience to

behold. I undertook the modelling of one of their fronts, the more modern structure—

ARAM. Bless me, cousin; why would you affront anybody so? They might be gentlewomen of a very good family—

BELIN. Of a very ancient one, I dare swear, by their dress. Affront! pshaw, how you're mistaken! The poor creature, I warrant, was as full of curtsies, as if I had been her godmother. The truth on't is, I did endeavour to make her look like a Christian—and she was sensible of it, for she thanked me, and gave me two apples, piping hot, out of her under-petticoat pocket. Ha, ha, ha: and t'other did so stare and gape, I fancied her like the front of her father's hall; her eyes were the two jut-windows, and her mouth the great door, most hospitably kept open for the entertainment of travelling flies.

ARAM. So then, you have been diverted. What did they buy?

BELIN. Why, the father bought a powder-horn, and an almanac, and a comb-case; the mother, a great fruz-towr, and a fat amber necklace; the daughters only tore two pairs of kid-leather gloves, with trying 'em on. O Gad, here comes the fool that dined at my Lady Freelove's t'other day.

SCENE IX.

[*To them*] Sir Joseph *and* Bluffe.

ARAM. May be he may not know us again.

BELIN. We'll put on our masks to secure his ignorance. [*They put on their masks.*]

SIR JO. Nay, Gad, I'll pick up; I'm resolved to make a night on't. I'll go to Alderman Fondlewife by and by, and get fifty pieces more from him. Adslidikins, bully, we'll wallow in wine and women. Why, this same Madeira wine has made me as light as a grasshopper. Hist, hist, bully, dost thou see those tearers? [*Sings.*] Look you what here is—look you what here is—toll—loll—dera—toll—loll—agad, t'other glass of Madeira, and I durst have attacked 'em in my own proper person, without your help.

BLUFF. Come on then, knight. But do you know what to say to them?

SIR JO. Say: pooh, pox, I've enough to say—never fear it—that is, if I can but think on't: truth is, I have but a treacherous memory.

BELIN. O frightful! cousin, what shall we do? These things come towards us.

ARAM. No matter. I see Vainlove coming this way—and, to confess my failing, I am willing to give him an opportunity of making his peace with me—and to rid me of these coxcombs, when I seem opprest with 'em, will be a fair one.

BLUFF. Ladies, by these hilts you are well met.

ARAM. We are afraid not.

BLUFF. What says my pretty little knapsack carrier. [*To* Belinda.]

BELIN. O monstrous filthy fellow! good slovenly Captain Huffe, Bluffe (what is your hideous name?) be gone: you stink of brandy and tobacco, most soldier-like. Foh. [*Spits.*]

SIR JO. Now am I slap-dash down in the mouth, and have not one word to say! [*Aside.*]

ARAM. I hope my fool has not confidence enough to be troublesome. [*Aside.*]

SIR JO. Hem! Pray, madam, which way is the wind?

ARAM. A pithy question. Have you sent your wits for a venture, sir, that you enquire?

SIR JO. Nay, now I'm in, I can prattle like a magpie. [*Aside.*]

SCENE X.

[*To them*] Sharper *and* Vainlove *at some distance.*

BELIN. Dear Araminta, I'm tired.

ARAM. 'Tis but pulling off our masks, and obliging Vainlove to know us. I'll be rid of my fool by fair means.—Well, Sir Joseph, you shall see my face; but, be gone immediately. I see one that will be jealous, to find me in discourse with you. Be discreet. No reply; but away. [*Unmasks.*]

SIR JO. The great fortune, that dined at my Lady Freelove's! Sir Joseph, thou art a made man. Agad, I'm in love up to the ears. But I'll be discreet, and hushed. [*Aside.*]

BLUFF. Nay, by the world, I'll see your face.

BELIN. You shall. [*Unmasks.*]

SHARP. Ladies, your humble servant. We were afraid you would not have given us leave to know you.

ARAM. We thought to have been private. But we find fools have the same advantage over a face

in a mask that a coward has while the sword is in the scabbard, so were forced to draw in our own defence.

BLUFF. My blood rises at that fellow: I can't stay where he is; and I must not draw in the park. [*To* SIR JOSEPH.]

SIR JO. I wish I durst stay to let her know my lodging.

SCENE XI.

ARAMINTA, BELINDA, VAINLOVE, SHARPER.

SHARP. There is in true beauty, as in courage, somewhat which narrow souls cannot dare to admire. And see, the owls are fled, as at the break of day.

BELIN. Very courtly. I believe Mr. Vainlove has not rubbed his eyes since break of day neither, he looks as if he durst not approach. Nay, come, cousin, be friends with him. I swear he looks so very simply—ha, ha, ha. Well, a lover in the state of separation from his mistress is like a body without a soul. Mr. Vainlove, shall I be bound for your good behaviour for the future?

VAIN. Now must I pretend ignorance equal to hers, of what she knows as well as I. [*Aside*.] Men are apt to offend ('tis true) where they find most goodness to forgive. But, madam, I hope I shall prove of a temper not to abuse mercy by committing new offences.

ARAM. So cold! [*Aside*.]

BELIN. I have broke the ice for you, Mr. Vainlove, and so I leave you. Come, Mr. Sharper, you and I will take a turn, and laugh at the vulgar—both the great vulgar and the small. O Gad! I have a great passion for Cowley. Don't you admire him?

SHARP. Oh, madam! he was our English Horace.

BELIN. Ah so fine! so extremely fine! So everything in the world that I like—O Lord, walk this way—I see a couple; I'll give you their history.

SCENE XII.

ARAMINTA, VAINLOVE.

VAIN. I find, madam, the formality of the law must be observed, though the penalty of it be dispensed with, and an offender must plead to his arraignment, though he has his pardon in his pocket.

ARAM. I'm amazed! This insolence exceeds t'other; whoever has encouraged you to this assurance, presuming upon the easiness of my temper, has much deceived you, and so you shall find.

VAIN. Hey day! Which way now? Here's fine doubling. [*Aside*.]

ARAM. Base man! Was it not enough to affront me with your saucy passion?

VAIN. You have given that passion a much kinder epithet than saucy, in another place.

ARAM. Another place! Some villainous design to blast my honour. But though thou hadst all the treachery and malice of thy sex, thou canst not lay a blemish on my fame. No, I have not erred in one favourable thought of mankind. How time might have deceived me in you, I know not; my opinion was but young, and your early baseness has prevented its growing to a wrong belief. Unworthy and ungrateful! be gone, and never see me more.

VAIN. Did I dream? or do I dream? Shall I believe my eyes, or ears? The vision is here still. Your passion, madam, will admit of no farther reasoning; but here's a silent witness of your acquaintance. [*Takes our the letter, and offers it: she snatches it, and throws it away*.]

ARAM. There's poison in everything you touch. Blisters will follow—

VAIN. That tongue, which denies what the hands have done.

ARAM. Still mystically senseless and impudent; I find I must leave the place.

VAIN. No, madam, I'm gone. She knows her name's to it, which she will be unwilling to expose to the censure of the first finder.

ARAM. Woman's obstinacy made me blind to what woman's curiosity now tempts me to see. [*Takes up the letter*.]

SCENE XIII.

BELINDA, SHARPER.

BELIN. Nay, we have spared nobody, I swear. Mr. Sharper, you're a pure man; where did you get this excellent talent of railing?

SHARP. Faith, madam, the talent was born with me:—I confess I have taken care to improve it, to qualify me for the society of ladies.

BELIN. Nay, sure, railing is the best qualification in a woman's man.

SCENE XIV.

[*To them*] FOOTMAN.

SHARP. The second best, indeed, I think.

BELIN. How now, Pace? Where's my cousin?

FOOT. She's not very well, madam, and has sent to know if your ladyship would have the coach come again for you?

BELIN. O Lord, no, I'll go along with her. Come, Mr. Sharper.

SCENE XV.

SCENE: *A chamber in Fondlewife's house*.

LÆTITIA and BELLMOUR, his cloak, hat, etc., lying loose about the chamber.

BELL. Here's nobody, nor no noise—'twas nothing but your fears.

LÆT. I durst have sworn I had heard my monster's voice. I swear I was heartily frightened; feel how my heart beats.

BELL. 'Tis an alarm to love—come in again, and let us—

FOND. [*Without*.] Cocky, Cocky, where are you, Cocky? I'm come home.

LÆT. Ah! There he is. Make haste, gather up your things.

FOND. Cocky, Cocky, open the door.

BELL. Pox choke him, would his horns were in his throat. My patch, my patch. [*Looking about, and gathering up his things*.]

LÆT. My jewel, art thou there?—No matter for your patch.—You s'an't tum in, Nykin—run into my chamber, quickly, quickly—You s'an't tum in.

FOND. Nay, prithee, dear, i'feck I'm in haste.

LÆT. Then I'll let you in. [*Opens the door*.]

SCENE XVI.

LÆTITIA, FONDLEWIFE, SIR JOSEPH.

FOND. Kiss, dear—I met the master of the ship by the way, and I must have my papers of accounts out of your cabinet.

LÆT. Oh, I'm undone! [*Aside*.]

SIR JO. Pray, first let me have fifty pound, good Alderman, for I'm in haste.

FOND. A hundred has already been paid by your order. Fifty? I have the sum ready in gold in my closet.

SCENE XVII.

LÆTITIA, SIR JOSEPH.

SIR JO. Agad, it's a curious, fine, pretty rogue; I'll speak to her.—Pray, Madam, what news d'ye hear?

LÆT. Sir, I seldom stir abroad. [*Walks about in disorder*.]

SIR JO. I wonder at that, Madam, for 'tis most curious fine weather.

LÆT. Methinks 't has been very ill weather.

SIR JO. As you say, madam, 'tis pretty bad weather, and has been so a great while.

SCENE XVIII.

[*To them*] FONDLEWIFE.

FOND. Here are fifty pieces in this purse, Sir Joseph; if you will tarry a moment, till I fetch my papers, I'll wait upon you down-stairs.

LÆT. Ruined, past redemption! what shall I do—ha! this fool may be of use. (Aside.) [*As* FONDLEWIFE *is going into the chamber, she runs to* SIR JOSEPH, *almost pushes him down, and cries out*.] Stand off, rude ruffian. Help me, my dear. O bless me! Why will you leave me alone with such a Satyr?

FOND. Bless us! What's the matter? What's the matter?

LÆT. Your back was no sooner turned, but like a lion he came open mouthed upon me, and would have ravished a kiss from me by main force.

SIR JO. O Lord! Oh, terrible! Ha, ha, ha. Is your wife mad, Alderman?

LÆT. Oh! I'm sick with the fright; won't you take him out of my sight?

FOND. O traitor! I'm astonished. O bloody-minded traitor!

SIR JO. Hey-day! Traitor yourself. By the Lord Harry, I was in most danger of being ravished, if you go to that.

FOND. Oh, how the blasphemous wretch swears! Out of my house, thou son of the whore of Babylon; offspring of Bel and the Dragon.—Bless us! ravish my wife! my Dinah! Oh, Shechemite! Begone, I say.

SIR JO. Why, the devil's in the people, I think.

SCENE XIX.

LÆTITIA, FONDLEWIFE.

LÆT. Oh! won't you follow, and see him out of doors, my dear?

FOND. I'll shut this door to secure him from coming back—Give me the key of your cabinet, Cocky. Ravish my wife before my face? I warrant he's a Papist in his heart at least, if not a Frenchman.

LÆT. What can I do now! (Aside.) Oh! my dear, I have been in such a fright, that I forgot to tell you, poor Mr. Spintext has a sad fit of the colic, and is forced to lie down upon our bed—you'll disturb him; I can tread softlier.

FOND. Alack, poor man—no, no—you don't know the papers—I won't disturb him; give me the key. [*She gives him the key, goes to the chamber door and speaks aloud.*]

LÆT. 'Tis nobody but Mr. Fondlewife, Mr. Spintext, lie still on your stomach; lying on your stomach will ease you of the colic.

FOND. Ay, ay, lie still, lie still; don't let me disturb you.

SCENE XX.

LÆTITIA *alone*.

LÆT. Sure, when he does not see his face, he won't discover him. Dear fortune, help me but this once, and I'll never run in thy debt again. But this opportunity is the Devil.

SCENE XXI.

FONDLEWIFE *returns with Papers*.

FOND. Good lack! good lack! I profess the poor man is in great torment; he lies as flat—Dear, you should heat a trencher, or a napkin.—Where's Deborah? Let her clap some warm thing to his stomach, or chafe it with a warm hand rather than fail. What book's this? [*Sees the book that* BELLMOUR *forgot*.]

LÆT. Mr. Spintext's prayer-book, dear. Pray Heaven it be a prayer-book. [*Aside*.]

FOND. Good man! I warrant he dropped it on purpose that you might take it up and read some of the pious ejaculations. [*Taking up the book*.] O bless me! O monstrous! A prayer-book? Ay, this is the devil's paternoster. Hold, let me see: The Innocent Adultery.

LÆT. Misfortune! now all's ruined again. [*Aside*.]

BELL. [*Peeping*]. Damned chance! If I had gone a-whoring with the Practice of Piety in my pocket I had never been discovered.

FOND. Adultery, and innocent! O Lord! Here's doctrine! Ay, here's discipline!

LÆT. Dear husband, I'm amazed. Sure it is a good book, and only tends to the speculation of sin.

FOND. Speculation! No no; something went farther than speculation when I was not to be let in. —Where is this apocryphal elder? I'll ferret him.

LÆT. I'm so distracted, I can't think of a lie. [*Aside*.]

SCENE XXII.

LÆTITIA *and* FONDLEWIFE *haling out* BELLMOUR.

FOND. Come out here, thou Ananias incarnate. Who, how now! Who have we here?

LÆT. Ha! [*Shrieks as surprised*.]

FOND. Oh thou salacious woman! Am I then brutified? Ay, I feel it here; I sprout, I bud, I

blossom, I am ripe-horn-mad. But who in the devil's name are you? Mercy on me for swearing. But—

LÆT. Oh! goodness keep us! Who are you? What are you?

BELL. Soh!

LÆT. In the name of the—O! Good, my dear, don't come near it; I'm afraid 'tis the devil; indeed, it has hoofs, dear.

FOND. Indeed, and I have horns, dear. The devil, no, I am afraid 'tis the flesh, thou harlot. Dear, with the pox. Come Syren, speak, confess, who is this reverend, brawny pastor.

LÆT. Indeed, and indeed now, my dear Nykin, I never saw this wicked man before.

FOND. Oh, it is a man then, it seems.

LÆT. Rather, sure it is a wolf in the clothing of a sheep.

FOND. Thou art a devil in his proper clothing—woman's flesh. What, you know nothing of him, but his fleece here! You don't love mutton? you Magdalen unconverted.

BELL. Well, now, I know my cue.—That is, very honourably to excuse her, and very impudently accuse myself. [*Aside.*]

LÆT. Why then, I wish I may never enter into the heaven of your embraces again, my dear, if ever I saw his face before.

FOND. O Lord! O strange! I am in admiration of your impudence. Look at him a little better; he is more modest, I warrant you, than to deny it. Come, were you two never face to face before? Speak.

BELL. Since all artifice is vain. And I think myself obliged to speak the truth in justice to your wife.—No.

FOND. Humph.

LÆT. No, indeed, dear.

FOND. Nay, I find you are both in a story; that I must confess. But, what—not to be cured of the colic? Don't you know your patient, Mrs. Quack? Oh, 'lie upon your stomach; lying upon your stomach will cure you of the colic.' Ah! answer me, Jezebel?

LÆT. Let the wicked man answer for himself: does he think I have nothing to do but excuse him? 'tis enough if I can clear my own innocence to my own dear.

BELL. By my troth, and so 'tis. I have been a little too backward; that's the truth on't.

FOND. Come, sir, who are you, in the first place? And what are you?

BELL. A whore-master.

FOND. Very concise.

LÆT. O beastly, impudent creature.

FOND. Well, sir, and what came you hither for?

BELL. To lie with your wife.

FOND. Good again. A very civil person this, and I believe speaks truth.

LÆT. Oh, insupportable impudence.

FOND. Well, sir; pray be covered—and you have—Heh! You have finished the matter, heh? And I am, as I should be, a sort of civil perquisite to a whore-master, called a cuckold, heh? Is it not so? Come, I'm inclining to believe every word you say.

BELL. Why, faith, I must confess, so I designed you; but you were a little unlucky in coming so soon, and hindered the making of your own fortune.

FOND. Humph. Nay, if you mince the matter once and go back of your word you are not the person I took you for. Come, come, go on boldly.—What, don't be ashamed of your profession.—Confess, confess; I shall love thee the better for't. I shall, i'feck. What, dost think I don't know how to behave myself in the employment of a cuckold, and have been three years apprentice to matrimony? Come, come; plain dealing is a jewel.

BELL. Well, since I see thou art a good, honest fellow, I'll confess the whole matter to thee.

FOND. Oh, I am a very honest fellow. You never lay with an honester man's wife in your life.

LÆT. How my heart aches! All my comfort lies in his impudence, and heaven be praised, he has a considerable portion. [*Aside.*]

BELL. In short, then, I was informed of the opportunity of your absence by my spy (for faith, honest Isaac, I have a long time designed thee this favour). I knew Spintext was to come by your

direction. But I laid a trap for him, and procured his habit, in which I passed upon your servants, and was conducted hither. I pretended a fit of the colic, to excuse my lying down upon your bed; hoping that when she heard of it, her good nature would bring her to administer remedies for my distemper. You know what might have followed. But, like an uncivil person, you knocked at the door before your wife was come to me.

FOND. Ha! This is apocryphal; I may choose whether I will believe it or no.

BELL. That you may, faith, and I hope you won't believe a word on't—but I can't help telling the truth, for my life.

FOND. How! would not you have me believe you, say you?

BELL. No; for then you must of consequence part with your wife, and there will be some hopes of having her upon the public; then the encouragement of a separate maintenance—

FOND. No, no; for that matter, when she and I part, she'll carry her separate maintenance about her.

LÆT. Ah, cruel dear, how can you be so barbarous? You'll break my heart, if you talk of parting. [*Cries*.]

FOND. Ah, dissembling vermin!

BELL. How can'st thou be so cruel, Isaac? Thou hast the heart of a mountain-tiger. By the faith of a sincere sinner, she's innocent for me. Go to him, madam, fling your snowy arms about his stubborn neck; bathe his relentless face in your salt trickling tears. [*She goes and hangs upon his neck, and kisses him*. Bellmour *kisses her hand behind* Fondlewife's *back*.] So, a few soft words, and a kiss, and the good man melts. See how kind nature works, and boils over in him.

LÆT. Indeed, my dear, I was but just come down stairs, when you knocked at the door; and the maid told me Mr. Spintext was ill of the colic upon our bed. And won't you speak to me, cruel Nykin? Indeed, I'll die, if you don't.

FOND. Ah! No, no, I cannot speak, my heart's so full—I have been a tender husband, a tender yoke-fellow; you know I have.—But thou hast been a faithless Delilah, and the Philistines—Heh! Art thou not vile and unclean, heh? Speak. [*Weeping*.]

LÆT. No-h. [*Sighing*.]

FOND. Oh that I could believe thee!

LÆT. Oh, my heart will break. [*Seeming to faint*.]

FOND. Heh, how! No, stay, stay, I will believe thee, I will. Pray bend her forward, sir.

LÆT. Oh! oh! Where is my dear?

FOND. Here, here; I do believe thee. I won't believe my own eyes.

BELL. For my part, I am so charmed with the love of your turtle to you, that I'll go and solicit matrimony with all my might and main.

FOND. Well, well, sir; as long as I believe it, 'tis well enough. No thanks to you, sir, for her virtue.—But, I'll show you the way out of my house, if you please. Come, my dear. Nay, I will believe thee, I do, i'feck.

BELL. See the great blessing of an easy faith; opinion cannot err.

> No husband, by his wife, can be deceived;
> She still is virtuous, if she's so believed.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

SCENE: *The Street*.

Bellmour *in fanatic habit*, Setter, Heartwell, Lucy.

BELL. Setter! Well encountered.

SET. Joy of your return, sir. Have you made a good voyage? or have you brought your own lading back?

BELL. No, I have brought nothing but ballast back—made a delicious voyage, Setter; and might have rode at anchor in the port till this time, but the enemy surprised us—I would unrig.

SET. I attend you, sir.

BELL. Ha! Is it not that Heartwell at Sylvia's door? Be gone quickly, I'll follow you—I would not be known. Pox take 'em, they stand just in my way.

SCENE II.

BELLMOUR, HEARTWELL, LUCY.

HEART. I'm impatient till it be done.

LUCY. That may be, without troubling yourself to go again for your brother's chaplain. Don't you see that stalking form of godliness?

HEART. O ay; he's a fanatic.

LUCY. An executioner qualified to do your business. He has been lawfully ordained.

HEART. I'll pay him well, if you'll break the matter to him.

LUCY. I warrant you.—Do you go and prepare your bride.

SCENE III.

BELLMOUR, LUCY.

BELL. Humph, sits the wind there? What a lucky rogue am I! Oh, what sport will be here, if I can persuade this wench to secrecy!

LUCY. Sir: reverend sir.

BELL. Madam. [*Discovers himself.*]

LUCY. Now, goodness have mercy upon me! Mr. Bellmour! is it you?

BELL. Even I. What dost think?

LUCY. Think! That I should not believe my eyes, and that you are not what you seem to be.

BELL. True. But to convince thee who I am, thou knowest my old token. [*Kisses her.*]

LUCY. Nay, Mr. Bellmour: O Lard! I believe you are a parson in good earnest, you kiss so devoutly.

BELL. Well, your business with me, Lucy?

LUCY. I had none, but through mistake.

BELL. Which mistake you must go through with, Lucy. Come, I know the intrigue between Heartwell and your mistress; and you mistook me for Tribulation Spintext, to marry 'em—Ha? are not matters in this posture? Confess: come, I'll be faithful; I will, i'faith. What! diffide in me, Lucy?

LUCY. Alas-a-day! You and Mr. Vainlove, between you, have ruined my poor mistress: you have made a gap in her reputation; and can you blame her if she make it up with a husband?

BELL. Well, is it as I say?

LUCY. Well, it is then: but you'll be secret?

BELL. Phuh, secret, ay. And to be out of thy debt, I'll trust thee with another secret. Your mistress must not marry Heartwell, Lucy.

LUCY. How! O Lord!

BELL. Nay, don't be in passion, Lucy:—I'll provide a fitter husband for her. Come, here's earnest of my good intentions for thee too; let this mollify. [*Gives her money.*] Look you, Heartwell is my friend; and though he be blind, I must not see him fall into the snare, and unwittingly marry a whore.

LUCY. Whore! I'd have you to know my mistress scorns—

BELL. Nay, nay: look you, Lucy; there are whores of as good quality. But to the purpose, if you will give me leave to acquaint you with it. Do you carry on the mistake of me: I'll marry 'em. Nay, don't pause; if you do, I'll spoil all. I have some private reasons for what I do, which I'll tell you within. In the meantime, I promise—and rely upon me—to help your mistress to a husband: nay, and thee too, Lucy. Here's my hand, I will; with a fresh assurance. [*Gives her more money.*]

LUCY. Ah, the devil is not so cunning. You know my easy nature. Well, for once I'll venture to serve you; but if you do deceive me, the curse of all kind, tender-hearted women light upon you!

BELL. That's as much as to say, the pox take me. Well, lead on.

SCENE IV.

VAINLOVE, SHARPER, *and* SETTER.

SHARP. Just now, say you; gone in with Lucy?

SET. I saw him, sir, and stood at the corner where you found me, and overheard all they said: Mr. Bellmour is to marry 'em.

SHARP. Ha, ha; it will be a pleasant cheat. I'll plague Heartwell when I see him. Prithee, Frank,

let's tease him; make him fret till he foam at the mouth, and disgorge his matrimonial oath with interest. Come, thou'rt musty—

SET. [*To* SHARPER.] Sir, a word with you. [*Whispers him.*]

VAIN. Sharper swears she has forsworn the letter—I'm sure he tells me truth;—but I'm not sure she told him truth: yet she was unaffectedly concerned, he says, and often blushed with anger and surprise: and so I remember in the park. She had reason, if I wrong her. I begin to doubt.

SHARP. Say'st thou so?

SET. This afternoon, sir, about an hour before my master received the letter.

SHARP. In my conscience, like enough.

SET. Ay, I know her, sir; at least, I'm sure I can fish it out of her: she's the very sluice to her lady's secrets: 'tis but setting her mill agoing, and I can drain her of 'em all.

SHARP. Here, Frank, your bloodhound has made out the fault: this letter, that so sticks in thy maw, is counterfeit; only a trick of Sylvia in revenge, contrived by Lucy.

VAIN. Ha! It has a colour; but how do you know it, sirrah?

SET. I do suspect as much; because why, sir, she was pumping me about how your worship's affairs stood towards Madam Araminta; as, when you had seen her last? when you were to see her next? and, where you were to be found at that time? and such like.

VAIN. And where did you tell her?

SET. In the Piazza.

VAIN. There I received the letter—it must be so—and why did you not find me out, to tell me this before, sot?

SET. Sir, I was pimping for Mr. Bellmour.

SHARP. You were well employed: I think there is no objection to the excuse.

VAIN. Pox of my saucy credulity—if I have lost her, I deserve it. But if confession and repentance be of force, I'll win her, or weary her into a forgiveness.

SHARP. Methinks I long to see Bellmour come forth.

SCENE V.

SHARPER, BELLMOUR, SETTER.

SET. Talk of the devil: see where he comes.

SHARP. Hugging himself in his prosperous mischief—no real fanatic can look better pleased after a successful sermon of sedition.

BELL. Sharper! Fortify thy spleen: such a jest! Speak when thou art ready.

SHARP. Now, were I ill-natured would I utterly disappoint thy mirth: hear thee tell thy mighty jest with as much gravity as a bishop hears venereal causes in the spiritual court. Not so much as wrinkle my face with one smile; but let thee look simply, and laugh by thyself.

BELL. Pshaw, no; I have a better opinion of thy wit. Gad, I defy thee.

SHARP. Were it not loss of time you should make the experiment. But honest Setter, here, overheard you with Lucy, and has told me all.

BELL. Nay, then, I thank thee for not putting me out of countenance. But, to tell you something you don't know. I got an opportunity after I had married 'em, of discovering the cheat to Sylvia. She took it at first, as another woman would the like disappointment; but my promise to make her amends quickly with another husband somewhat pacified her.

SHARP. But how the devil do you think to acquit yourself of your promise? Will you marry her yourself?

BELL. I have no such intentions at present. Prithee, wilt thou think a little for me? I am sure the ingenious Mr. Setter will assist.

SET. O Lord, sir!

BELL. I'll leave him with you, and go shift my habit.

SCENE VI.

SHARPER, SETTER, SIR JOSEPH, and BLUFFE.

SHARP. Heh! Sure fortune has sent this fool hither on purpose. Setter, stand close; seem not to observe 'em; and, hark ye. [*Whispers.*]

BLUFF. Fear him not. I am prepared for him now, and he shall find he might have safer roused

a sleeping lion.

SIR JO. Hush, hush! don't you see him?

BLUFF. Show him to me. Where is he?

SIR JO. Nay, don't speak so loud. I don't jest as I did a little while ago. Look yonder! Agad, if he should hear the lion roar, he'd cudgel him into an ass, and his primitive braying. Don't you remember the story in Æsop's Fables, bully? Agad, there are good morals to be picked out of Æsop's Fables, let me tell you that, and Reynard the Fox too.

BLUFF. Damn your morals.

SIR JO. Prithee, don't speak so loud.

BLUFF. Damn your morals; I must revenge the affront done to my honour. [*In a low voice.*]

SIR JO. Ay; do, do, captain, if you think fitting. You may dispose of your own flesh as you think fitting, d'ye see, but, by the Lord Harry, I'll leave you. [*Stealing away upon his tip-toes.*]

BLUFF. Prodigious! What, will you forsake your friend in extremity? You can't in honour refuse to carry him a challenge. [*Almost whispering, and treading softly after him.*]

SIR JO. Prithee, what do you see in my face that looks as if I would carry a challenge? Honour is your province, captain; take it. All the world know me to be a knight, and a man of worship.

SET. I warrant you, sir, I'm instructed.

SHARP. Impossible! Araminta take a liking to a fool? [*Aloud.*]

SET. Her head runs on nothing else, nor she can talk of nothing else.

SHARP. I know she commanded him all the while we were in the Park; but I thought it had been only to make Vainlove jealous.

SIR JO. How's this! Good bully, hold your breath and let's hearken. Agad, this must be I.

SHARP. Death, it can't be. An oaf, an idiot, a wittal.

SIR JO. Ay, now it's out; 'tis I, my own individual person.

SHARP. A wretch that has flown for shelter to the lowest shrub of mankind, and seeks protection from a blasted coward.

SIR JO. That's you, bully back. [Bluffe *frowns upon* Sir Joseph.]

SHARP. She has given Vainlove her promise to marry him before to-morrow morning. Has she not? [*To* Setter.]

SET. She has, sir; and I have it in charge to attend her all this evening, in order to conduct her to the place appointed.

SHARP. Well, I'll go and inform your master; and do you press her to make all the haste imaginable.

SCENE VII.

Setter, Sir Joseph, Bluffe.

SET. Were I a rogue now, what a noble prize could I dispose of! A goodly pinnace, richly laden, and to launch forth under my auspicious convoy. Twelve thousand pounds and all her rigging, besides what lies concealed under hatches. Ha! all this committed to my care! Avaunt, temptation! Setter, show thyself a person of worth; be true to thy trust, and be reputed honest. Reputed honest! Hum: is that all? Ay; for to be honest is nothing; the reputation of it is all. Reputation! what have such poor rogues as I to do with reputation? 'tis above us; and for men of quality, they are above it; so that reputation is even as foolish a thing as honesty. And, for my part, if I meet Sir Joseph with a purse of gold in his hand, I'll dispose of mine to the best advantage.

SIR JO. Heh, heh, heh: Here 'tis for you, i'faith, Mr. Setter. Nay, I'll take you at your word. [*Chinking a purse.*]

SET. Sir Joseph and the captain, too! undone! undone! I'm undone, my master's undone, my lady's undone, and all the business is undone.

SIR JO. No, no; never fear, man; the lady's business shall be done. What, come, Mr. Setter, I have overheard all, and to speak is but loss of time; but if there be occasion, let these worthy gentlemen intercede for me. [*Gives him gold.*]

SET. O lord, sir, what d'ye mean? Corrupt my honesty? They have indeed very persuading faces. But—

SIR JO. 'Tis too little, there's more, man. There, take all. Now—

SET. Well, Sir Joseph, you have such a winning way with you—

SIR JO. And how, and how, good Setter, did the little rogue look when she talked of Sir Joseph? Did not her eyes twinkle and her mouth water? Did not she pull up her little bubbies? And—agad, I'm so overjoyed—And stroke down her belly? and then step aside to tie her garter when she was thinking of her love? Heh, Setter!

SET. Oh, yes, sir.

SIR JO. How now, bully? What, melancholy because I'm in the lady's favour? No matter, I'll make your peace: I know they were a little smart upon you. But I warrant I'll bring you into the lady's good graces.

BLUFF. Pshaw, I have petitions to show from other-guess toys than she. Look here; these were sent me this morning. There, read. [*Shows letters*]. That—that's a scrawl of quality. Here, here's from a countess too. Hum—No, hold—that's from a knight's wife—she sent it me by her husband. But here, both these are from persons of great quality.

SIR JO. They are either from persons of great quality, or no quality at all, 'tis such a damned ugly hand. [*While* Sir Joseph *reads*, Bluffe *whispers* Setter.]

SET. Captain, I would do anything to serve you; but this is so difficult.

BLUFF. Not at all. Don't I know him?

SET. You'll remember the conditions?

BLUFF. I'll give it you under my hand. In the meantime, here's earnest. [*Gives him money*.] Come, knight, I'm capitulating with Mr. Setter for you.

SIR JO. Ah, honest Setter; sirrah, I'll give thee anything but a night's lodging.

SCENE VIII.

Sharper *tugging in* Heartwell.

SHARP. Nay, prithee leave railing, and come along with me. May be she mayn't be within. 'Tis but to yond corner-house.

HEART. Whither? Whither? Which corner-house.

SHARP. Why, there: the two white posts.

HEART. And who would you visit there, say you? (O'ons, how my heart aches.)

SHARP. Pshaw, thou'rt so troublesome and inquisitive. My, I'll tell you; 'tis a young creature that Vainlove debauched and has forsaken. Did you never hear Bellmour chide him about Sylvia?

HEART. Death, and hell, and marriage! My wife! [*Aside*.]

SHARP. Why, thou art as musty as a new-married man that had found his wife knowing the first night.

HEART. Hell, and the Devil! Does he know it? But, hold; if he should not, I were a fool to discover it. I'll dissemble, and try him. [*Aside*.] Ha, ha, ha. Why, Tom, is that such an occasion of melancholy? Is it such an uncommon mischief?

SHARP. No, faith; I believe not. Few women but have their year of probation before they are cloistered in the narrow joys of wedlock. But, prithee, come along with me or I'll go and have the lady to myself. B'w'y George. [*Going*.]

HEART. O torture! How he racks and tears me! Death! Shall I own my shame or wittingly let him go and whore my wife? No, that's insupportable. O Sharper!

SHARP. How now?

HEART. Oh, I am married.

SHARP. (Now hold, spleen.) Married!

HEART. Certainly, irrecoverably married.

SHARP. Heaven forbid, man! How long?

HEART. Oh, an age, an age! I have been married these two hours.

SHARP. My old bachelor married! That were a jest. Ha, ha, ha.

HEART. Death! D'ye mock me? Hark ye, if either you esteem my friendship, or your own safety —come not near that house—that corner-house—that hot brothel. Ask no questions.

SHARP. Mad, by this light.

Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure:
Married in haste, we may repent at leisure.

SCENE IX.

SHARPER, SETTER.

SET. Some by experience find these words misplaced:
At leisure married, they repent in haste.

As I suppose my master Heartwell.

SHARP. Here again, my Mercury!

SET. Sublimate, if you please, sir: I think my achievements do deserve the epithet—Mercury was a pimp too, but, though I blush to own it, at this time, I must confess I am somewhat fallen from the dignity of my function, and do condescend to be scandalously employed in the promotion of vulgar matrimony.

SHARP. As how, dear, dexterous pimp?

SET. Why, to be brief, for I have weighty affairs depending—our stratagem succeeded as you intended—Bluffe turns errant traitor; bribes me to make a private conveyance of the lady to him, and put a shame-settlement upon Sir Joseph.

SHARP. O rogue! Well, but I hope—

SET. No, no; never fear me, sir. I privately informed the knight of the treachery, who has agreed seemingly to be cheated, that the captain may be so in reality.

SHARP. Where's the bride?

SET. Shifting clothes for the purpose, at a friend's house of mine. Here's company coming; if you'll walk this way, sir, I'll tell you.

SCENE X.

BELLMOUR, BELINDA, ARAMINTA, *and* VAINLOVE.

VAIN. Oh, 'twas frenzy all: cannot you forgive it? Men in madness have a title to your pity. [*To* ARAMINTA.]

ARAM. Which they forfeit, when they are restored to their senses.

VAIN. I am not presuming beyond a pardon.

ARAM. You who could reproach me with one counterfeit, how insolent would a real pardon make you! But there's no need to forgive what is not worth my anger.

BELIN. O' my conscience, I could find in my heart to marry thee, purely to be rid of thee—at least thou art so troublesome a lover, there's hopes thou'lt make a more than ordinary quiet husband. [*To* BELLMOUR.]

BELL. Say you so? Is that a maxim among ye?

BELIN. Yes: you fluttering men of the *mode* have made marriage a mere French dish.

BELL. I hope there's no French sauce. [*Aside*.]

BELIN. You are so curious in the preparation, that is, your courtship, one would think you meant a noble entertainment—but when we come to feed, 'tis all froth, and poor, but in show. Nay, often, only remains, which have been I know not how many times warmed for other company, and at last served up cold to the wife.

BELL. That were a miserable wretch indeed, who could not afford one warm dish for the wife of his bosom. But you timorous virgins form a dreadful chimæra of a husband, as of a creature contrary to that soft, humble, pliant, easy thing, a lover; so guess at plagues in matrimony, in opposition to the pleasures of courtship. Alas! courtship to marriage, is but as the music in the play-house, until the curtain's drawn; but that once up, then opens the scene of pleasure.

BELIN. Oh, foh,—no: rather courtship to marriage, as a very witty prologue to a very dull play.

SCENE XI.

[*To them*] SHARPER.

SHARP. Hist! Bellmour. If you'll bring the ladies, make haste to Sylvia's lodgings, before Heartwell has fretted himself out of breath.

BELL. You have an opportunity now, madam, to revenge yourself upon Heartwell, for affronting your squirrel. [*To* BELINDA.]

BELIN. Oh, the filthy rude beast.

ARAM. 'Tis a lasting quarrel; I think he has never been at our house since.

BELL. But give yourselves the trouble to walk to that corner-house, and I'll tell you by the way what may divert and surprise you.

SCENE XII.

SCENE: *Sylvia's Lodgings*.

HEARTWELL *and* BOY.

HEART. Gone forth, say you, with her maid?

BOY. There was a man too, that fetched them out—Setter, I think they called him.

HEART. So-h—that precious pimp too—damned, damned strumpet! could she not contain herself on her wedding-day? not hold out till night? Oh, cursed state! how wide we err, when apprehensive of the load of life.

We hope to find
That help which Nature meant in womankind,
To man that supplemental self-designed;
But proves a burning caustic when applied,
And Adam, sure, could with more ease abide
The bone when broken, than when made a bride.

SCENE XIII.

[*To him*] BELLMOUR, BELINDA, VAINLOVE, ARAMINTA.

BELL. Now George, what, rhyming! I thought the chimes of verse were past, when once the doleful marriage-knell was rung.

HEART. Shame and confusion, I am exposed. [VAINLOVE *and* ARAMINTA *talk apart*.]

BELIN. Joy, joy, Mr. Bridegroom; I give you joy, sir.

HEART. 'Tis not in thy nature to give me joy. A woman can as soon give immortality.

BELIN. Ha, ha, ha! oh Gad, men grow such clowns when they are married.

BELL. That they are fit for no company but their wives.

BELIN. Nor for them neither, in a little time. I swear, at the month's end, you shall hardly find a married man that will do a civil thing to his wife, or say a civil thing to anybody else. How he looks already, ha, ha, ha.

BELL. Ha, ha, ha!

HEART. Death, am I made your laughing-stock? For you, sir, I shall find a time; but take off your wasp here, or the clown may grow boisterous; I have a fly-flap.

BELIN. You have occasion for't, your wife has been blown upon.

BELL. That's home.

HEART. Not fiends or furies could have added to my vexation, or anything, but another woman. You've racked my patience; begone, or by—

BELL. Hold, hold. What the devil—thou wilt not draw upon a woman?

VAIN. What's the matter?

ARAM. Bless me! what have you done to him?

BELIN. Only touched a galled beast until he winced.

VAIN. Bellmour, give it over; you vex him too much. 'Tis all serious to him.

BELIN. Nay, I swear, I begin to pity him myself.

HEART. Damn your pity!—but let me be calm a little. How have I deserved this of you? any of ye? Sir, have I impaired the honour of your house, promised your sister marriage, and whored her? Wherein have I injured you? Did I bring a physician to your father when he lay expiring, and endeavour to prolong his life, and you one and twenty? Madam, have I had an opportunity with you and baulked it? Did you ever offer me the favour that I refused it? Or—

BELIN. Oh foh! what does the filthy fellow mean? Lord, let me be gone.

ARAM. Hang me, if I pity you; you are right enough served.

BELL. This is a little scurrilous though.

VAIN. Nay, 'tis a sore of your own scratching—well, George?

HEART. You are the principal cause of all my present ills. If Sylvia had not been your mistress, my wife might have been honest.

VAIN. And if Sylvia had not been your wife, my mistress might have been just. There, we are even. But have a good heart, I heard of your misfortune, and come to your relief.

HEART. When execution's over, you offer a reprieve.

VAIN. What would you give?

HEART. Oh! Anything, everything, a leg or two, or an arm; nay, I would be divorced from my virility to be divorced from my wife.

SCENE XIV.

[*To them*] SHARPER.

VAIN. Faith, that's a sure way: but here's one can sell you freedom better cheap.

SHARP. Vainlove, I have been a kind of a godfather to you yonder. I have promised and vowed some things in your name which I think you are bound to perform.

VAIN. No signing to a blank, friend.

SHARP. No, I'll deal fairly with you. 'Tis a full and free discharge to Sir Joseph Wittal and Captain Bluffe; for all injuries whatsoever, done unto you by them, until the present date hereof. How say you?

VAIN. Agreed.

SHARP. Then, let me beg these ladies to wear their masks, a moment. Come in, gentlemen and ladies.

HEART. What the devil's all this to me?

VAIN. Patience.

SCENE the Last

[*To them*] SIR JOSEPH, BLUFFE, SYLVIA, LUCY, SETTER.

BLUFF. All injuries whatsoever, Mr. Sharper.

SIR JO. Ay, ay, whatsoever, Captain, stick to that; whatsoever.

SHARP. 'Tis done, these gentlemen are witnesses to the general release.

VAIN. Ay, ay, to this instant moment. I have passed an act of oblivion.

BLUFF. 'Tis very generous, sir, since I needs must own—

SIR JO. No, no, Captain, you need not own, heh, heh, heh. 'Tis I must own—

BLUFF.—That you are over-reached too, ha, ha, ha, only a little art military used—only undermined, or so, as shall appear by the fair Araminta, my wife's permission. Oh, the devil, cheated at last! [LUCY *unmasks*.]

SIR JO. Only a little art-military trick, captain, only countermined, or so. Mr. Vainlove, I suppose you know whom I have got—now, but all's forgiven.

VAIN. I know whom you have not got; pray ladies convince him. [ARAM. *and* BELIN. *unmask*.]

SIR JO. Ah! oh Lord, my heart aches. Ah! Setter, a rogue of all sides.

SHARP. Sir Joseph, you had better have pre-engaged this gentleman's pardon: for though Vainlove be so generous to forgive the loss of his mistress, I know not how Heartwell may take the loss of his wife. [SYLVIA *unmasks*.]

HEART. My wife! By this light 'tis she, the very cockatrice. O Sharper! Let me embrace thee. But art thou sure she is really married to him?

SET. Really and lawfully married, I am witness.

SHARP. Bellmour will unriddle to you. [HEARTWELL *goes to* BELLMOUR.]

SIR JO. Pray, madam, who are you? For I find you and I are like to be better acquainted.

SYLV. The worst of me is, that I am your wife—

SHARP. Come, Sir Joseph, your fortune is not so bad as you fear. A fine lady, and a lady of very good quality.

SIR JO. Thanks to my knighthood, she's a lady—

VAIN. That deserves a fool with a better title. Pray use her as my relation, or you shall hear on't.

BLUFF. What, are you a woman of quality too, spouse?

SET. And my relation; pray let her be respected accordingly. Well, honest Lucy, fare thee well. I think, you and I have been play-fellows off and on, any time this seven years.

LUCY. Hold your prating. I'm thinking what vocation I shall follow while my spouse is planting laurels in the wars.

BLUFF. No more wars, spouse, no more wars. While I plant laurels for my head abroad, I may

find the branches sprout at home.

HEART. Bellmour, I approve thy mirth, and thank thee. And I cannot in gratitude (for I see which way thou art going) see thee fall into the same snare out of which thou hast delivered me.

BELL. I thank thee, George, for thy good intention; but there is a fatality in marriage, for I find I'm resolute.

HEART. Then good counsel will be thrown away upon you. For my part, I have once escaped; and when I wed again, may she be—ugly, as an old bawd.

VAIN. Ill-natured, as an old maid—

BELL. Wanton, as a young widow—

SHARP. And jealous, as a barren wife.

HEART. Agreed.

BELL. Well; 'midst of these dreadful denunciations, and notwithstanding the warning and example before me, I commit myself to lasting durance.

BELIN. Prisoner, make much of your fetters. [*Giving her hand.*]

BELL. Frank, will you keep us in countenance?

VAIN. May I presume to hope so great a blessing?

ARAM. We had better take the advantage of a little of our friend's experience first.

BELL. O' my conscience she dares not consent, for fear he should recant. [*Aside.*] Well, we shall have your company to church in the morning. May be it may get you an appetite to see us fall to before you. Setter, did not you tell me?—

SET. They're at the door: I'll call 'em in.

A DANCE.

BELL. Now set we forward on a journey for life. Come take your fellow-travellers. Old George, I'm sorry to see thee still plod on alone.

HEART. With gaudy plumes and jingling bells made proud,
The youthful beast sets forth, and neighs aloud.
A morning-sun his tinselled harness gilds,
And the first stage a down-hill greensward yields.
But, oh—
What rugged ways attend the noon of life!
Our sun declines, and with what anxious strife,
What pain we tug that galling load, a wife.
All coursers the first heat with vigour run;
But 'tis with whip and spur the race is won.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*]

EPILOGUE.
Spoken by Mrs. Barry.

As a rash girl, who will all hazards run,
And be enjoyed, though sure to be undone,
Soon as her curiosity is over,
Would give the world she could her toy recover,
So fares it with our poet; and I'm sent
To tell you he already does repent:
Would you were all as forward to keep Lent.
Now the deed's done, the giddy thing has leisure
To think o' th' sting, that's in the tail of pleasure.
Methinks I hear him in consideration:
What will the world say? Where's my reputation?
Now that's at stake. No, fool, 'tis out o' fashion.
If loss of that should follow want of wit,
How many undone men were in the pit!
Why that's some comfort to an author's fears,
If he's an ass, he will be tryed by's peers.
But hold, I am exceeding my commission:
My business here was humbly to petition;
But we're so used to rail on these occasions,
I could not help one trial of your patience:
For 'tis our way, you know, for fear o' th' worst,
To be beforehand still, and cry Fool first.
How say you, sparks? How do you stand affected?
I swear, young Bays within is so dejected,

’Twould grieve your hearts to see him; shall I call him?
But then you cruel critics would so maul him!
Yet may be you’ll encourage a beginner;
But how? Just as the devil does a sinner.
Women and wits are used e’en much at one,
You gain your end, and damn ’em when you’ve done.

THE DOUBLE-DEALER
A COMEDY

Interdum tamen et vocem Comœdia tollit.—Hor. *Ar. Po.*

Huic equidem consilio palmam do: hic me magnifice effero, qui vim tantam in me et potestatem habeam tantæ astutiæ, vera dicendo ut eos ambos fallam.

Syr. in Terent. *Heaut.*

TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE CHARLES MONTAGUE,
ONE OF THE LORDS OF THE TREASURY.

Sir,—I heartily wish this play were as perfect as I intended it, that it might be more worthy your acceptance, and that my dedication of it to you might be more becoming that honour and esteem which I, with everybody who is so fortunate as to know you, have for you. It had your countenance when yet unknown; and now it is made public, it wants your protection.

I would not have anybody imagine that I think this play without its faults, for I am conscious of several. I confess I designed (whatever vanity or ambition occasioned that design) to have written a true and regular comedy, but I found it an undertaking which put me in mind of *Sudet multum, frustraque laboret ausus idem*. And now, to make amends for the vanity of such a design, I do confess both the attempt and the imperfect performance. Yet I must take the boldness to say I have not miscarried in the whole, for the mechanical part of it is regular. That I may say with as little vanity as a builder may say he has built a house according to the model laid down before him, or a gardener that he has set his flowers in a knot of such or such a figure. I designed the moral first, and to that moral I invented the fable, and do not know that I have borrowed one hint of it anywhere. I made the plot as strong as I could because it was single, and I made it single because I would avoid confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three unities of the drama. Sir, this discourse is very impertinent to you, whose judgment much better can discern the faults than I can excuse them; and whose good nature, like that of a lover, will find out those hidden beauties (if there are any such) which it would be great immodesty for me to discover. I think I don’t speak improperly when I call you a *lover* of poetry; for it is very well known she has been a very kind mistress to you: she has not denied you the last favour, and she has been fruitful to you in a most beautiful issue. If I break off abruptly here, I hope everybody will understand that it is to avoid a commendation which, as it is your due, would be most easy for me to pay, and too troublesome for you to receive.

I have since the acting of this play harkened after the objections which have been made to it, for I was conscious where a true critic might have put me upon my defence. I was prepared for the attack, and am pretty confident I could have vindicated some parts and excused others; and where there were any plain miscarriages, I would most ingenuously have confessed ’em. But I have not heard anything said sufficient to provoke an answer. That which looks most like an objection does not relate in particular to this play, but to all or most that ever have been written, and that is soliloquy. Therefore I will answer it, not only for my own sake, but to save others the trouble, to whom it may hereafter be objected.

I grant that for a man to talk to himself appears absurd and unnatural, and indeed it is so in most cases; but the circumstances which may attend the occasion make great alteration. It oftentimes happens to a man to have designs which require him to himself, and in their nature cannot admit of a confidant. Such for certain is all villainy, and other less mischievous intentions may be very improper to be communicated to a second person. In such a case, therefore, the audience must observe whether the person upon the stage takes any notice of them at all or no. For if he supposes any one to be by when he talks to himself, it is monstrous and ridiculous to the last degree. Nay, not only in this case, but in any part of a play, if there is expressed any knowledge of an audience, it is insufferable. But otherwise, when a man in soliloquy reasons with himself, and *pro’s* and *con’s*, and weighs all his designs, we ought not to imagine that this man either talks to us or to himself; he is only thinking, and thinking such matter as were inexcusable folly in him to speak. But because we are concealed spectators of the plot in agitation, and the poet finds it necessary to let us know the whole mystery of his contrivance, he is willing to inform us of this person’s thoughts; and to that end is forced to make use of the expedient of speech, no other better way being yet invented for the communication of thought.

Another very wrong objection has been made by some who have not taken leisure to distinguish the characters. The hero of the play, as they are pleased to call him (meaning Mellefont), is a gull, and made a fool, and cheated. Is every man a gull and a fool that is deceived? At that rate I'm afraid the two classes of men will be reduced to one, and the knaves themselves be at a loss to justify their title. But if an open-hearted honest man, who has an entire confidence in one whom he takes to be his friend, and whom he has obliged to be so, and who, to confirm him in his opinion, in all appearance and upon several trials has been so: if this man be deceived by the treachery of the other, must he of necessity commence fool immediately, only because the other has proved a villain? Ay, but there was caution given to Mellefont in the first act by his friend Careless. Of what nature was that caution? Only to give the audience some light into the character of Maskwell before his appearance, and not to convince Mellefont of his treachery; for that was more than Careless was then able to do: he never knew Maskwell guilty of any villainy; he was only a sort of man which he did not like. As for his suspecting his familiarity with my Lady Touchwood, let 'em examine the answer that Mellefont makes him, and compare it with the conduct of Maskwell's character through the play.

I would beg 'em again to look into the character of Maskwell before they accuse Mellefont of weakness for being deceived by him. For upon summing up the enquiry into this objection, it may be found they have mistaken cunning in one character for folly in another.

But there is one thing at which I am more concerned than all the false criticisms that are made upon me, and that is, some of the ladies are offended. I am heartily sorry for it, for I declare I would rather disoblige all the critics in the world than one of the fair sex. They are concerned that I have represented some women vicious and affected. How can I help it? It is the business of a comic poet to paint the vices and follies of humankind; and there are but two sexes, male and female, *men* and *women*, which have a title to humanity, and if I leave one half of them out, the work will be imperfect. I should be very glad of an opportunity to make my compliment to those ladies who are offended; but they can no more expect it in a comedy than to be tickled by a surgeon when he's letting 'em blood. They who are virtuous or discreet should not be offended, for such characters as these distinguish *them*, and make their beauties more shining and observed; and they who are of the other kind may nevertheless pass for such, by seeming not to be displeased or touched with the satire of this *comedy*. Thus have they also wrongfully accused me of doing them a prejudice, when I have in reality done them a service.

You will pardon me, sir, for the freedom I take of making answers to other people in an epistle which ought wholly to be sacred to you; but since I intend the play to be so too, I hope I may take the more liberty of justifying it where it is in the right.

I must now, sir, declare to the world how kind you have been to my endeavours; for in regard of what was well meant, you have excused what was ill performed. I beg you would continue the same method in your acceptance of this dedication. I know no other way of making a return to that humanity you shewed, in protecting an infant, but by enrolling it in your service, now that it is of age and come into the world. Therefore be pleased to accept of this as an acknowledgment of the favour you have shewn me, and an earnest of the real service and gratitude of,

Sir, your most obliged, humble servant,

WILLIAM CONGREVE.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND MR. CONGREVE, ON HIS COMEDY CALLED THE DOUBLE-DEALER.

Well then, the promised hour is come at last;
The present age of wit obscures the past.
Strong were our sires; and as they fought they writ,
Conqu'ring with force of arms and dint of wit.
Theirs was the giant race, before the flood;
And thus, when Charles returned, our empire stood.
Like Janus he the stubborn soil manured,
With rules of husbandry the rankness cured,
Tamed us to manners, when the stage was rude,
And boist'rous English wit with art indued.
Our age was cultivated thus at length;
But what we gained in skill we lost in strength.
Our builders were with want of genius curst;
The second temple was not like the first:
Till you, the best Vitruvius, come at length,
Our beauties equal, but excel our strength.
Firm Doric pillars found your solid base,
The fair Corinthian crowns the higher space;
Thus all below is strength, and all above is grace.
In easy dialogue is Fletcher's praise:
He moved the mind, but had no power to raise.
Great Johnson did by strength of judgment please
Yet doubling Fletcher's force, he wants ease.

In diff'ring talents both adorned their age;
One for the study, t'other for the stage.
But both to Congreve justly shall submit,
One matched in judgment, both o'er-matched in wit.
In him all beauties of this age we see,
Etherege his courtship, Southern's purity,
The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherly.
All this in blooming youth you have achieved,
Nor are your foiled contemporaries grieved;
So much the sweetness of your manners move,
We cannot envy you, because we love.
Fabius might joy in Scipio, when he saw
A beardless consul made against the law,
And join his suffrage to the votes of Rome;
Though he with Hannibal was overcome.
Thus old Romano bowed to Raphael's fame,
And scholar to the youth he taught became.

O that your brows my laurel had sustained,
Well had I been deposed if you had reigned!
The father had descended for the son,
For only you are lineal to the throne.
Thus when the state one Edward did depose,
A greater Edward in his room arose.
But now, not I, but poetry is cursed;
For Tom the Second reigns like Tom the First.
But let 'em not mistake my patron's part,
Nor call his charity their own desert.
Yet this I prophesy: Thou shalt be seen
(Though with some short parenthesis between)
High on the throne of wit; and seated there,
Not mine (that's little) but thy laurel wear.
Thy first attempt an early promise made;
That early promise this has more than paid.
So bold, yet so judiciously you dare,
That your least praise is to be regular.
Time, place, and action may with pains be wrought,
But genius must be born, and never can be taught.
This is your portion, this your native store,
Heav'n, that but once was prodigal before,
To Shakespeare gave as much; she could not give him more.

Maintain your post: that's all the fame you need;
For 'tis impossible you should proceed.
Already I am worn with cares and age,
And just abandoning th' ungrateful stage:
Unprofitably kept at heav'n's expense,
I live a rent-charge on his providence.
But you, whom every muse and grace adorn,
Whom I foresee to better fortune born,
Be kind to my remains; and oh, defend,
Against your judgment, your departed friend!
Let not th' insulting foe my fame pursue;
But shade those laurels which descend to you:
And take for tribute what these lines express:
You merit more; nor could my love do less.

JOHN DRYDEN.

PROLOGUE
Spoken by Mrs. Bracegirdle.

Moors have this way (as story tells) to know
Whether their brats are truly got or no;
Into the sea the new-born babe is thrown,
There, as instinct directs, to swim or drown.
A barbarous device, to try if spouse
Has kept religiously her nuptial vows.

Such are the trials poets make of plays,
Only they trust to more inconstant seas;
So does our author, this his child commit
To the tempestuous mercy of the pit,
To know if it be truly born of wit.

Critics avaunt, for you are fish of prey,

And feed, like sharks, upon an infant play.
Be ev'ry monster of the deep away;
Let's have a fair trial and a clear sea.

Let nature work, and do not damn too soon,
For life will struggle long e'er it sink down:
And will at least rise thrice before it drown.
Let us consider, had it been our fate,
Thus hardly to be proved legitimate:
I will not say, we'd all in danger been,
Were each to suffer for his mother's sin:
But by my troth I cannot avoid thinking,
How nearly some good men might have 'scaped sinking.
But, heav'n be praised, this custom is confined
Alone to th' offspring of the muses kind:
Our Christian cuckolds are more bent to pity;
I know not one Moor-husband in the city.
I' th' good man's arms the chopping bastard thrives,
For he thinks all his own that is his wives'.

Whatever fate is for this play designed,
The poet's sure he shall some comfort find:
For if his muse has played him false, the worst
That can befall him, is, to be divorced:
You husbands judge, if that be to be cursed.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

Maskwell, a villain; pretended friend to Mellefont, gallant to Lady Touchwood, and in love with Cynthia,—*Mr. Betterton*.

Lord Touchwood, uncle to Mellefont,—*Mr. Kynaston*.

Mellefont, promised to, and in love with Cynthia,—*Mr. Williams*.

Careless, his friend,—*Mr. Verbruggen*.

Lord Froth, a solemn coxcomb,—*Mr. Bowman*.

Brisk, a pert coxcomb,—*Mr. Powell*.

Sir Paul Plyant, an uxorious, foolish old knight; brother to Lady Touchwood, and father to Cynthia,—*Mr. Dogget*.

WOMEN.

Lady Touchwood, in love with Mellefont,—*Mrs. Barry*.

Cynthia, daughter to Sir Paul by a former wife, promised to Mellefont,—*Mrs. Bracegirdle*.

Lady Froth, a great coquette; pretender to poetry, wit, and learning,—*Mrs. Mountfort*.

Lady Plyant, insolent to her husband, and easy to any pretender,—*Mrs. Leigh*.

Chaplain, Boy, Footmen, and Attendants.

The Scene: A gallery in the Lord Touchwood's house, with chambers adjoining.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A gallery in the Lord Touchwood's home, with chambers adjoining.

Enter Careless, *crossing the stage, with his hat, gloves, and sword in his hands; as just risen from table*: Mellefont *following him*.

MEL. Ned, Ned, whither so fast? What, turned flincher! Why, you wo' not leave us?

CARE. Where are the women? I'm weary of guzzling, and begin to think them the better company.

MEL. Then thy reason staggers, and thou'rt almost drunk.

CARE. No, faith, but your fools grow noisy; and if a man must endure the noise of words without sense, I think the women have more musical voices, and become nonsense better.

MEL. Why, they are at the end of the gallery; retired to their tea and scandal, according to their ancient custom, after dinner. But I made a pretence to follow you, because I had something to say to you in private, and I am not like to have many opportunities this evening.

CARE. And here's this coxcomb most critically come to interrupt you.

SCENE II.

[*To them*] BRISK.

BRISK. Boys, boys, lads, where are you? What, do you give ground? Mortgage for a bottle, ha? Careless, this is your trick; you're always spoiling company by leaving it.

CARE. And thou art always spoiling company by coming in o't.

BRISK. Pooh, ha, ha, ha, I know you envy me. Spite, proud spite, by the gods! and burning envy. I'll be judged by Mellefont here, who gives and takes raillery better than you or I. Pshaw, man, when I say you spoil company by leaving it, I mean you leave nobody for the company to laugh at. I think there I was with you. Ha, Mellefont?

MEL. O' my word, Brisk, that was a home thrust; you have silenced him.

BRISK. Oh, my dear Mellefont, let me perish if thou art not the soul of conversation, the very essence of wit and spirit of wine. The deuce take me if there were three good things said, or one understood, since thy amputation from the body of our society. He, I think that's pretty and metaphorical enough; i'gad I could not have said it out of thy company. Careless, ha?

CARE. Hum, ay, what is't?

BRISK. *O mon cœur*! What is't! Nay, gad, I'll punish you for want of apprehension. The deuce take me if I tell you.

MEL. No, no, hang him, he has no taste. But, dear Brisk, excuse me, I have a little business.

CARE. Prithee get thee gone; thou seest we are serious.

MEL. We'll come immediately, if you'll but go in and keep up good humour and sense in the company. Prithee do, they'll fall asleep else.

BRISK. I'gad, so they will. Well, I will, I will; gad, you shall command me from the Zenith to the Nadir. But the deuce take me if I say a good thing till you come. But prithee, dear rogue, make haste, prithee make haste, I shall burst else. And yonder your uncle, my Lord Touchwood, swears he'll disinherit you, and Sir Paul Plyant threatens to disclaim you for a son-in-law, and my Lord Froth won't dance at your wedding to-morrow; nor, the deuce take me, I won't write your Epithalamium—and see what a condition you're like to be brought to.

MEL. Well, I'll speak but three words, and follow you.

BRISK. Enough, enough. Careless, bring your apprehension along with you.

SCENE III.

MELLEFONT, CARELESS.

CARE. Pert coxcomb.

MEL. Faith, 'tis a good-natured coxcomb, and has very entertaining follies. You must be more humane to him; at this juncture it will do me service. I'll tell you, I would have mirth continued this day at any rate; though patience purchase folly, and attention be paid with noise, there are times when sense may be unseasonable as well as truth. Prithee do thou wear none to-day, but allow Brisk to have wit, that thou may'st seem a fool.

CARE. Why, how now, why this extravagant proposition?

MEL. Oh, I would have no room for serious design, for I am jealous of a plot. I would have noise and impertinence keep my Lady Touchwood's head from working: for hell is not more busy than her brain, nor contains more devils than that imaginations.

CARE. I thought your fear of her had been over. Is not to-morrow appointed for your marriage with Cynthia, and her father, Sir Paul Plyant, come to settle the writings this day on purpose?

MEL. True; but you shall judge whether I have not reason to be alarmed. None besides you and Maskwell are acquainted with the secret of my Aunt Touchwood's violent passion for me. Since my first refusal of her addresses she has endeavoured to do me all ill offices with my uncle, yet has managed 'em with that subtilty, that to him they have borne the face of kindness; while her malice, like a dark lanthorn, only shone upon me where it was directed. Still, it gave me less perplexity to prevent the success of her displeasure than to avoid the importunities of her love, and of two evils I thought myself favoured in her aversion. But whether urged by her despair and the short prospect of time she saw to accomplish her designs; whether the hopes of revenge, or of her love, terminated in the view of this my marriage with Cynthia, I know not, but this morning she surprised me in my bed.

CARE. Was there ever such a fury! 'Tis well nature has not put it into her sex's power to ravish. Well, bless us, proceed. What followed?

MEL. What at first amazed me—for I looked to have seen her in all the transports of a slighted and revengeful woman—but when I expected thunder from her voice, and lightning in her eyes, I

saw her melted into tears and hushed into a sigh. It was long before either of us spoke: passion had tied her tongue, and amazement mine. In short, the consequence was thus, she omitted nothing that the most violent love could urge, or tender words express; which when she saw had no effect, but still I pleaded honour and nearness of blood to my uncle, then came the storm I feared at first, for, starting from my bed-side like a fury, she flew to my sword, and with much ado I prevented her doing me or herself a mischief. Having disarmed her, in a gust of passion she left me, and in a resolution, confirmed by a thousand curses, not to close her eyes till they had seen my ruin.

CARE. Exquisite woman! But what the devil, does she think thou hast no more sense than to get an heir upon her body to disinherit thyself? for as I take it this settlement upon you is, with a proviso, that your uncle have no children.

MEL. It is so. Well, the service you are to do me will be a pleasure to yourself: I must get you to engage my Lady Plyant all this evening, that my pious aunt may not work her to her interest. And if you chance to secure her to yourself, you may incline her to mine. She's handsome, and knows it; is very silly, and thinks she has sense, and has an old fond husband.

CARE. I confess, a very fair foundation for a lover to build upon.

MEL. For my Lord Froth, he and his wife will be sufficiently taken up with admiring one another and Brisk's gallantry, as they call it. I'll observe my uncle myself, and Jack Maskwell has promised me to watch my aunt narrowly, and give me notice upon any suspicion. As for Sir Paul, my wise father-in-law that is to be, my dear Cynthia has such a share in his fatherly fondness, he would scarce make her a moment uneasy to have her happy hereafter.

CARE. So you have manned your works; but I wish you may not have the weakest guard where the enemy is strongest.

MEL. Maskwell, you mean; prithee why should you suspect him?

CARE. Faith I cannot help it; you know I never liked him: I am a little superstitious in physiognomy.

MEL. He has obligations of gratitude to bind him to me: his dependence upon my uncle is through my means.

CARE. Upon your aunt, you mean.

MEL. My aunt!

CARE. I'm mistaken if there be not a familiarity between them you do not suspect, notwithstanding her passion for you.

MEL. Pooh, pooh! nothing in the world but his design to do me service; and he endeavours to be well in her esteem, that he may be able to effect it.

CARE. Well, I shall be glad to be mistaken; but your aunt's aversion in her revenge cannot be any way so effectually shown as in bringing forth a child to disinherit you. She is handsome and cunning and naturally wanton. Maskwell is flesh and blood at best, and opportunities between them are frequent. His affection to you, you have confessed, is grounded upon his interest, that you have transplanted; and should it take root in my lady, I don't see what you can expect from the fruit.

MEL. I confess the consequence is visible, were your suspicions just. But see, the company is broke up, let's meet 'em.

SCENE IV.

[*To them*] LORD TOUCHWOOD, LORD FROTH, SIR PAUL PLYANT, *and* BRISK.

LORD TOUCH. Out upon't, nephew. Leave your father-in-law and me to maintain our ground against young people!

MEL. I beg your lordship's pardon. We were just returning.

SIR PAUL. Were you, son? Gadsbud, much better as it is. Good, strange! I swear I'm almost tipsy; t'other bottle would have been too powerful for me,—as sure as can be it would. We wanted your company, but Mr. Brisk—where is he? I swear and vow he's a most facetious person, and the best company. And, my Lord Froth, your lordship is so merry a man, he, he, he.

LORD FROTH. Oh, foy, Sir Paul, what do you mean? Merry! Oh, barbarous! I'd as lieve you called me fool.

SIR PAUL. Nay, I protest and vow now, 'tis true; when Mr. Brisk jokes, your lordship's laugh does so become you, he, he, he.

LORD FROTH. Ridiculous! Sir Paul, you're strangely mistaken, I find champagne is powerful. I assure you, Sir Paul, I laugh at nobody's jest but my own, or a lady's, I assure you, Sir Paul.

BRISK. How? how, my lord? what, affront my wit! Let me perish, do I never say anything worthy to be laughed at?

LORD FROTH. Oh, foy, don't misapprehend me; I don't say so, for I often smile at your conceptions. But there is nothing more unbecoming a man of quality than to laugh; 'tis such a vulgar expression of the passion; everybody can laugh. Then especially to laugh at the jest of an inferior person, or when anybody else of the same quality does not laugh with one—ridiculous! To be pleased with what pleases the crowd! Now when I laugh, I always laugh alone.

BRISK. I suppose that's because you laugh at your own jests, i'gad, ha, ha, ha.

LORD FROTH. He, he, I swear though, your raillery provokes me to a smile.

BRISK. Ay, my lord, it's a sign I hit you in the teeth, if you show 'em.

LORD FROTH. He, he, he, I swear that's so very pretty, I can't forbear.

CARE. I find a quibble bears more sway in your lordship's face than a jest.

LORD TOUCH. Sir Paul, if you please we'll retire to the ladies, and drink a dish of tea to settle our heads.

SIR PAUL. With all my heart. Mr. Brisk, you'll come to us, or call me when you joke; I'll be ready to laugh incontinently.

SCENE V.

MELLEFONT, CARELESS, LORD FROTH, BRISK.

MEL. But does your lordship never see comedies?

LORD FROTH. Oh yes, sometimes; but I never laugh.

MEL. No?

LORD FROTH. Oh no; never laugh indeed, sir.

CARE. No! why, what d'ye go there for?

LORD FROTH. To distinguish myself from the commonalty and mortify the poets; the fellows grow so conceited, when any of their foolish wit prevails upon the side-boxes. I swear,—he, he, he, I have often constrained my inclinations to laugh,—he, he, he, to avoid giving them encouragement.

MEL. You are cruel to yourself, my lord, as well as malicious to them.

LORD FROTH. I confess I did myself some violence at first, but now I think I have conquered it.

BRISK. Let me perish, my lord, but there is something very particular in the humour; 'tis true it makes against wit, and I'm sorry for some friends of mine that write; but, i'gad, I love to be malicious. Nay, deuce take me, there's wit in't, too. And wit must be foiled by wit; cut a diamond with a diamond, no other way, i'gad.

LORD FROTH. Oh, I thought you would not be long before you found out the wit.

CARE. Wit! In what? Where the devil's the wit in not laughing when a man has a mind to't?

BRISK. O Lord, why can't you find it out? Why, there 'tis, in the not laughing. Don't you apprehend me? My lord, Careless is a very honest fellow, but harkee, you understand me, somewhat heavy, a little shallow, or so. Why, I'll tell you now, suppose now you come up to me—nay, prithee, Careless, be instructed. Suppose, as I was saying, you come up to me holding your sides, and laughing as if you would—well—I look grave, and ask the cause of this immoderate mirth. You laugh on still, and are not able to tell me, still I look grave, not so much as smile.

CARE. Smile, no, what the devil should you smile at, when you suppose I can't tell you!

BRISK. Pshaw, pshaw, prithee don't interrupt me. But I tell you, you shall tell me at last, but it shall be a great while first.

CARE. Well, but prithee don't let it be a great while, because I long to have it over.

BRISK. Well then, you tell me some good jest or some very witty thing, laughing all the while as if you were ready to die, and I hear it, and look thus. Would not you be disappointed?

CARE. No; for if it were a witty thing I should not expect you to understand it.

LORD FROTH. Oh, foy, Mr. Careless, all the world allows Mr. Brisk to have wit; my wife says he has a great deal. I hope you think her a judge.

BRISK. Pooh, my lord, his voice goes for nothing; I can't tell how to make him apprehend. Take it t'other way. Suppose I say a witty thing to you?

CARE. Then I shall be disappointed indeed.

MEL. Let him alone, Brisk, he is obstinately bent not to be instructed.

BRISK. I'm sorry for him, the deuce take me.

MEL. Shall we go to the ladies, my lord?

LORD FROTH. With all my heart; methinks we are a solitude without 'em.

MEL. Or what say you to another bottle of champagne?

LORD FROTH. Oh, for the universe not a drop more, I beseech you. Oh, intemperate! I have a flushing in my face already. [*Takes out a pocket-glass and looks in it.*]

BRISK. Let me see, let me see, my lord, I broke my glass that was in the lid of my snuff-box. Hum! Deuce take me, I have encouraged a pimple here too. [*Takes the glass and looks.*]

LORD FROTH. Then you must mortify him with a patch; my wife shall supply you. Come, gentlemen, *allons*, here is company coming.

SCENE VI.

LADY TOUCHWOOD *and* MASKWELL.

LADY TOUCH. I'll hear no more. You are false and ungrateful; come, I know you false.

MASK. I have been frail, I confess, madam, for your ladyship's service.

LADY TOUCH. That I should trust a man whom I had known betray his friend!

MASK. What friend have I betrayed? or to whom?

LADY TOUCH. Your fond friend Mellefont, and to me; can you deny it?

MASK. I do not.

LADY TOUCH. Have you not wronged my lord, who has been a father to you in your wants, and given you being? Have you not wronged him in the highest manner, in his bed?

MASK. With your ladyship's help, and for your service, as I told you before. I can't deny that neither. Anything more, madam?

LADY TOUCH. More! Audacious villain! Oh, what's more, is most my shame. Have you not dishonoured me?

MASK. No, that I deny; for I never told in all my life: so that accusation's answered; on to the next.

LADY TOUCH. Death, do you dally with my passion? Insolent devil! But have a care,—provoke me not; for, by the eternal fire, you shall not 'scape my vengeance. Calm villain! How unconcerned he stands, confessing treachery and ingratitude! Is there a vice more black? Oh, I have excuses thousands for my faults; fire in my temper, passions in my soul, apt to ev'ry provocation, oppressed at once with love, and with despair. But a sedate, a thinking villain, whose black blood runs temperately bad, what excuse can clear?

MASK. Will you be in temper, madam? I would not talk not to be heard. I have been [*she walks about disordered*] a very great rogue for your sake, and you reproach me with it; I am ready to be a rogue still, to do you service; and you are flinging conscience and honour in my face, to rebate my inclinations. How am I to behave myself? You know I am your creature, my life and fortune in your power; to disoblige you brings me certain ruin. Allow it I would betray you, I would not be a traitor to myself: I don't pretend to honesty, because you know I am a rascal; but I would convince you from the necessity of my being firm to you.

LADY TOUCH. Necessity, impudence! Can no gratitude incline you, no obligations touch you? Have not my fortune and my person been subjected to your pleasure? Were you not in the nature of a servant, and have not I in effect made you lord of all, of me, and of my lord? Where is that humble love, the languishing, that adoration, which once was paid me, and everlastingly engaged?

MASK. Fixt, rooted in my heart, whence nothing can remove 'em, yet you—

LADY TOUCH. Yet, what yet?

MASK. Nay, misconceive me not, madam, when I say I have had a gen'rous and a faithful passion, which you had never favoured, but through revenge and policy.

LADY TOUCH. Ha!

MASK. Look you, madam, we are alone,—pray contain yourself and hear me. You know you loved your nephew when I first sighed for you; I quickly found it: an argument that I loved, for with that art you veiled your passion 'twas imperceptible to all but jealous eyes. This discovery made me bold; I confess it; for by it I thought you in my power. Your nephew's scorn of you added to my hopes; I watched the occasion, and took you, just repulsed by him, warm at once with love and indignation; your disposition, my arguments, and happy opportunity accomplished my design; I pressed the yielding minute, and was blest. How I have loved you since, words have not shown, then how should words express?

LADY TOUCH. Well, mollifying devil! And have I not met your love with forward fire?

MASK. Your zeal, I grant, was ardent, but misplaced; there was revenge in view; that woman's idol had defiled the temple of the god, and love was made a mock-worship. A son and heir would

have edged young Mellefont upon the brink of ruin, and left him none but you to catch at for prevention.

LADY TOUCH. Again provoke me! Do you wind me like a larum, only to rouse my own stilled soul for your diversion? Confusion!

MASK. Nay, madam, I'm gone, if you relapse. What needs this? I say nothing but what you yourself, in open hours of love, have told me. Why should you deny it? Nay, how can you? Is not all this present heat owing to the same fire? Do you not love him still? How have I this day offended you, but in not breaking off his match with Cynthia? which, ere to-morrow, shall be done, had you but patience.

LADY TOUCH. How, what said you, Maskwell? Another caprice to unwind my temper?

MASK. By heav'n, no; I am your slave, the slave of all your pleasures; and will not rest till I have given you peace, would you suffer me.

LADY TOUCH. O Maskwell! in vain I do disguise me from thee, thou know'st me, knowest the very inmost windings and recesses of my soul. O Mellefont! I burn; married to morrow! Despair strikes me. Yet my soul knows I hate him too: let him but once be mine, and next immediate ruin seize him.

MASK. Compose yourself, you shall possess and ruin him too,—will that please you?

LADY TOUCH. How, how? Thou dear, thou precious villain, how?

MASK. You have already been tampering with my Lady Plyant.

LADY TOUCH. I have: she is ready for any impression I think fit.

MASK. She must be throughly persuaded that Mellefont loves her.

LADY TOUCH. She is so credulous that way naturally, and likes him so well, that she will believe it faster than I can persuade her. But I don't see what you can propose from such a trifling design, for her first conversing with Mellefont will convince her of the contrary.

MASK. I know it. I don't depend upon it. But it will prepare something else, and gain us leisure to lay a stronger plot. If I gain a little time, I shall not want contrivance.

One minute gives invention to destroy,

What to rebuild will a whole age employ.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

LADY FROTH *and* CYNTHIA.

CYNT. Indeed, madam! Is it possible your ladyship could have been so much in love?

LADY FROTH. I could not sleep; I did not sleep one wink for three weeks together.

CYNT. Prodigious! I wonder want of sleep, and so much love and so much wit as your ladyship has, did not turn your brain.

LADY FROTH. Oh, my dear Cynthia, you must not rally your friend. But really, as you say, I wonder too. But then I had a way. For, between you and I, I had whimsies and vapours, but I gave them vent.

CYNT. How, pray, madam?

LADY FROTH. Oh, I writ, writ abundantly. Do you never write?

CYNT. Write what?

LADY FROTH. Songs, elegies, satires, encomiums, panegyrics, lampoons, plays, or heroic poems?

CYNT. O Lord, not I, madam; I'm content to be a courteous reader.

LADY FROTH. Oh, inconsistent! In love and not write! If my lord and I had been both of your temper, we had never come together. Oh, bless me! What a sad thing would that have been, if my lord and I should never have met!

CYNT. Then neither my lord nor you would ever have met with your match, on my conscience.

LADY FROTH. O' my conscience, no more we should; thou say'st right. For sure my Lord Froth is as fine a gentleman and as much a man of quality! Ah! nothing at all of the common air. I think I may say he wants nothing but a blue ribbon and a star to make him shine, the very phosphorus of our hemisphere. Do you understand those two hard words? If you don't, I'll explain 'em to you.

CYNT. Yes, yes, madam, I'm not so ignorant.—At least I won't own it, to be troubled with your

instructions. [*Aside*.]

LADY FROTH. Nay, I beg your pardon; but being derived from the Greek, I thought you might have escaped the etymology. But I'm the more amazed to find you a woman of letters and not write! Bless me! how can Mellefont believe you love him?

CYNT. Why, faith, madam, he that won't take my word shall never have it under my hand.

LADY FROTH. I vow Mellefont's a pretty gentleman, but methinks he wants a manner.

CYNT. A manner! What's that, madam?

LADY FROTH. Some distinguishing quality, as, for example, the *bel air* or *brillant* of Mr. Brisk; the solemnity, yet complaisance of my lord, or something of his own that should look a little *Je-ne-sais-quoish*; he is too much a mediocrity, in my mind.

CYNT. He does not indeed affect either pertness or formality; for which I like him. Here he comes.

LADY FROTH. And my lord with him. Pray observe the difference.

SCENE II.

[*To them*] LORD FROTH, MELLEFONT, *and* BRISK.

CYNT. Impertinent creature! I could almost be angry with her now. [*Aside*.]

LADY FROTH. My lord, I have been telling Cynthia how much I have been in love with you; I swear I have; I'm not ashamed to own it now. Ah! it makes my heart leap, I vow I sigh when I think on't. My dear lord! Ha, ha, ha, do you remember, my lord? [*Squeezes him by the hand, looks kindly on him, sighs, and then laughs out*.]

LORD FROTH. Pleasant creature! perfectly well, ah! that look, ay, there it is; who could resist? 'twas so my heart was made a captive first, and ever since t'has been in love with happy slavery.

LADY FROTH. Oh, that tongue, that dear deceitful tongue! that charming softness in your mien and your expression, and then your bow! Good my lord, bow as you did when I gave you my picture; here, suppose this my picture. [*Gives him a pocket-glass*.] Pray mind, my lord; ah! he bows charmingly; nay, my lord, you shan't kiss it so much; I shall grow jealous, I vow now. [*He bows profoundly low, then kisses the glass*.]

LORD FROTH. I saw myself there, and kissed it for your sake.

LADY FROTH. Ah! Gallantry to the last degree. Mr. Brisk, you're a judge; was ever anything so well bred as my lord?

BRISK. Never anything, but your ladyship; let me perish.

LADY FROTH. Oh, prettily turned again; let me die, but you have a great deal of wit. Mr. Mellefont, don't you think Mr. Brisk has a world of wit?

MEL. O yes, madam.

BRISK. O dear, madam—

LADY FROTH. An infinite deal!

BRISK. O heav'ns, madam—

LADY FROTH. More wit than anybody.

BRISK. I'm everlastingly your humble servant, deuce take me, madam.

LORD FROTH. Don't you think us a happy couple?

CYNT. I vow, my lord, I think you the happiest couple in the world, for you're not only happy in one another, and when you are together, but happy in yourselves, and by yourselves.

LORD FROTH. I hope Mellefont will make a good husband too.

CYNT. 'Tis my interest to believe he will, my Lord.

LORD FROTH. D'ye think he'll love you as well as I do my wife? I'm afraid not.

CYNT. I believe he'll love me better.

LORD FROTH. Heav'ns! that can never be. But why do you think so?

CYNT. Because he has not so much reason to be fond of himself.

LORD FROTH. Oh, your humble servant for that, dear madam. Well, Mellefont, you'll be a happy creature.

MEL. Ay, my lord, I shall have the same reason for my happiness that your lordship has, I shall think myself happy.

LORD FROTH. Ah, that's all.

BRISK. [*To* LADY FROTH.] Your ladyship is in the right; but, i'gad, I'm wholly turned into satire. I confess I write but seldom, but when I do—keen iambics, i'gad. But my lord was telling me your ladyship has made an essay toward an heroic poem.

LADY FROTH. Did my lord tell you? Yes, I vow, and the subject is my lord's love to me. And what do you think I call it? I dare swear you won't guess—*The Sillabub*, ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Because my lord's title's Froth, i'gad, ha, ha, ha, deuce take me, very à propos and surprising, ha, ha, ha.

LADY FROTH. He, ay, is not it? And then I call my lord Spumoso; and myself, what d'ye think I call myself?

BRISK. Lactilla, may be,—i'gad, I cannot tell.

LADY FROTH. Biddy, that's all; just my own name.

BRISK. Biddy! I'gad, very pretty. Deuce take me if your ladyship has not the art of surprising the most naturally in the world. I hope you'll make me happy in communicating the poem.

LADY FROTH. Oh, you must be my confidant, I must ask your advice.

BRISK. I'm your humble servant, let me perish. I presume your ladyship has read Bossu?

LADY FROTH. Oh yes, and Racine, and Dacier upon Aristotle and Horace. My lord, you must not be jealous, I'm communicating all to Mr. Brisk.

LORD FROTH. No, no, I'll allow Mr. Brisk; have you nothing about you to shew him, my dear?

LADY FROTH. Yes, I believe I have. Mr. Brisk, come, will you go into the next room? and there I'll shew you what I have.

LORD FROTH. I'll walk a turn in the garden, and come to you.

SCENE III.

MELLEFONT, CYNTHIA.

MEL. You're thoughtful, Cynthia?

CYNT. I'm thinking, though marriage makes man and wife one flesh, it leaves 'em still two fools; and they become more conspicuous by setting off one another.

MEL. That's only when two fools meet, and their follies are opposed.

CYNT. Nay, I have known two wits meet, and by the opposition of their wit render themselves as ridiculous as fools. 'Tis an odd game we're going to play at. What think you of drawing stakes, and giving over in time?

MEL. No, hang't, that's not endeavouring to win, because it's possible we may lose; since we have shuffled and cut, let's even turn up trump now.

CYNT. Then I find it's like cards, if either of us have a good hand it is an accident of fortune.

MEL. No, marriage is rather like a game at bowls: fortune indeed makes the match, and the two nearest, and sometimes the two farthest, are together, but the game depends entirely upon judgment.

CYNT. Still it is a game, and consequently one of us must be a loser.

MEL. Not at all; only a friendly trial of skill, and the winnings to be laid out in an entertainment. What's here, the music? Oh, my lord has promised the company a new song; we'll get 'em to give it us by the way. [*Musicians crossing the stage.*] Pray let us have the favour of you, to practise the song before the company hear it.

SONG.

I.

Cynthia frowns whene'er I woo her,
Yet she's vext if I give over;
Much she fears I should undo her,
But much more to lose her lover:
Thus, in doubting, she refuses;
And not winning, thus she loses.

II.

Prithee, Cynthia, look behind you,
Age and wrinkles will o'ertake you;
Then too late desire will find you,
When the power must forsake you:
Think, O think o' th' sad condition,
To be past, yet wish fruition.

MEL. You shall have my thanks below. [*To the musicians, they go out.*]

SCENE IV.

[*To them*] SIR PAUL PLYANT *and* LADY PLYANT.

SIR PAUL. Gadsbud! I am provoked into a fermentation, as my Lady Froth says; was ever the like read of in story?

LADY PLYANT. Sir Paul, have patience, let me alone to rattle him up.

SIR PAUL. Pray, your ladyship, give me leave to be angry. I'll rattle him up, I warrant you, I'll firk him with a *certiorari*.

LADY PLYANT. You firk him, I'll firk him myself; pray, Sir Paul, hold you contented.

CYNT. Bless me, what makes my father in such a passion? I never saw him thus before.

SIR PAUL. Hold yourself contented, my Lady Plyant. I find passion coming upon me by inflation, and I cannot submit as formerly, therefore give way.

LADY PLYANT. How now! will you be pleased to retire and—

SIR PAUL. No, marry will I not be pleased: I am pleased to be angry, that's my pleasure at this time.

MEL. What can this mean?

LADY PLYANT. Gads my life, the man's distracted; why, how now, who are you? What am I? Slidikins, can't I govern you? What did I marry you for? Am I not to be absolute and uncontrollable? Is it fit a woman of my spirit and conduct should be contradicted in a matter of this concern?

SIR PAUL. It concerns me and only me. Besides, I'm not to be governed at all times. When I am in tranquillity, my Lady Plyant shall command Sir Paul; but when I am provoked to fury, I cannot incorporate with patience and reason: as soon may tigers match with tigers, lambs with lambs, and every creature couple with its foe, as the poet says.

LADY PLYANT. He's hot-headed still! 'Tis in vain to talk to you; but remember I have a curtain-lecture for you, you disobedient, headstrong brute.

SIR PAUL. No, 'tis because I won't be headstrong, because I won't be a brute, and have my head fortified, that I am thus exasperated. But I will protect my honour, and yonder is the violator of my fame.

LADY PLYANT. 'Tis my honour that is concerned, and the violation was intended to me. Your honour! You have none but what is in my keeping, and I can dispose of it when I please: therefore don't provoke me.

SIR PAUL. Hum, gadsbud, she says true. Well, my lady, march on; I will fight under you, then: I am convinced, as far as passion will permit. [LADY PLYANT *and* SIR PAUL *come up to* MELLEFONT.]

LADY PLYANT. Inhuman and treacherous—

SIR PAUL. Thou serpent and first tempter of womankind.

CYNT. Bless me! Sir, madam, what mean you?

SIR PAUL. Thy, Thy, come away, Thy; touch him not. Come hither, girl; go not near him, there's nothing but deceit about him. Snakes are in his peruke, and the crocodile of Nilus is in his belly; he will eat thee up alive.

LADY PLYANT. Dishonourable, impudent creature!

MEL. For heav'n's sake, madam, to whom do you direct this language?

LADY PLYANT. Have I behaved myself with all the decorum and nicety befitting the person of Sir Paul's wife? Have I preserved my honour as it were in a snow-house for these three years past? Have I been white and unsullied even by Sir Paul himself?

SIR PAUL. Nay, she has been an invincible wife, even to me; that's the truth on't.

LADY PLYANT. Have I, I say, preserved myself like a fair sheet of paper for you to make a blot upon?

SIR PAUL. And she shall make a simile with any woman in England.

MEL. I am so amazed, I know not what to say.

SIR PAUL. Do you think my daughter, this pretty creature—gadsbud, she's a wife for a cherubim!—do you think her fit for nothing but to be a stalking horse, to stand before you, while you take aim at my wife? Gadsbud, I was never angry before in my life, and I'll never be appeased again.

MEL. Hell and damnation! This is my aunt; such malice can be engendered nowhere else.

[*Aside*.]

LADY PLYANT. Sir Paul, take Cynthia from his sight; leave me to strike him with the remorse of his intended crime.

CYNT. Pray, sir, stay, hear him; I dare affirm he's innocent.

SIR PAUL. Innocent! Why, hark'ee—come hither, Thy—hark'ee, I had it from his aunt, my sister Touchwood. Gadsbud, he does not care a farthing for anything of thee but thy portion. Why, he's in love with my wife. He would have tantalised thee, and made a cuckold of thy poor father, and that would certainly have broke my heart. I'm sure, if ever I should have horns, they would kill me; they would never come kindly—I should die of 'em like a child that was cutting his teeth—I should indeed, Thy—therefore come away; but providence has prevented all, therefore come away when I bid you.

CYNT. I must obey.

SCENE V.

LADY PLYANT, MELLEFONT.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, such a thing! the impiety of it startles me—to wrong so good, so fair a creature, and one that loves you tenderly—'tis a barbarity of barbarities, and nothing could be guilty of it—

MEL. But the greatest villain imagination can form, I grant it; and next to the villainy of such a fact is the villainy of aspersing me with the guilt. How? which way was I to wrong her? For yet I understand you not.

LADY PLYANT. Why, gads my life, cousin Mellefont, you cannot be so peremptory as to deny it, when I tax you with it to your face? for now Sir Paul's gone, you are *corum nobus*.

MEL. By heav'n, I love her more than life or—

LADY PLYANT. Fiddle faddle, don't tell me of this and that, and everything in the world, but give me mathemacular demonstration; answer me directly. But I have not patience. Oh, the impiety of it, as I was saying, and the unparalleled wickedness! O merciful Father! How could you think to reverse nature so, to make the daughter the means of procuring the mother?

MEL. The daughter to procure the mother!

LADY PLYANT. Ay, for though I am not Cynthia's own mother, I am her father's wife, and that's near enough to make it incest.

MEL. Incest! O my precious aunt, and the devil in conjunction. [*Aside*.]

LADY PLYANT. Oh, reflect upon the horror of that, and then the guilt of deceiving everybody; marrying the daughter, only to make a cuckold of the father; and then seducing me, debauching my purity, and perverting me from the road of virtue in which I have trod thus long, and never made one trip, not one *faux pas*. Oh, consider it! What would you have to answer for if you should provoke me to frailty? Alas! humanity is feeble, heav'n knows! very feeble, and unable to support itself.

MEL. Where am I? is it day? and am I awake? Madam—

LADY PLYANT. And nobody knows how circumstances may happen together. To my thinking, now I could resist the strongest temptation. But yet I know, 'tis impossible for me to know whether I could or not; there's no certainty in the things of this life.

MEL. Madam, pray give me leave to ask you one question.

LADY PLYANT. O Lord, ask me the question; I'll swear I'll refuse it, I swear I'll deny it—therefore don't ask me; nay, you shan't ask me, I swear I'll deny it. O Gemini, you have brought all the blood into my face; I warrant I am as red as a turkey-cock. O fie, cousin Mellefont!

MEL. Nay, madam, hear me; I mean—

LADY PLYANT. Hear you? No, no; I'll deny you first and hear you afterwards. For one does not know how one's mind may change upon hearing. Hearing is one of the senses, and all the senses are fallible. I won't trust my honour, I assure you; my honour is infallible and uncomeatable.

MEL. For heav'n's sake, madam—

LADY PLYANT. Oh, name it no more. Bless me, how can you talk of heav'n, and have so much wickedness in your heart? May be you don't think it a sin—they say some of you gentlemen don't think it a sin. May be it is no sin to them that don't think it so; indeed, if I did not think it a sin—But still my honour, if it were no sin. But then, to marry my daughter for the conveniency of frequent opportunities, I'll never consent to that; as sure as can be, I'll break the match.

MEL. Death and amazement! Madam, upon my knees—

LADY PLYANT. Nay, nay, rise up; come, you shall see my good-nature. I know love is powerful, and nobody can help his passion. 'Tis not your fault; nor, I swear, it is not mine. How can I help

it, if I have charms? And how can you help it, if you are made a captive? I swear it is pity it should be a fault. But my honour,—well, but your honour, too—but the sin!—well, but the necessity—O Lord, here's somebody coming, I dare not stay. Well, you must consider of your crime; and strive as much as can be against it,—strive, be sure. But don't be melancholic; don't despair. But never think that I'll grant you anything. O Lord, no. But be sure you lay aside all thoughts of the marriage, for though I know you don't love Cynthia, only as a blind for your passion to me, yet it will make me jealous. O Lord, what did I say? Jealous! no, no, I can't be jealous, for I must not love you; therefore don't hope,—but don't despair neither. Oh, they're coming, I must fly.

SCENE VI.

MELLEFONT *alone*.

MEL. [*After a pause*.] So then, spite of my care and foresight, I am caught, caught in my security. Yet this was but a shallow artifice, unworthy of my Machiavellian aunt. There must be more behind: this is but the first flash, the priming of her engine. Destruction follows hard, if not most presently prevented.

SCENE VII.

[*To him*] MASKWELL.

MEL. Maskwell, welcome, thy presence is a view of land, appearing to my shipwrecked hopes. The witch has raised the storm, and her ministers have done their work: you see the vessels are parted.

MASK. I know it. I met Sir Paul towing away Cynthia. Come, trouble not your head; I'll join you together ere to-morrow morning, or drown between you in the attempt.

MEL. There's comfort in a hand stretched out to one that's sinking; though ne'er so far off.

MASK. No sinking, nor no danger. Come, cheer up; why, you don't know that while I plead for you, your aunt has given me a retaining fee. Nay, I am your greatest enemy, and she does but journey-work under me.

MEL. Ha! how's this?

MASK. What d'ye think of my being employed in the execution of all her plots? Ha, ha, ha, by heav'n, it's true: I have undertaken to break the match; I have undertaken to make your uncle disinherit you; to get you turned out of doors; and to—ha, ha, ha, I can't tell you for laughing. Oh, she has opened her heart to me! I am to turn you a-grazing, and to—ha, ha, ha, marry Cynthia myself. There's a plot for you.

MEL. Ha! Oh, see, I see my rising sun! Light breaks through clouds upon me, and I shall live in day—Oh, my Maskwell! how shall I thank or praise thee? Thou hast outwitted woman. But, tell me, how couldst thou thus get into her confidence? Ha! How? But was it her contrivance to persuade my Lady Plyant to this extravagant belief?

MASK. It was; and to tell you the truth, I encouraged it for your diversion. Though it made you a little uneasy for the present, yet the reflection of it must needs be entertaining. I warrant she was very violent at first.

MEL. Ha, ha, ha, ay, a very fury; but I was most afraid of her violence at last. If you had not come as you did, I don't know what she might have attempted.

MASK. Ha, ha, ha, I know her temper. Well, you must know, then, that all my contrivances were but bubbles, till at last I pretended to have been long secretly in love with Cynthia; that did my business, that convinced your aunt I might be trusted; since it was as much my interest as hers to break the match. Then, she thought my jealousy might qualify me to assist her in her revenge. And, in short, in that belief, told me the secrets of her heart. At length we made this agreement, if I accomplish her designs (as I told you before) she has engaged to put Cynthia with all her fortune into my power.

MEL. She is most gracious in her favour. Well, and, dear Jack, how hast thou contrived?

MASK. I would not have you stay to hear it now; for I don't know but she may come this way. I am to meet her anon; after that, I'll tell you the whole matter. Be here in this gallery an hour hence; by that time I imagine our consultation may be over.

MEL. I will; till then success attend thee.

SCENE VIII.

MASKWELL *alone*.

Till then, success will attend me; for when I meet you, I meet the only obstacle to my fortune. Cynthia, let thy beauty gild my crimes; and whatsoever I commit of treachery or deceit, shall be imputed to me as a merit. Treachery? What treachery? Love cancels all the bonds of friendship, and sets men right upon their first foundations.

Duty to kings, piety to parents, gratitude to benefactors, and fidelity to friends, are different and particular ties. But the name of rival cuts 'em all asunder, and is a general acquittance. Rival is equal, and love like death an universal leveller of mankind. Ha! But is there not such a thing as honesty? Yes, and whosoever has it about him, bears an enemy in his breast. For your honest man, as I take it, is that nice, scrupulous, conscientious person, who will cheat nobody but himself; such another coxcomb as your wise man, who is too hard for all the world, and will be made a fool of by nobody but himself; ha, ha, ha. Well, for wisdom and honesty give me cunning and hypocrisy; oh, 'tis such a pleasure to angle for fair-faced fools! Then that hungry gudgeon credulity will bite at anything. Why, let me see, I have the same face, the same words and accents when I speak what I do think, and when I speak what I do not think, the very same; and dear dissimulation is the only art not to be known from nature.

Why will mankind be fools, and be deceived,
And why are friends' and lovers' oaths believed,
When each, who searches strictly his own mind,
May so much fraud and power of baseness find?

ACT III.

SCENE I.

LORD TOUCHWOOD *and* LADY TOUCHWOOD.

LADY TOUCH. My lord, can you blame my brother Plyant if he refuse his daughter upon this provocation? The contract's void by this unheard-of impiety.

LORD TOUCH. I don't believe it true; he has better principles. Pho, 'tis nonsense. Come, come, I know my Lady Plyant has a large eye, and would centre everything in her own circle; 'tis not the first time she has mistaken respect for love, and made Sir Paul jealous of the civility of an undesigning person, the better to bespeak his security in her unfeigned pleasures.

LADY TOUCH. You censure hardly, my lord; my sister's honour is very well known.

LORD TOUCH. Yes, I believe I know some that have been familiarly acquainted with it. This is a little trick wrought by some pitiful contriver, envious of my nephew's merit.

LADY TOUCH. Nay, my lord, it may be so, and I hope it will be found so. But that will require some time; for in such a case as this, demonstration is necessary.

LORD TOUCH. There should have been demonstration of the contrary too, before it had been believed.

LADY TOUCH. So I suppose there was.

LORD TOUCH. How? Where? When?

LADY TOUCH. That I can't tell; nay, I don't say there was. I am willing to believe as favourably of my nephew as I can.

LORD TOUCH. I don't know that. [*Half aside.*]

LADY TOUCH. How? Don't you believe that, say you, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. No, I don't say so. I confess I am troubled to find you so cold in his defence.

LADY TOUCH. His defence! Bless me, would you have me defend an ill thing?

LORD TOUCH. You believe it, then?

LADY TOUCH. I don't know; I am very unwilling to speak my thoughts in anything that may be to my cousin's disadvantage: besides, I find, my lord, you are prepared to receive an ill impression from any opinion of mine which is not consenting with your own. But, since I am like to be suspected in the end, and 'tis a pain any longer to dissemble, I own it to you; in short I do believe it, nay, and can believe anything worse, if it were laid to his charge. Don't ask me my reasons, my lord, for they are not fit to be told you.

LORD TOUCH. I'm amazed: there must be something more than ordinary in this. [*Aside.*] Not fit to be told me, madam? You can have no interests wherein I am not concerned, and consequently the same reasons ought to be convincing to me, which create your satisfaction or disquiet.

LADY TOUCH. But those which cause my disquiet I am willing to have remote from your hearing. Good my lord, don't press me.

LORD TOUCH. Don't oblige me to press you.

LADY TOUCH. Whatever it was, 'tis past. And that is better to be unknown which cannot be prevented; therefore let me beg you to rest satisfied.

LORD TOUCH. When you have told me, I will.

LADY TOUCH. You won't.

LORD TOUCH. By my life, my dear, I will.

LADY TOUCH. What if you can't?

LORD TOUCH. How? Then I must know, nay, I will. No more trifling. I charge you tell me. By all our mutual peace to come; upon your duty—

LADY TOUCH. Nay, my lord, you need say no more, to make me lay my heart before you, but don't be thus transported; compose yourself. It is not of concern to make you lose one minute's temper. 'Tis not, indeed, my dear. Nay, by this kiss you shan't be angry. O Lord, I wish I had not told you anything. Indeed, my lord, you have frighted me. Nay, look pleased, I'll tell you.

LORD TOUCH. Well, well.

LADY TOUCH. Nay, but will you be calm? Indeed it's nothing but—

LORD TOUCH. But what?

LADY TOUCH. But will you promise me not to be angry? Nay, you must—not to be angry with Mellefont? I dare swear he's sorry, and were it to do again, would not—

LORD TOUCH. Sorry for what? 'Death, you rack me with delay.

LADY TOUCH. Nay, no great matter, only—well, I have your promise. Pho, why nothing, only your nephew had a mind to amuse himself sometimes with a little gallantry towards me. Nay, I can't think he meant anything seriously, but methought it looked oddly.

LORD TOUCH. Confusion and hell, what do I hear?

LADY TOUCH. Or, may be, he thought he was not enough akin to me, upon your account, and had a mind to create a nearer relation on his own; a lover you know, my lord. Ha, ha, ha. Well, but that's all. Now you have it; well remember your promise, my lord, and don't take any notice of it to him.

LORD TOUCH. No, no, no. Damnation!

LADY TOUCH. Nay, I swear you must not. A little harmless mirth; only misplaced, that's all. But if it were more, 'tis over now, and all's well. For my part I have forgot it, and so has he, I hope,—for I have not heard anything from him these two days.

LORD TOUCH. These two days! Is it so fresh? Unnatural villain! Death, I'll have him stripped and turned naked out of my doors this moment, and let him rot and perish, incestuous brute!

LADY TOUCH. Oh, for heav'n's sake, my lord, you'll ruin me if you take such public notice of it; it will be a town talk. Consider your own and my honour; nay, I told you you would not be satisfied when you knew it.

LORD TOUCH. Before I've done I will be satisfied. Ungrateful monster! how long?

LADY TOUCH. Lord, I don't know; I wish my lips had grown together when I told you. Almost a twelvemonth. Nay, I won't tell you any more till you are yourself. Pray, my lord, don't let the company see you in this disorder. Yet, I confess, I can't blame you; for I think I was never so surprised in my life. Who would have thought my nephew could have so misconstrued my kindness? But will you go into your closet, and recover your temper. I'll make an excuse of sudden business to the company, and come to you. Pray, good, dear my lord, let me beg you do now. I'll come immediately and tell you all; will you, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. I will—I am mute with wonder.

LADY TOUCH. Well, but go now, here's somebody coming.

LORD TOUCH. Well, I go. You won't stay? for I would hear more of this.

LADY TOUCH. I follow instantly. So.

SCENE II.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, MASKWELL.

MASK. This was a masterpiece, and did not need my help, though I stood ready for a cue to come in and confirm all, had there been occasion.

LADY TOUCH. Have you seen Mellefont?

MASK. I have; and am to meet him here about this time.

LADY TOUCH. How does he bear his disappointment?

MASK. Secure in my assistance, he seemed not much afflicted, but rather laughed at the shallow artifice, which so little time must of necessity discover. Yet he is apprehensive of some farther design of yours, and has engaged me to watch you. I believe he will hardly be able to prevent your plot, yet I would have you use caution and expedition.

LADY TOUCH. Expedition indeed, for all we do must be performed in the remaining part of this evening, and before the company break up, lest my lord should cool and have an opportunity to

talk with him privately. My lord must not see him again.

MASK. By no means; therefore you must aggravate my lord's displeasure to a degree that will admit of no conference with him. What think you of mentioning me?

LADY TOUCH. How?

MASK. To my lord, as having been privy to Mellefont's design upon you, but still using my utmost endeavours to dissuade him, though my friendship and love to him has made me conceal it; yet you may say, I threatened the next time he attempted anything of that kind to discover it to my lord.

LADY TOUCH. To what end is this?

MASK. It will confirm my lord's opinion of my honour and honesty, and create in him a new confidence in me, which (should this design miscarry) will be necessary to the forming another plot that I have in my head.—To cheat you as well as the rest. [*Aside*.]

LADY TOUCH. I'll do it—I'll tell him you hindered him once from forcing me.

MASK. Excellent! Your ladyship has a most improving fancy. You had best go to my lord, keep him as long as you can in his closet, and I doubt not but you will mould him to what you please; your guests are so engaged in their own follies and intrigues, they'll miss neither of you.

LADY TOUCH. When shall we meet?—at eight this evening in my chamber? There rejoice at our success, and toy away an hour in mirth.

MASK. I will not fail.

SCENE III.

MASKWELL *alone*.

I know what she means by toying away an hour well enough. Pox, I have lost all appetite to her; yet she's a fine woman, and I loved her once. But I don't know: since I have been in a great measure kept by her, the case is altered; what was my pleasure is become my duty, and I have as little stomach to her now as if I were her husband. Should she smoke my design upon Cynthia, I were in a fine pickle. She has a damned penetrating head, and knows how to interpret a coldness the right way; therefore I must dissemble ardour and ecstasy; that's resolved. How easily and pleasantly is that dissembled before fruition! Pox on't that a man can't drink without quenching his thirst. Ha! yonder comes Mellefont, thoughtful. Let me think. Meet her at eight—hum—ha! By heav'n I have it.—If I can speak to my lord before. Was it my brain or providence? No matter which—I will deceive 'em all, and yet secure myself. 'Twas a lucky thought! Well, this double-dealing is a jewel. Here he comes, now for me. [MASKWELL, *pretending not to see him, walks by him, and speaks as it were to himself*.]

SCENE IV.

[*To him*] MELLEFONT, *musing*.

MASK. Mercy on us, what will the wickedness of this world come to?

MEL. How now, Jack? What, so full of contemplation that you run over?

MASK. I'm glad you're come, for I could not contain myself any longer, and was just going to give vent to a secret, which nobody but you ought to drink down. Your aunt's just gone from hence.

MEL. And having trusted thee with the secrets of her soul, thou art villainously bent to discover 'em all to me, ha?

MASK. I'm afraid my frailty leans that way. But I don't know whether I can in honour discover 'em all.

MEL. All, all, man! What, you may in honour betray her as far as she betrays herself. No tragical design upon my person, I hope.

MASK. No, but it's a comical design upon mine.

MEL. What dost thou mean?

MASK. Listen and be dumb; we have been bargaining about the rate of your ruin—

MEL. Like any two guardians to an orphan heiress. Well?

MASK. And whereas pleasure is generally paid with mischief, what mischief I do is to be paid with pleasure.

MEL. So when you've swallowed the potion you sweeten your mouth with a plum.

MASK. You are merry, sir, but I shall probe your constitution. In short, the price of your banishment is to be paid with the person of—

MEL. Of Cynthia and her fortune. Why, you forget you told me this before.

MASK. No, no. So far you are right; and I am, as an earnest of that bargain, to have full and free possession of the person of—your aunt.

MEL. Ha! Pho, you trifle.

MASK. By this light, I'm serious; all raillery apart. I knew 'twould stun you. This evening at eight she will receive me in her bedchamber.

MEL. Hell and the devil, is she abandoned of all grace? Why, the woman is possessed.

MASK. Well, will you go in my stead?

MEL. By heav'n, into a hot furnace sooner.

MASK. No, you would not; it would not be so convenient, as I can order matters.

MEL. What d'ye mean?

MASK. Mean? Not to disappoint the lady, I assure you. Ha, ha, ha, how gravely he looks. Come, come, I won't perplex you. 'Tis the only thing that providence could have contrived to make me capable of serving you, either to my inclination or your own necessity.

MEL. How, how, for heav'n's sake, dear Maskwell?

MASK. Why, thus. I'll go according to appointment; you shall have notice at the critical minute to come and surprise your aunt and me together. Counterfeit a rage against me, and I'll make my escape through the private passage from her chamber, which I'll take care to leave open. 'Twill be hard if then you can't bring her to any conditions. For this discovery will disarm her of all defence, and leave her entirely at your mercy—nay, she must ever after be in awe of you.

MEL. Let me adore thee, my better genius! By heav'n I think it is not in the power of fate to disappoint my hopes—my hopes? My certainty!

MASK. Well, I'll meet you here, within a quarter of eight, and give you notice.

MEL. Good fortune ever go along with thee.

SCENE V.

MELLEFONT, CARELESS.

CARE. Mellefont, get out o' th' way, my Lady Plyant's coming, and I shall never succeed while thou art in sight. Though she begins to tack about; but I made love a great while to no purpose.

MEL. Why, what's the matter? She's convinced that I don't care for her.

CARE. I can't get an answer from her, that does not begin with her honour, or her virtue, her religion, or some such cant. Then she has told me the whole history of Sir Paul's nine years courtship; how he has lain for whole nights together upon the stairs before her chamber-door; and that the first favour he received from her was a piece of an old scarlet petticoat for a stomacher, which since the day of his marriage he has out of a piece of gallantry converted into a night-cap, and wears it still with much solemnity on his anniversary wedding-night.

MEL. That I have seen, with the ceremony thereunto belonging. For on that night he creeps in at the bed's feet like a gulled bassa that has married a relation of the Grand Signior, and that night he has his arms at liberty. Did not she tell you at what a distance she keeps him? He has confessed to me that, but at some certain times, that is, I suppose, when she apprehends being with child, he never has the privilege of using the familiarity of a husband with a wife. He was once given to scrambling with his hands, and sprawling in his sleep, and ever since she has him swaddled up in blankets, and his hands and feet swathed down, and so put to bed; and there he lies with a great beard, like a Russian bear upon a drift of snow. You are very great with him, I wonder he never told you his grievances: he will, I warrant you.

CARE. Excessively foolish! But that which gives me most hopes of her is her telling me of the many temptations she has resisted.

MEL. Nay, then you have her; for a woman's bragging to a man that she has overcome temptations is an argument that they were weakly offered, and a challenge to him to engage her more irresistibly. 'Tis only an enhancing the price of the commodity, by telling you how many customers have underbid her.

CARE. Nay, I don't despair. But still she has a grudging to you. I talked to her t'other night at my Lord Froth's masquerade, when I'm satisfied she knew me, and I had no reason to complain of my reception; but I find women are not the same bare-faced and in masks, and a vizor disguises their inclinations as much as their faces.

MEL. 'Tis a mistake, for women may most properly be said to be unmasked when they wear vizors; for that secures them from blushing and being out of countenance, and next to being in the dark, or alone, they are most truly themselves in a vizor mask. Here they come: I'll leave you. Ply her close, and by and by clap a *billet doux* into her hand; for a woman never thinks a man truly in love with her, till he has been fool enough to think of her out of her sight, and to lose so much time as to write to her.

SCENE VI.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL, *and* LADY PLYANT.

SIR PAUL. Shan't we disturb your meditation, Mr. Careless? You would be private?

CARE. You bring that along with you, Sir Paul, that shall be always welcome to my privacy.

SIR PAUL. O sweet sir, you load your humble servants, both me and my wife, with continual favours.

LADY PLYANT. Sir Paul, what a phrase was there? You will be making answers, and taking that upon you which ought to lie upon me. That you should have so little breeding to think Mr. Careless did not apply himself to me. Pray what have you to entertain anybody's privacy? I swear and declare in the face of the world I'm ready to blush for your ignorance.

SIR PAUL. I acquiesce, my lady; but don't snub so loud. [*Aside to her*.]

LADY PLYANT. Mr. Careless, if a person that is wholly illiterate might be supposed to be capable of being qualified to make a suitable return to those obligations, which you are pleased to confer upon one that is wholly incapable of being qualified in all those circumstances, I'm sure I should rather attempt it than anything in the world, [*Courtesies*] for I'm sure there's nothing in the world that I would rather. [*Courtesies*] But I know Mr. Careless is so great a critic, and so fine a gentleman, that it is impossible for me—

CARE. O heavens! madam, you confound me.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, she's a fine person.

LADY PLYANT. O Lord! sir, pardon me, we women have not those advantages; I know my imperfections. But at the same time you must give me leave to declare in the face of the world that nobody is more sensible of favours and things; for with the reserve of my honour I assure you, Mr. Careless, I don't know anything in the world I would refuse to a person so meritorious. You'll pardon my want of expression.

CARE. O, your ladyship is abounding in all excellence, particularly that of phrase.

LADY PLYANT. You are so obliging, sir.

CARE. Your ladyship is so charming.

SIR PAUL. So, now, now; now, my lady.

LADY PLYANT. So well bred.

CARE. So surprising.

LADY PLYANT. So well dressed, so *bonne mine*, so eloquent, so unaffected, so easy, so free, so particular, so agreeable.

SIR PAUL. Ay, so, so, there.

CARE. O Lord, I beseech you madam, don't.

LADY PLYANT. So gay, so graceful, so good teeth, so fine shape, so fine limbs, so fine linen, and I don't doubt but you have a very good skin, sir,

CARE. For heaven's sake, madam, I'm quite out of countenance.

SIR PAUL. And my lady's quite out of breath; or else you should hear—Gads-bud, you may talk of my Lady Froth.

CARE. O fie, fie, not to be named of a day. My Lady Froth is very well in her accomplishments. But it is when my Lady Plyant is not thought of. If that can ever be.

LADY PLYANT. O, you overcome me. That is so excessive.

SIR PAUL. Nay, I swear and vow that was pretty.

CARE. O, Sir Paul, you are the happiest man alive. Such a lady! that is the envy of her own sex, and the admiration of ours.

SIR PAUL. Your humble servant. I am, I thank heaven, in a fine way of living, as I may say, peacefully and happily, and I think need not envy any of my neighbours, blessed be providence. Ay, truly, Mr. Careless, my lady is a great blessing, a fine, discreet, well-spoken woman as you shall see, if it becomes me to say so, and we live very comfortably together; she is a little hasty sometimes, and so am I; but mine's soon over, and then I'm so sorry.—O Mr. Careless, if it were not for one thing—

SCENE VII.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL, LADY PLYANT, BOY *with a letter*.

LADY PLYANT. How often have you been told of that, you jackanapes?

SIR PAUL. Gad so, gad's-bud. Tim, carry it to my lady, you should have carried it to my lady first.

BOY. 'Tis directed to your worship.

SIR PAUL. Well, well, my lady reads all letters first. Child, do so no more; d'ye hear, Tim.

BOY. No, and please you.

SCENE VIII.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL, LADY PLYANT.

SIR PAUL. A humour of my wife's: you know women have little fancies. But as I was telling you, Mr. Careless, if it were not for one thing, I should think myself the happiest man in the world; indeed that touches me near, very near.

CARE. What can that be, Sir Paul?

SIR PAUL. Why, I have, I thank heaven, a very plentiful fortune, a good estate in the country, some houses in town, and some money, a pretty tolerable personal estate; and it is a great grief to me, indeed it is, Mr. Careless, that I have not a son to inherit this. 'Tis true I have a daughter, and a fine dutiful child she is, though I say it, blessed be providence I may say; for indeed, Mr. Careless, I am mightily beholden to providence. A poor unworthy sinner. But if I had a son! Ah, that's my affliction, and my only affliction; indeed I cannot refrain tears when it comes in my mind. [*Cries*.]

CARE. Why, methinks that might be easily remedied—my lady's a fine likely woman—

SIR PAUL. Oh, a fine likely woman as you shall see in a summer's day. Indeed she is, Mr. Careless, in all respects.

CARE. And I should not have taken you to have been so old—

SIR PAUL. Alas, that's not it, Mr. Careless; ah! that's not it; no, no, you shoot wide of the mark a mile; indeed you do, that's not it, Mr. Careless; no, no, that's not it.

CARE. No? What can be the matter then?

SIR PAUL. You'll scarcely believe me when I shall tell you—my lady is so nice. It's very strange, but it's true; too true—she's so very nice, that I don't believe she would touch a man for the world. At least not above once a year; I'm sure I have found it so; and, alas, what's once a year to an old man, who would do good in his generation? Indeed it's true, Mr. Careless, it breaks my heart. I am her husband, as I may say; though far unworthy of that honour, yet I am her husband; but alas-a-day, I have no more familiarity with her person—as to that matter—than with my own mother—no indeed.

CARE. Alas-a-day, this is a lamentable story. My lady must be told on't. She must i'faith, Sir Paul; 'tis an injury to the world.

SIR PAUL. Ah! would to heaven you would, Mr. Careless; you are mightily in her favour.

CARE. I warrant you, what! we must have a son some way or other.

SIR PAUL. Indeed I should be mightily bound to you if you could bring it about, Mr. Careless.

LADY PLYANT. Here, Sir Paul, it's from your steward. Here's a return of 600 pounds; you may take fifty of it for the next half year. [*Gives him the letter*.]

SCENE IX.

[*To them*] LORD FROTH, CYNTHIA.

SIR PAUL. How does my girl? Come hither to thy father, poor lamb: thou'rt melancholic.

LORD FROTH. Heaven, Sir Paul, you amaze me, of all things in the world. You are never pleased but when we are all upon the broad grin: all laugh and no company; ah, then 'tis such a sight to see some teeth. Sure you're a great admirer of my Lady Whifler, Mr. Sneer, and Sir Laurence Loud, and that gang.

SIR PAUL. I vow and swear she's a very merry woman; but I think she laughs a little too much.

LORD FROTH. Merry! O Lord, what a character that is of a woman of quality. You have been at my Lady Whifler's upon her day, madam?

CYNT. Yes, my lord. I must humour this fool. [*Aside*.]

LORD FROTH. Well, and how? hee! What is your sense of the conversation?

CYNT. Oh, most ridiculous, a perpetual comfort of laughing without any harmony; for sure, my lord, to laugh out of time, is as disagreeable as to sing out of time or out of tune.

LORD FROTH. Hee, hee, hee, right; and then, my Lady Whifler is so ready—she always comes in three bars too soon. And then, what do they laugh at? For you know laughing without a jest is as

impertinent, hee! as, as—

CYNT. As dancing without a fiddle.

LORD FROTH. Just i'faith, that was at my tongue's end.

CYNT. But that cannot be properly said of them, for I think they are all in good nature with the world, and only laugh at one another; and you must allow they have all jests in their persons, though they have none in their conversation.

LORD FROTH. True, as I'm a person of honour. For heaven's sake let us sacrifice 'em to mirth a little. [*Enter* BOY *and whispers* SIR PAUL.]

SIR PAUL. Gads so.—Wife, wife, my Lady Plyant, I have a word.

LADY PLYANT. I'm busy, Sir Paul, I wonder at your impertinence.

CARE. Sir Paul, harkee, I'm reasoning the matter you know. Madam, if your ladyship please, we'll discourse of this in the next room.

SIR PAUL. O ho, I wish you good success, I wish you good success. Boy, tell my lady, when she has done, I would speak with her below.

SCENE X.

CYNTHIA, LORD FROTH, LADY FROTH, BRISK.

LADY FROTH. Then you think that episode between Susan, the dairy-maid, and our coachman is not amiss; you know, I may suppose the dairy in town, as well as in the country.

BRISK. Incomparable, let me perish. But then, being an heroic poem, had you not better call him a charioteer? Charioteer sounds great; besides, your ladyship's coachman having a red face, and you comparing him to the sun—and you know the sun is called Heaven's charioteer.

LADY FROTH. Oh, infinitely better; I'm extremely beholden to you for the hint; stay, we'll read over those half a score lines again. [*Pulls out a paper*.] Let me see here, you know what goes before,—the comparison, you know. [*Reads*.]

> For as the sun shines ev'ry day,
> So of our coachman I may say.

BRISK. I'm afraid that simile won't do in wet weather; because you say the sun shines every day.

LADY FROTH. No; for the sun it won't, but it will do for the coachman, for you know there's most occasion for a coach in wet weather.

BRISK. Right, right, that saves all.

LADY FROTH. Then I don't say the sun shines all the day, but that he peeps now and then; yet he does shine all the day too, you know, though we don't see him.

BRISK. Right, but the vulgar will never comprehend that.

LADY FROTH. Well, you shall hear. Let me see. [*Reads*.]

> For as the sun shines ev'ry day,
> So of our coachman I may say,
> He shows his drunken fiery face,
> Just as the sun does, more or less.

BRISK. That's right, all's well, all's well. 'More or less.'

LADY FROTH reads:

> And when at night his labour's done,
> Then too, like Heav'n's charioteer the sun:

Ay, charioteer does better.

> Into the dairy he descends,
> And there his whipping and his driving ends;
> There he's secure from danger of a bilk,
> His fare is paid him, and he sets in milk.

For Susan you know, is Thetis, and so—

BRISK. Incomparable well and proper, egad—but I have one exception to make—don't you think bilk—(I know it's good rhyme)—but don't you think *bilk* and *fare* too like a hackney coachman?

LADY FROTH. I swear and vow I'm afraid so. And yet our Jehu was a hackney coachman, when my lord took him.

BRISK. Was he? I'm answered, if Jehu was a hackney coachman. You may put that in the

marginal notes though, to prevent criticism—only mark it with a small asterism, and say, 'Jehu was formerly a hackney coachman.'

LADY FROTH. I will. You'd oblige me extremely to write notes to the whole poem.

BRISK. With all my heart and soul, and proud of the vast honour, let me perish.

LORD FROTH. Hee, hee, hee, my dear, have you done? won't you join with us? We were laughing at my Lady Whifler and Mr. Sneer.

LADY FROTH. Ay, my dear, were you? Oh, filthy Mr. Sneer; he's a nauseous figure, a most fulsamic fop, foh! He spent two days together in going about Covent Garden to suit the lining of his coach with his complexion.

LORD FROTH. O silly! yet his aunt is as fond of him as if she had brought the ape into the world herself.

BRISK. Who, my Lady Toothless? Oh, she's a mortifying spectacle; she's always chewing the cud like an old ewe.

CYNT. Fie, Mr. Brisk, eringo's for her cough.

LADY FROTH. I have seen her take 'em half chewed out of her mouth, to laugh, and then put 'em in again. Foh!

LORD FROTH. Foh!

LADY FROTH. Then she's always ready to laugh when Sneer offers to speak, and sits in expectation of his no jest, with her gums bare, and her mouth open—

BRISK. Like an oyster at low ebb, egad. Ha, ha, ha!

CYNT. [*Aside*] Well, I find there are no fools so inconsiderable in themselves but they can render other people contemptible by exposing their infirmities.

LADY FROTH. Then that t'other great strapping lady—I can't hit of her name; the old fat fool that paints so exorbitantly.

BRISK. I know whom you mean—but deuce take me, I can't hit of her name neither. Paints, d'ye say? Why, she lays it on with a trowel. Then she has a great beard that bristles through it, and makes her look as if she were plastered with lime and hair, let me perish.

LADY FROTH. Oh, you made a song upon her, Mr. Brisk.

BRISK. He! egad, so I did. My lord can sing it.

CYNT. O good, my lord, let's hear it.

BRISK. 'Tis not a song neither, it's a sort of an epigram, or rather an epigrammatic sonnet; I don't know what to call it, but it's satire. Sing it, my lord.

LORD FROTH sings.

> Ancient Phyllis has young graces,
> 'Tis a strange thing, but a true one;
> Shall I tell you how?
> She herself makes her own faces,
> And each morning wears a new one;
> Where's the wonder now?

BRISK. Short, but there's salt in't; my way of writing, egad.

SCENE XI.

[*To them*] FOOTMAN.

LADY FROTH. How now?

FOOT. Your ladyship's chair is come.

LADY FROTH. Is nurse and the child in it?

FOOT. Yes, madam.

LADY FROTH. O the dear creature! Let's go see it.

LORD FROTH. I swear, my dear, you'll spoil that child, with sending it to and again so often; this is the seventh time the chair has gone for her to-day.

LADY FROTH. O law! I swear it's but the sixth—and I haven't seen her these two hours. The poor creature—I swear, my lord, you don't love poor little Sapho. Come, my dear Cynthia, Mr. Brisk, we'll go see Sapho, though my lord won't.

CYNT. I'll wait upon your ladyship.

BRISK. Pray, madam, how old is Lady Sapho?

LADY FROTH. Three-quarters, but I swear she has a world of wit, and can sing a tune already. My lord, won't you go? Won't you? What! not to see Saph? Pray, my lord, come see little Saph. I knew you could not stay.

SCENE XII.

CYNTHIA *alone*.

CYNT. 'Tis not so hard to counterfeit joy in the depth of affliction, as to dissemble mirth in company of fools. Why should I call 'em fools? The world thinks better of 'em; for these have quality and education, wit and fine conversation, are received and admired by the world. If not, they like and admire themselves. And why is not that true wisdom? for 'tis happiness: and for ought I know, we have misapplied the name all this while, and mistaken the thing: since

> If happiness in self-content is placed,
> The wise are wretched, and fools only bless'd.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

MELLEFONT *and* CYNTHIA.

CYNT. I heard him loud as I came by the closet-door, and my lady with him, but she seemed to moderate his passion.

MEL. Ay, hell thank her, as gentle breezes moderate a fire; but I shall counter-work her spells, and ride the witch in her own bridle.

CYNT. It's impossible; she'll cast beyond you still. I'll lay my life it will never be a match.

MEL. What?

CYNT. Between you and me.

MEL. Why so?

CYNT. My mind gives me it won't, because we are both willing. We each of us strive to reach the goal, and hinder one another in the race. I swear it never does well when the parties are so agreed; for when people walk hand in hand there's neither overtaking nor meeting. We hunt in couples, where we both pursue the same game but forget one another; and 'tis because we are so near that we don't think of coming together.

MEL. Hum, 'gad I believe there's something in it. Marriage is the game that we hunt, and while we think that we only have it in view, I don't see but we have it in our power.

CYNT. Within reach; for example, give me your hand. You have looked through the wrong end of the perspective all this while, for nothing has been between us but our fears.

MEL. I don't know why we should not steal out of the house this very moment and marry one another, without consideration or the fear of repentance. Pox o' fortune, portion, settlements, and jointures.

CYNT. Ay, ay, what have we to do with 'em? You know we marry for love.

MEL. Love, love, downright, very villainous love.

CYNT. And he that can't live upon love deserves to die in a ditch. Here then, I give you my promise, in spite of duty, any temptation of wealth, your inconstancy, or my own inclination to change—

MEL. To run most wilfully and unreasonably away with me this moment and be married.

CYNT. Hold. Never to marry anybody else.

MEL. That's but a kind of negative consent. Why, you won't baulk the frolic?

CYNT. If you had not been so assured of your own conduct I would not. But 'tis but reasonable that since I consent to like a man without the vile consideration of money, he should give me a very evident demonstration of his wit: therefore let me see you undermine my Lady Touchwood, as you boasted, and force her to give her consent, and then—

MEL. I'll do't.

CYNT. And I'll do't.

MEL. This very next ensuing hour of eight o'clock is the last minute of her reign, unless the devil assist her *in propriâ personâ*.

CYNT. Well, if the devil should assist her, and your plot miscarry—

MEL. Ay, what am I to trust to then?

CYNT. Why, if you give me very clear demonstration that it was the devil, I'll allow for irresistible odds. But if I find it to be only chance, or destiny, or unlucky stars, or anything but the very devil, I'm inexorable: only still I'll keep my word, and live a maid for your sake.

MEL. And you won't die one, for your own, so still there's hope.

CYNT. Here's my mother-in-law, and your friend Careless; I would not have 'em see us together yet.

SCENE II.

CARELESS *and* LADY PLYANT.

LADY PLYANT. I swear, Mr. Careless, you are very alluring, and say so many fine things, and nothing is so moving to me as a fine thing. Well, I must do you this justice, and declare in the face of the world, never anybody gained so far upon me as yourself. With blushes I must own it, you have shaken, as I may say, the very foundation of my honour. Well, sure, if I escape your importunities, I shall value myself as long as I live, I swear.

CARE. And despise me. [*Sighing.*]

LADY PLYANT. The last of any man in the world, by my purity; now you make me swear. O gratitude forbid, that I should ever be wanting in a respectful acknowledgment of an entire resignation of all my best wishes for the person and parts of so accomplished a person, whose merit challenges much more, I'm sure, than my illiterate praises can description.

CARE. [*In a whining tone.*] Ah heavens, madam, you ruin me with kindness. Your charming tongue pursues the victory of your eyes, while at your feet your poor adorer dies.

LADY PLYANT. Ah! Very fine.

CARE. [*Still whining.*] Ah, why are you so fair, so bewitching fair? O let me grow to the ground here, and feast upon that hand; O let me press it to my heart, my trembling heart: the nimble movement shall instruct your pulse, and teach it to alarm desire. (Zoons, I'm almost at the end of my cant, if she does not yield quickly.) [*Aside.*]

LADY PLYANT. O that's so passionate and fine, I cannot hear. I am not safe if I stay, and must leave you.

CARE. And must you leave me! Rather let me languish out a wretched life, and breath my soul beneath your feet. (I must say the same thing over again, and can't help it.) [*Aside.*]

LADY PLYANT. I swear I'm ready to languish too! O my honour! Whither is it going? I protest you have given me the palpitation of the heart.

CARE. Can you be so cruel—

LADY PLYANT. O rise, I beseech you, say no more till you rise. Why did you kneel so long? I swear I was so transported, I did not see it. Well, to show you how far you have gained upon me, I assure you, if Sir Paul should die, of all mankind there's none I'd sooner make my second choice.

CARE. O Heaven! I can't out-live this night without your favour; I feel my spirits faint, a general dampness overspreads my face, a cold deadly dew already vents through all my pores, and will to-morrow wash me for ever from your sight, and drown me in my tomb.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, you have conquered, sweet, melting, moving sir, you have conquered. What heart of marble can refrain to weep, and yield to such sad sayings! [*Cries.*]

CARE. I thank Heaven, they are the saddest that I ever said. Oh! (I shall never contain laughter.) [*Aside.*]

LADY PLYANT. Oh, I yield myself all up to your uncontrollable embraces. Say, thou dear dying man, when, where, and how. Ah, there's Sir Paul.

CARE. 'Slife, yonder's Sir Paul, but if he were not come, I'm so transported I cannot speak. This note will inform you. [*Gives her a note.*]

SCENE III.

LADY PLYANT, SIR PAUL, CYNTHIA.

SIR PAUL. Thou art my tender lambkin, and shalt do what thou wilt. But endeavour to forget this Mellefont.

CYNT. I would obey you to my power, sir; but if I have not him, I have sworn never to marry.

SIR PAUL. Never to marry! Heavens forbid! must I neither have sons nor grandsons? Must the family of the Plyants be utterly extinct for want of issue male? O impiety! But did you swear, did that sweet creature swear? ha! How durst you swear without my consent, ah? Gads-bud, who am I?

CYNT. Pray don't be angry, sir, when I swore I had your consent; and therefore I swore.

SIR PAUL. Why then the revoking my consent does annul, or make of none effect your oath; so you may unswear it again. The law will allow it.

CYNT. Ay, but my conscience never will.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, no matter for that, conscience and law never go together; you must not expect that.

LADY PLYANT. Ay, but, Sir Paul, I conceive if she has sworn, d'ye mark me, if she has once sworn, it is most unchristian, inhuman, and obscene that she should break it. I'll make up the match again, because Mr. Careless said it would oblige him. [*Aside.*]

SIR PAUL. Does your ladyship conceive so? Why, I was of that opinion once too. Nay, if your ladyship conceives so, I'm of that opinion again; but I can neither find my lord nor my lady to know what they intend.

LADY PLYANT. I'm satisfied that my cousin Mellefont has been much wronged.

CYNT. [*Aside.*] I'm amazed to find her of our side, for I'm sure she loved him.

LADY PLYANT. I know my Lady Touchwood has no kindness for him; and besides I have been informed by Mr. Careless, that Mellefont had never anything more than a profound respect. That he has owned himself to be my admirer 'tis true, but he was never so presumptuous to entertain any dishonourable notions of things; so that if this be made plain, I don't see how my daughter can in conscience, or honour, or anything in the world—

SIR PAUL. Indeed if this be made plain, as my lady, your mother, says, child—

LADY PLYANT. Plain! I was informed of it by Mr. Careless. And I assure you, Mr. Careless is a person that has a most extraordinary respect and honour for you, Sir Paul.

CYNT. [*Aside.*] And for your ladyship too, I believe, or else you had not changed sides so soon; now I begin to find it.

SIR PAUL. I am much obliged to Mr. Careless really; he is a person that I have a great value for, not only for that, but because he has a great veneration for your ladyship.

LADY PLYANT. O las, no indeed, Sir Paul, 'tis upon your account.

SIR PAUL. No, I protest and vow, I have no title to his esteem, but in having the honour to appertain in some measure to your ladyship, that's all.

LADY PLYANT. O law now, I swear and declare it shan't be so; you're too modest, Sir Paul.

SIR PAUL. It becomes me, when there is any comparison made between—

LADY PLYANT. O fie, fie, Sir Paul, you'll put me out of countenance. Your very obedient and affectionate wife; that's all. And highly honoured in that title.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, I am transported! Give me leave to kiss your ladyship's hand.

CYNT. That my poor father should be so very silly! [*Aside.*]

LADY PLYANT. My lip indeed, Sir Paul, I swear you shall. [*He kisses her, and bows very low.*]

SIR PAUL. I humbly thank your ladyship. I don't know whether I fly on ground, or walk in air. Gads-bud, she was never thus before. Well, I must own myself the most beholden to Mr. Careless. As sure as can be, this is all his doing, something that he has said; well, 'tis a rare thing to have an ingenious friend. Well, your ladyship is of opinion that the match may go forward.

LADY PLYANT. By all means. Mr. Careless has satisfied me of the matter.

SIR PAUL. Well, why then, lamb, you may keep your oath, but have a care about making rash vows; come hither to me, and kiss papa.

LADY PLYANT. I swear and declare, I am in such a twitter to read Mr. Careless his letter, that I can't forbear any longer. But though I may read all letters first by prerogative, yet I'll be sure to be unsuspected this time, Sir Paul.

SIR PAUL. Did your ladyship call?

LADY PLYANT. Nay, not to interrupt you, my dear. Only lend me your letter, which you had from your steward to-day; I would look upon the account again, and may be increase your allowance.

SIR PAUL. There it is, madam, do you want a pen and ink? [*Bows and gives the letter.*]

LADY PLYANT. No, no, nothing else, I thank you, Sir Paul. So, now I can read my own letter under the cover of his. [*Aside.*]

SIR PAUL. He? And wilt thou bring a grandson at nine months end—he? A brave chopping boy. I'll settle a thousand pound a year upon the rogue as soon as ever he looks me in the face, I will, gads-bud. I'm overjoyed to think I have any of my family that will bring children into the world. For I would fain have some resemblance of myself in my posterity, he, Thy? Can't you contrive

that affair, girl? Do, gads-bud, think on thy old father, heh? Make the young rogue as like as you can.

CYNT. I'm glad to see you so merry, sir.

SIR PAUL. Merry, gads-bud, I'm serious; I'll give thee five hundred pounds for every inch of him that resembles me; ah, this eye, this left eye! A thousand pounds for this left eye. This has done execution in its time, girl; why, thou hast my leer, hussey, just thy father's leer. Let it be transmitted to the young rogue by the help of imagination; why, 'tis the mark of our family, Thy; our house is distinguished by a languishing eye, as the house of Austria is by a thick lip. Ah! when I was of your age, hussey, I would have held fifty to one, I could have drawn my own picture—gads-bud I could have done—not so much as you, neither; but—nay, don't blush.

CYNT. I don't blush, sir, for I vow I don't understand.

SIR PAUL. Pshaw, pshaw, you fib, you baggage, you do understand, and you shall understand; come, don't be so nice. Gads-bud, don't learn after your mother-in-law my lady here. Marry, heaven forbid that you should follow her example; that would spoil all indeed. Bless us! if you should take a vagary and make a rash resolution on your wedding night, to die a maid, as she did; all were ruined, all my hopes lost. My heart would break, and my estate would be left to the wide world, he? I hope you are a better Christian than to think of living a nun, he? Answer me?

CYNT. I'm all obedience, sir, to your commands.

LADY PLYANT. [*Having read the letter.*] O dear Mr. Careless, I swear he writes charmingly, and he looks charmingly, and he has charmed me, as much as I have charmed him; and so I'll tell him in the wardrobe when 'tis dark. O criminy! I hope Sir Paul has not seen both letters. [*Puts the wrong letter hastily up, and gives him her own.*] Sir Paul, here's your letter; to-morrow morning I'll settle accounts to your advantage.

SCENE IV.

[*To them*] Brisk.

BRISK. Sir Paul, gads-bud, you're an uncivil person, let me tell you, and all that; and I did not think it had been in you.

SIR PAUL. O law, what's the matter now? I hope you are not angry, Mr. Brisk.

BRISK. Deuce take me, I believe you intend to marry your daughter yourself; you're always brooding over her like an old hen, as if she were not well hatched, egad, he.

SIR PAUL. Good strange! Mr. Brisk is such a merry facetious person, he, he, he. No, no, I have done with her, I have done with her now.

BRISK. The fiddles have stayed this hour in the hall, and my Lord Froth wants a partner, we can never begin without her.

SIR PAUL. Go, go child, go, get you gone and dance and be merry; I'll come and look at you by and by. Where's my son Mellefont?

LADY PLYANT. I'll send him to them, I know where he is.

BRISK. Sir Paul, will you send Careless into the hall if you meet him?

SIR PAUL. I will, I will, I'll go and look for him on purpose.

SCENE V.

Brisk *alone*.

BRISK. So now they are all gone, and I have an opportunity to practice. Ah! My dear Lady Froth, she's a most engaging creature, if she were not so fond of that damned coxcombly lord of hers; and yet I am forced to allow him wit too, to keep in with him. No matter, she's a woman of parts, and, egad, parts will carry her. She said she would follow me into the gallery. Now to make my approaches. Hem, hem! Ah ma- [*bows.*] dam! Pox on't, why should I disparage my parts by thinking what to say? None but dull rogues think; witty men, like rich fellows, are always ready for all expenses; while your blockheads, like poor needy scoundrels, are forced to examine their stock, and forecast the charges of the day. Here she comes, I'll seem not to see her, and try to win her with a new airy invention of my own, hem!

SCENE VI.

[*To him*] Lady Froth.

BRISK [*Sings, walking about.*] 'I'm sick with love,' ha, ha, ha, 'prithee, come cure me. I'm sick with,' etc. O ye powers! O my Lady Froth, my Lady Froth, my Lady Froth! Heigho! Break heart; gods, I thank you. [*Stands musing with his arms across.*]

LADY FROTH. O heavens, Mr. Brisk! What's the matter?

BRISK. My Lady Froth! Your ladyship's most humble servant. The matter, madam? Nothing,

madam, nothing at all, egad. I was fallen into the most agreeable amusement in the whole province of contemplation: that's all—(I'll seem to conceal my passion, and that will look like respect.) [*Aside*.]

LADY FROTH. Bless me, why did you call out upon me so loud?

BRISK. O Lord, I, madam! I beseech your ladyship—when?

LADY FROTH. Just now as I came in, bless me, why, don't you know it?

BRISK. Not I, let me perish. But did I? Strange! I confess your ladyship was in my thoughts; and I was in a sort of dream that did in a manner represent a very pleasing object to my imagination, but—but did I indeed?—To see how love and murder will out. But did I really name my Lady Froth?

LADY FROTH. Three times aloud, as I love letters. But did you talk of love? O Parnassus! Who would have thought Mr. Brisk could have been in love, ha, ha, ha. O heavens, I thought you could have no mistress but the Nine Muses.

BRISK. No more I have, egad, for I adore 'em all in your ladyship. Let me perish, I don't know whether to be splenetic, or airy upon't; the deuce take me if I can tell whether I am glad or sorry that your ladyship has made the discovery.

LADY FROTH. O be merry by all means. Prince Volscius in love! Ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. O barbarous, to turn me into ridicule! Yet, ha, ha, ha. The deuce take me, I can't help laughing myself, ha, ha, ha; yet by heavens, I have a violent passion for your ladyship, seriously.

LADY FROTH. Seriously? Ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Seriously, ha, ha, ha. Gad I have, for all I laugh.

LADY FROTH. Ha, ha, ha! What d'ye think I laugh at? Ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Me, egad, ha, ha.

LADY FROTH. No, the deuce take me if I don't laugh at myself; for hang me if I have not a violent passion for Mr. Brisk, ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. Seriously?

LADY FROTH. Seriously, ha, ha, ha.

BRISK. That's well enough; let me perish, ha, ha, ha. O miraculous; what a happy discovery. Ah my dear charming Lady Froth!

LADY FROTH. Oh my adored Mr. Brisk! [*Embrace*.]

SCENE VII.

[*To them*] Lord Froth.

LORD FROTH. The company are all ready. How now?

BRISK. Zoons! madam, there's my lord. [*Softly to her*.]

LADY FROTH. Take no notice, but observe me. Now, cast off, and meet me at the lower end of the room, and then join hands again; I could teach my lord this dance purely, but I vow, Mr. Brisk, I can't tell how to come so near any other man. Oh here's my lord, now you shall see me do it with him. [*They pretend to practise part of a country dance*.]

LORD FROTH. Oh, I see there's no harm yet, but I don't like this familiarity. [*Aside*.]

LADY FROTH. Shall you and I do our close dance, to show Mr. Brisk?

LORD FROTH. No, my dear, do it with him.

LADY FROTH. I'll do it with him, my lord, when you are out of the way.

BRISK. That's good, egad, that's good. Deuce take me, I can hardly hold laughing in his face. [*Aside*.]

LORD FROTH. Any other time, my dear, or we'll dance it below.

LADY FROTH. With all my heart.

BRISK. Come, my lord, I'll wait on you. My charming witty angel! [*To her*.]

LADY FROTH. We shall have whispering time enough, you know, since we are partners.

SCENE VIII.

Lady Plyant *and* Careless.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, Mr. Careless, Mr. Careless, I'm ruined, I'm undone.

CARE. What's the matter, madam?

LADY PLYANT. Oh, the unluckiest accident, I'm afraid I shan't live to tell it you.

CARE. Heaven forbid! What is it?

LADY PLYANT. I'm in such a fright; the strangest quandary and premunire! I'm all over in a universal agitation; I dare swear every circumstance of me trembles. O your letter, your letter! By an unfortunate mistake I have given Sir Paul your letter instead of his own.

CARE. That was unlucky.

LADY PLYANT. Oh, yonder he comes reading of it; for heaven's sake step in here and advise me quickly before he sees.

SCENE IX.

SIR PAUL *with the Letter*.

SIR PAUL. O Providence, what a conspiracy have I discovered. But let me see to make an end on't. [*Reads*.] Hum—After supper in the wardrobe by the gallery. If Sir Paul should surprise us, I have a commission from him to treat with you about the very matter of fact. Matter of fact! Very pretty; it seems that I am conducting to my own cuckoldom. Why, this is the very traitorous position of taking up arms by my authority, against my person! Well, let me see. Till then I languish in expectation of my adored charmer.—Dying Ned Careless. Gads-bud, would that were matter of fact too. Die and be damned for a Judas Maccabeus and Iscariot both. O friendship! what art thou but a name? Henceforward let no man make a friend that would not be a cuckold: for whomsoever he receives into his bosom will find the way to his bed, and there return his caresses with interest to his wife. Have I for this been pinioned, night after night for three years past? Have I been swathed in blankets till I have been even deprived of motion? Have I approached the marriage bed with reverence as to a sacred shrine, and denied myself the enjoyment of lawful domestic pleasures to preserve its purity, and must I now find it polluted by foreign iniquity? O my Lady Plyant, you were chaste as ice, but you are melted now, and false as water. But Providence has been constant to me in discovering this conspiracy; still, I am beholden to Providence. If it were not for Providence, sure, poor Sir Paul, thy heart would break.

SCENE X.

[*To him*] LADY PLYANT.

LADY PLYANT. So, sir, I see you have read the letter. Well, now, Sir Paul, what do you think of your friend Careless? Has he been treacherous, or did you give his insolence a licence to make trial of your wife's suspected virtue? D'ye see here? [*Snatches the letter as in anger*.] Look, read it. Gads my life, if I thought it were so, I would this moment renounce all communication with you. Ungrateful monster! He? is it so? Ay, I see it, a plot upon my honour; your guilty cheeks confess it. Oh, where shall wronged virtue fly for reparation? I'll be divorced this instant.

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, what shall I say? This is the strangest surprise. Why, I don't know anything at all, nor I don't know whether there be anything at all in the world, or no.

LADY PLYANT. I thought I should try you, false man. I, that never dissembled in my life, yet to make trial of you, pretended to like that monster of iniquity, Careless, and found out that contrivance to let you see this letter, which now I find was of your own inditing—I do, heathen, I do. See my face no more; I'll be divorced presently.

SIR PAUL. O strange, what will become of me? I'm so amazed, and so overjoyed, so afraid, and so sorry. But did you give me this letter on purpose, he? Did you?

LADY PLYANT. Did I? Do you doubt me, Turk, Saracen? I have a cousin that's a proctor in the Commons; I'll go to him instantly.

SIR PAUL. Hold, stay, I beseech your ladyship. I'm so overjoyed, stay, I'll confess all.

LADY PLYANT. What will you confess, Jew?

SIR PAUL. Why, now, as I hope to be saved, I had no hand in this letter—nay, hear me, I beseech your ladyship. The devil take me now if he did not go beyond my commission. If I desired him to do any more than speak a good word only just for me; gads-bud, only for poor Sir Paul, I'm an Anabaptist, or a Jew, or what you please to call me.

LADY PLYANT. Why, is not here matter of fact?

SIR PAUL. Ay, but by your own virtue and continency that matter of fact is all his own doing. I confess I had a great desire to have some honours conferred upon me, which lie all in your ladyship's breast, and he being a well-spoken man, I desired him to intercede for me.

LADY PLYANT. Did you so? presumption! Oh, he comes, the Tarquin comes; I cannot bear his sight.

SCENE XI.

CARELESS, SIR PAUL.

CARE. Sir Paul, I'm glad I've met with you, 'gad, I have said all I could, but can't prevail. Then my friendship to you has carried me a little farther in this matter.

SIR PAUL. Indeed; well sir, I'll dissemble with him a little. [*Aside*.]

CARE. Why, faith I have in my time known honest gentlemen abused by a pretended coyness in their wives, and I had a mind to try my lady's virtue. And when I could not prevail for you, gad, I pretended to be in love myself; but all in vain, she would not hear a word upon that subject. Then I writ a letter to her; I don't know what effects that will have, but I'll be sure to tell you when I do, though by this light I believe her virtue is impregnable.

SIR PAUL. O Providence! Providence! What discoveries are here made? Why, this is better and more miraculous than the rest.

CARE. What do you mean?

SIR PAUL. I can't tell you, I'm so overjoyed; come along with me to my lady, I can't contain myself; come, my dear friend.

CARE. So, so, so, this difficulty's over. [*Aside*.]

SCENE XII.

MELLEFONT, MASKWELL, *from different doors*.

MEL. Maskwell! I have been looking for you—'tis within a quarter of eight.

MASK. My lady is just gone into my lord's closet, you had best steal into her chamber before she comes, and lie concealed there, otherwise she may lock the door when we are together, and you not easily get in to surprise us.

MEL. He? You say true.

MASK. You had best make haste, for after she has made some apology to the company for her own and my lord's absence all this while, she'll retire to her chamber instantly.

MEL. I go this moment. Now, fortune, I defy thee.

SCENE XIII.

MASKWELL *alone*.

MASK. I confess you may be allowed to be secure in your own opinion; the appearance is very fair, but I have an after-game to play that shall turn the tables, and here comes the man that I must manage.

SCENE XIV.

[*To him*] LORD TOUCHWOOD.

LORD TOUCH. Maskwell, you are the man I wished to meet.

MASK. I am happy to be in the way of your lordship's commands.

LORD TOUCH. I have always found you prudent and careful in anything that has concerned me or my family.

MASK. I were a villain else. I am bound by duty and gratitude, and my own inclination, to be ever your lordship's servant.

LORD TOUCH. Enough. You are my friend; I know it. Yet there has been a thing in your knowledge, which has concerned me nearly, that you have concealed from me.

MASK. My lord!

LORD TOUCH. Nay, I excuse your friendship to my unnatural nephew thus far. But I know you have been privy to his impious designs upon my wife. This evening she has told me all. Her good nature concealed it as long as was possible; but he perseveres so in villainy, that she has told me even you were weary of dissuading him, though you have once actually hindered him from forcing her.

MASK. I am sorry, my lord, I can't make you an answer; this is an occasion in which I would not willing be silent.

LORD TOUCH. I know you would excuse him—and I know as well that you can't.

MASK. Indeed I was in hopes it had been a youthful heat that might have soon boiled over; but—

LORD TOUCH. Say on.

MASK. I have nothing more to say, my lord; but to express my concern; for I think his frenzy increases daily.

LORD TOUCH. How! Give me but proof of it, ocular proof, that I may justify my dealing with him to the world, and share my fortunes.

MASK. O my lord! consider; that is hard. Besides, time may work upon him. Then, for me to do it! I have professed an everlasting friendship to him.

LORD TOUCH. He is your friend; and what am I?

MASK. I am answered.

LORD TOUCH. Fear not his displeasure; I will put you out of his, and fortune's power, and for that thou art scrupulously honest, I will secure thy fidelity to him, and give my honour never to own any discovery that you shall make me. Can you give me a demonstrative proof? Speak.

MASK. I wish I could not. To be plain, my lord, I intended this evening to have tried all arguments to dissuade him from a design which I suspect; and if I had not succeeded, to have informed your lordship of what I knew.

LORD TOUCH. I thank you. What is the villain's purpose?

MASK. He has owned nothing to me of late, and what I mean now, is only a bare suspicion of my own. If your lordship will meet me a quarter of an hour hence there, in that lobby by my lady's bed-chamber, I shall be able to tell you more.

LORD TOUCH. I will.

MASK. My duty to your lordship makes me do a severe piece of justice.

LORD TOUCH. I will be secret, and reward your honesty beyond your hopes.

SCENE XV.

Scene opening, shows Lady Touchwood's chamber.

Mellefont *solus.*

MEL. Pray heaven my aunt keep touch with her assignation. O that her lord were but sweating behind this hanging, with the expectation of what I shall see. Hist, she comes. Little does she think what a mine is just ready to spring under her feet. But to my post. [*Goes behind the hangings.*]

SCENE XVI.

Lady Touchwood.

LADY TOUCH. 'Tis eight o'clock; methinks I should have found him here. Who does not prevent the hour of love, outstays the time; for to be dully punctual is too slow. I was accusing you of neglect.

SCENE XVII.

Lady Touchwood, Maskwell, Mellefont *absconding.*

MASK. I confess you do reproach me when I see you here before me; but 'tis fit I should be still behindhand, still to be more and more indebted to your goodness.

LADY TOUCH. You can excuse a fault too well, not to have been to blame. A ready answer shows you were prepared.

MASK. Guilt is ever at a loss, and confusion waits upon it; when innocence and bold truth are always ready for expression.

LADY TOUCH. Not in love: words are the weak support of cold indifference; love has no language to be heard.

MASK. Excess of joy has made me stupid! Thus may my lips be ever closed. [*Kisses her.*] And thus—O who would not lose his speech, upon condition to have joys above it?

LADY TOUCH. Hold, let me lock the door first. [*Goes to the door.*]

MASK. [*Aside.*] That I believed; 'twas well I left the private passage open.

LADY TOUCH. So, that's safe.

MASK. And so may all your pleasures be, and secret as this kiss—

MEL. And may all treachery be thus discovered. [*Leaps out.*]

LADY TOUCH. Ah! [*Shrieks.*]

MEL. Villain! [*Offers to draw.*]

MASK. Nay, then, there's but one way. [*Runs out.*]

SCENE XVIII.

Lady Touchwood, Mellefont.

MEL. Say you so, were you provided for an escape? Hold, madam, you have no more holes to your burrow; I'll stand between you and this sally-port.

LADY TOUCH. Thunder strike thee dead for this deceit, immediate lightning blast thee, me, and the whole world! Oh! I could rack myself, play the vulture to my own heart, and gnaw it piecemeal, for not boding to me this misfortune.

MEL. Be patient.

LADY TOUCH. Be damned.

MEL. Consider, I have you on the hook; you will but flounder yourself a-weary, and be nevertheless my prisoner.

LADY TOUCH. I'll hold my breath and die, but I'll be free.

MEL. O madam, have a care of dying unprepared, I doubt you have some unrepented sins that may hang heavy, and retard your flight.

LADY TOUCH. O! what shall I do? say? Whither shall I turn? Has hell no remedy?

MEL. None; hell has served you even as heaven has done, left you to yourself.—You're in a kind of Erasmus paradise, yet if you please you may make it a purgatory; and with a little penance and my absolution all this may turn to good account.

LADY TOUCH. [*Aside.*] Hold in my passion, and fall, fall a little, thou swelling heart; let me have some intermission of this rage, and one minute's coolness to dissemble. [*She weeps.*]

MEL. You have been to blame. I like those tears, and hope they are of the purest kind,—penitential tears.

LADY TOUCH. O the scene was shifted quick before me,—I had not time to think. I was surprised to see a monster in the glass, and now I find 'tis myself; can you have mercy to forgive the faults I have imagined, but never put in practice?—O consider, consider how fatal you have been to me, you have already killed the quiet of this life. The love of you was the first wandering fire that e'er misled my steps, and while I had only that in view, I was betrayed into unthought of ways of ruin.

MEL. May I believe this true?

LADY TOUCH. O be not cruelly incredulous.—How can you doubt these streaming eyes? Keep the severest eye o'er all my future conduct, and if I once relapse, let me not hope forgiveness; 'twill ever be in your power to ruin me. My lord shall sign to your desires; I will myself create your happiness, and Cynthia shall be this night your bride. Do but conceal my failings, and forgive.

MEL. Upon such terms I will be ever yours in every honest way.

SCENE XIX.

MASKWELL *softly introduces* LORD TOUCHWOOD, *and retires.*

MASK. I have kept my word, he's here, but I must not be seen.

SCENE XX.

LADY TOUCHWOOD, LORD TOUCHWOOD, MELLEFONT.

LORD TOUCH. Hell and amazement, she's in tears.

LADY TOUCH. [*Kneeling.*] Eternal blessings thank you.—Ha! my lord listening! O fortune has o'erpaid me all, all! all's my own! [*Aside.*]

MEL. Nay, I beseech you rise.

LADY TOUCH. [*Aloud.*] Never, never! I'll grow to the ground, be buried quick beneath it, e'er I'll be consenting to so damned a sin as incest! unnatural incest!

MEL. Ha!

LADY TOUCH. O cruel man, will you not let me go? I'll forgive all that's past. O heaven, you will not ravish me?

MEL. Damnation!

LORD TOUCH. Monster, dog! your life shall answer this! [*Draws and runs at* MELLEFONT, *is held by* LADY TOUCHWOOD.]

LADY TOUCH. O heavens, my lord! Hold, hold, for heaven's sake.

MEL. Confusion, my uncle! O the damned sorceress.

LADY TOUCH. Moderate your rage, good my lord! He's mad, alas, he's mad. Indeed he is, my lord, and knows not what he does. See how wild he looks.

MEL. By heaven, 'twere senseless not to be mad, and see such witchcraft.

LADY TOUCH. My lord, you hear him, he talks idly.

LORD TOUCH. Hence from my sight, thou living infamy to my name; when next I see that face, I'll write villain in't with my sword's point.

MEL. Now, by my soul, I will not go till I have made known my wrongs. Nay, till I have made known yours, which, if possible, are greater,—though she has all the host of hell her servants.

LADY TOUCH. Alas, he raves! Talks very poetry! For heaven's sake away, my lord, he'll either tempt you to extravagance, or commit some himself.

MEL. Death and furies, will you not hear me?—Why by heaven she laughs, grins, points to your back; she forks out cuckoldom with her fingers, and you're running horn-mad after your fortune. [*As she is going she turns back and smiles at him*.]

LORD TOUCH. I fear he's mad indeed.—Let's send Maskwell to him.

MEL. Send him to her.

LADY TOUCH. Come, come, good my lord, my heart aches so, I shall faint if I stay.

SCENE XXI.

MELLEFONT *alone*.

MEL. Oh, I could curse my stars, fate, and chance; all causes and accidents of fortune in this life! But to what purpose? Yet, 'sdeath, for a man to have the fruit of all his industry grow full and ripe, ready to drop into his mouth, and just when he holds out his hand to gather it, to have a sudden whirlwind come, tear up tree and all, and bear away the very root and foundation of his hopes:—what temper can contain? They talk of sending Maskwell to me; I never had more need of him. But what can he do? Imagination cannot form a fairer and more plausible design than this of his which has miscarried. O my precious aunt, I shall never thrive without I deal with the devil, or another woman.

Women, like flames, have a destroying power,

Ne'er to be quenched, till they themselves devour.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

LADY TOUCHWOOD *and* MASKWELL.

LADY TOUCH. Was't not lucky?

MASK. Lucky! Fortune is your own, and 'tis her interest so to be. By heaven I believe you can control her power, and she fears it: though chance brought my lord, 'twas your own art that turned it to advantage.

LADY TOUCH. 'Tis true it might have been my ruin. But yonder's my lord. I believe he's coming to find you: I'll not be seen.

SCENE II.

MASKWELL *alone*.

MASK. So; I durst not own my introducing my lord, though it succeeded well for her, for she would have suspected a design which I should have been puzzled to excuse. My lord is thoughtful. I'll be so too; yet he shall know my thoughts: or think he does.

SCENE III.

[*To him*] LORD TOUCHWOOD.

MASK. What have I done?

LORD TOUCH. Talking to himself!

MASK. 'Twas honest—and shall I be rewarded for it? No, 'twas honest, therefore I shan't. Nay, rather therefore I ought not; for it rewards itself.

LORD TOUCH. Unequalled virtue! [*Aside*.]

MASK. But should it be known, then I have lost a friend! He was an ill man, and I have gained; for half myself I lent him, and that I have recalled: so I have served myself, and what is yet better, I have served a worthy lord to whom I owe myself.

LORD TOUCH. Excellent man! [*Aside*.]

MASK. Yet I am wretched. Oh, there is a secret burns within this breast, which, should it once

blaze forth, would ruin all, consume my honest character, and brand me with the name of villain.

LORD TOUCH. Ha!

MASK. Why do I love! Yet heaven and my waking conscience are my witnesses, I never gave one working thought a vent, which might discover that I loved, nor ever must. No, let it prey upon my heart; for I would rather die, than seem once, barely seem, dishonest. Oh, should it once be known I love fair Cynthia, all this that I have done would look like rival's malice, false friendship to my lord, and base self-interest. Let me perish first, and from this hour avoid all sight and speech, and, if I can, all thought of that pernicious beauty. Ha! But what is my distraction doing? I am wildly talking to myself, and some ill chance might have directed malicious ears this way. [*Seems to start, seeing my lord.*]

LORD TOUCH. Start not; let guilty and dishonest souls start at the revelation of their thoughts, but be thou fixed, as is thy virtue.

MASK. I am confounded, and beg your Lordship's pardon for those free discourses which I have had with myself.

LORD TOUCH. Come, I beg your pardon that I overheard you, and yet it shall not need. Honest Maskwell! Thy and my good genius led me hither. Mine, in that I have discovered so much manly virtue; thine, in that thou shalt have due reward of all thy worth. Give me thy hand. My nephew is the alone remaining branch of all our ancient family: him I thus blow away, and constitute thee in his room to be my heir—

MASK. Now heaven forbid—

LORD TOUCH. No more—I have resolved. The writings are ready drawn, and wanted nothing but to be signed, and have his name inserted. Yours will fill the blank as well. I will have no reply. Let me command this time; for 'tis the last in which I will assume authority. Hereafter, you shall rule where I have power.

MASK. I humbly would petition—

LORD TOUCH. Is't for yourself? [Maskwell *pauses.*] I'll hear of nought for anybody else.

MASK. Then witness heaven for me, this wealth and honour was not of my seeking, nor would I build my fortune on another's ruin. I had but one desire—

LORD TOUCH. Thou shalt enjoy it. If all I'm worth in wealth or interest can purchase Cynthia, she is thine. I'm sure Sir Paul's consent will follow fortune. I'll quickly show him which way that is going.

MASK. You oppress me with bounty. My gratitude is weak, and shrinks beneath the weight, and cannot rise to thank you. What, enjoy my love! Forgive the transports of a blessing so unexpected, so unhoped for, so unthought of!

LORD TOUCH. I will confirm it, and rejoice with thee.

SCENE IV.

Maskwell *alone.*

MASK. This is prosperous indeed. Why let him find me out a villain, settled in possession of a fair estate, and full fruition of my love, I'll bear the railings of a losing gamester. But should he find me out before! 'Tis dangerous to delay. Let me think. Should my lord proceed to treat openly of my marriage with Cynthia, all must be discovered, and Mellefont can be no longer blinded. It must not be; nay, should my lady know it—ay, then were fine work indeed! Her fury would spare nothing, though she involved herself in ruin. No, it must be by stratagem. I must deceive Mellefont once more, and get my lord to consent to my private management. He comes opportunely. Now will I, in my old way, discover the whole and real truth of the matter to him, that he may not suspect one word on't.

> No mask like open truth to cover lies,
> As to go naked is the best disguise.

SCENE V.

[*To him*] Mellefont.

MEL. O Maskwell, what hopes? I am confounded in a maze of thoughts, each leading into one another, and all ending in perplexity. My uncle will not see nor hear me.

MASK. No matter, sir, don't trouble your head: all's in my power.

MEL. How? For heaven's sake?

MASK. Little do you think that your aunt has kept her word. How the devil she wrought my lord into this dotage, I know not; but he's gone to Sir Paul about my marriage with Cynthia, and has appointed me his heir.

MEL. The devil he has! What's to be done?

MASK. I have it, it must be by stratagem; for it's in vain to make application to him. I think I have that in my head that cannot fail. Where's Cynthia?

MEL. In the garden.

MASK. Let us go and consult her: my life for yours, I cheat my lord.

SCENE VI.

Lord Touchwood, Lady Touchwood.

LADY TOUCH. Maskwell your heir, and marry Cynthia!

LORD TOUCH. I cannot do too much for so much merit.

LADY TOUCH. But this is a thing of too great moment to be so suddenly resolved. Why Cynthia? Why must he be married? Is there not reward enough in raising his low fortune, but he must mix his blood with mine, and wed my niece? How know you that my brother will consent, or she? Nay, he himself perhaps may have affections otherwhere.

LORD TOUCH. No, I am convinced he loves her.

LADY TOUCH. Maskwell love Cynthia? Impossible!

LORD TOUCH. I tell you he confessed it to me.

LADY TOUCH. Confusion! How's this? [*Aside.*]

LORD TOUCH. His humility long stifled his passion. And his love of Mellefont would have made him still conceal it. But by encouragement, I wrung the secret from him, and know he's no way to be rewarded but in her. I'll defer my farther proceedings in it till you have considered it; but remember how we are both indebted to him.

SCENE VII.

Lady Touchwood *alone*.

LADY TOUCH. Both indebted to him! Yes, we are both indebted to him, if you knew all. Villain! Oh, I am wild with this surprise of treachery: it is impossible, it cannot be. He love Cynthia! What, have I been bawd to his designs, his property only, a baiting place? Now I see what made him false to Mellefont. Shame and distraction! I cannot bear it, oh! what woman can bear to be a property? To be kindled to a flame, only to light him to another's arms; oh! that I were fire indeed that I might burn the vile traitor. What shall I do? How shall I think? I cannot think. All my designs are lost, my love unsated, my revenge unfinished, and fresh cause of fury from unthought of plagues.

SCENE VIII.

[*To her*] Sir Paul.

SIR PAUL. Madam, sister, my lady sister, did you see my lady my wife?

LADY TOUCH. Oh! Torture!

SIR PAUL. Gads-bud, I can't find her high nor low; where can she be, think you?

LADY TOUCH. Where she's serving you, as all your sex ought to be served, making you a beast. Don't you know you're a fool, brother?

SIR PAUL. A fool; he, he, he, you're merry. No, no, not I, I know no such matter.

LADY TOUCH. Why, then, you don't know half your happiness.

SIR PAUL. That's a jest with all my heart, faith and troth. But harkee, my lord told me something of a revolution of things; I don't know what to make on't. Gads-bud, I must consult my wife:—he talks of disinheriting his nephew, and I don't know what. Look you, sister, I must know what my girl has to trust to, or not a syllable of a wedding, gads-bud!—to show you that I am not a fool.

LADY TOUCH. Hear me: consent to the breaking off this marriage, and the promoting any other without consulting me, and I'll renounce all blood, all relation and concern with you for ever; nay, I'll be your enemy, and pursue you to destruction: I'll tear your eyes out, and tread you under my feet.

SIR PAUL. Why, what's the matter now? Good Lord, what's all this for? Pooh, here's a joke indeed. Why, where's my wife?

LADY TOUCH. With Careless, in the close arbour; he may want you by this time, as much as you want her.

SIR PAUL. Oh, if she be with Mr. Careless, 'tis well enough.

LADY TOUCH. Fool, sot, insensible ox! But remember what I said to you, or you had better eat your own horns, by this light you had.

SIR PAUL. You're a passionate woman, gads-bud! But to say truth all our family are choleric; I am the only peaceable person amongst 'em.

SCENE IX.

MELLEFONT, MASKWELL, *and* CYNTHIA.

MEL. I know no other way but this he has proposed: if you have love enough to run the venture.

CYNT. I don't know whether I have love enough, but I find I have obstinacy enough to pursue whatever I have once resolved; and a true female courage to oppose anything that resists my will, though 'twere reason itself.

MASK. That's right. Well, I'll secure the writings and run the hazard along with you.

CYNT. But how can the coach and six horses be got ready without suspicion?

MASK. Leave it to my care; that shall be so far from being suspected, that it shall be got ready by my lord's own order.

MEL. How?

MASK. Why, I intend to tell my lord the whole matter of our contrivance; that's my way.

MEL. I don't understand you.

MASK. Why, I'll tell my lord I laid this plot with you on purpose to betray you; and that which put me upon it, was the finding it impossible to gain the lady any other way, but in the hopes of her marrying you.

MEL. So.

MASK. So, why so, while you're busied in making yourself ready, I'll wheedle her into the coach; and instead of you, borrow my lord's chaplain, and so run away with her myself.

MEL. Oh, I conceive you; you'll tell him so.

MASK. Tell him so! ay; why, you don't think I mean to do so?

MEL. No, no; ha, ha, I dare swear thou wilt not.

MASK. Therefore, for our farther security, I would have you disguised like a parson, that if my lord should have curiosity to peep, he may not discover you in the coach, but think the cheat is carried on as he would have it.

MEL. Excellent Maskwell! Thou wert certainly meant for a statesman or a Jesuit; but thou art too honest for one, and too pious for the other.

MASK. Well, get yourself ready, and meet me in half-an-hour, yonder in my lady's dressing-room; go by the back stairs, and so we may slip down without being observed. I'll send the chaplain to you with his robes: I have made him my own, and ordered him to meet us to-morrow morning at St. Albans; there we will sum up this account, to all our satisfactions.

MEL. Should I begin to thank or praise thee, I should waste the little time we have.

SCENE X.

CYNTHIA, MASKWELL.

MASK. Madam, you will be ready?

CYNT. I will be punctual to the minute. [*Going*.]

MASK. Stay, I have a doubt. Upon second thoughts, we had better meet in the chaplain's chamber here, the corner chamber at this end of the gallery, there is a back way into it, so that you need not come through this door, and a pair of private stairs leading down to the stables. It will be more convenient.

CYNT. I am guided by you; but Mellefont will mistake.

MASK. No, no, I'll after him immediately, and tell him.

CYNT. I will not fail.

SCENE XI.

MASKWELL *alone*.

MASK. Why, *qui vult decipi decipiatur*.—'Tis no fault of mine: I have told 'em in plain terms how easy 'tis for me to cheat 'em, and if they will not hear the serpent's hiss, they must be stung into experience and future caution. Now to prepare my lord to consent to this. But first I must instruct my little Levite; there is no plot, public or private, that can expect to prosper without one of them has a finger in't: he promised me to be within at this hour,—Mr. Saygrace, Mr. Saygrace! [*Goes to the chamber door and knocks*.]

SCENE XII.

MASKWELL, SAYGRACE.

SAYGRACE [*looking out*.] Sweet sir, I will but pen the last line of an acrostic, and be with you in the twinkling of an ejaculation, in the pronouncing of an Amen, or before you can—

MASK. Nay, good Mr. Saygrace, do not prolong the time by describing to me the shortness of your stay; rather if you please, defer the finishing of your wit, and let us talk about our business; it shall be tithes in your way.

SAYGRACE. [*Enters*.] You shall prevail: I would break off in the middle of a sermon to do you a pleasure.

MASK. You could not do me a greater,—except the business in hand. Have you provided a habit for Mellefont?

SAYGRACE. I have; they are ready in my chamber, together with a clean starched band and cuffs.

MASK. Good, let them be carried to him; have you stitched the gown sleeve, that he may be puzzled, and waste time in putting it on?

SAYGRACE. I have: the gown will not be indued without perplexity.

MASK. Meet me in half-an-hour, here in your own chamber. When Cynthia comes, let there be no light, and do not speak, that she may not distinguish you from Mellefont. I'll urge haste to excuse your silence.

SAYGRACE. You have no more commands?

MASK. None: your text is short.

SAYGRACE. But pithy: and I will handle it with discretion.

MASK. It will be the first you have so served.

SCENE XIII.

LORD TOUCHWOOD, MASKWELL.

LORD TOUCH. Sure I was born to be controlled by those I should command. My very slaves will shortly give me rules how I shall govern them.

MASK. I am concerned to see your lordship discomposed.

LORD TOUCH. Have you seen my wife lately, or disobliged her?

MASK. No, my lord. What can this mean? [*Aside*.]

LORD TOUCH. Then Mellefont has urged somebody to incense her. Something she has heard of you which carries her beyond the bounds of patience.

MASK. This I feared. [*Aside*.] Did not your lordship tell her of the honours you designed me?

LORD TOUCH. Yes.

MASK. 'Tis that; you know my lady has a high spirit; she thinks I am unworthy.

LORD TOUCH. Unworthy! 'Tis an ignorant pride in her to think so. Honesty to me is true nobility. However, 'tis my will it shall be so, and that should be convincing to her as much as reason. By Heaven, I'll not be wife-ridden; were it possible, it should be done this night.

MASK. By Heaven, he meets my wishes! [*Aside*.] Few things are impossible to willing minds.

LORD TOUCH. Instruct me how this may be done, you shall see I want no inclination.

MASK. I had laid a small design for to-morrow (as love will be inventing) which I thought to communicate to your lordship. But it may be as well done to-night.

LORD TOUCH. Here's company. Come this way and tell me.

SCENE XIV.

CARELESS *and* CYNTHIA.

CARE. Is not that he now gone out with my lord?

CYNT. Yes.

CARE. By heaven, there's treachery. The confusion that I saw your father in, my Lady Touchwood's passion, with what imperfectly I overheard between my lord and her, confirm me in my fears. Where's Mellefont?

CYNT. Here he comes.

SCENE XV.

[*To them*] MELLEFONT.

CYNT. Did Maskwell tell you anything of the chaplain's chamber?

MEL. No. My dear, will you get ready? The things are all in my chamber; I want nothing but the habit.

CARE. You are betrayed, and Maskwell is the villain I always thought him.

CYNT. When you were gone, he said his mind was changed, and bid me meet him in the chaplain's room, pretending immediately to follow you and give you notice.

MEL. How?

CARE. There's Saygrace tripping by with a bundle under his arm. He cannot be ignorant that Maskwell means to use his chamber; let's follow and examine him.

MEL. 'Tis loss of time; I cannot think him false.

SCENE XVI.

CYNTHIA, LORD TOUCHWOOD.

CYNT. My lord musing!

LORD TOUCH. He has a quick invention, if this were suddenly designed. Yet he says he had prepared my chaplain already.

CYNT. How's this? Now I fear indeed.

LORD TOUCH. Cynthia here! Alone, fair cousin, and melancholy?

CYNT. Your lordship was thoughtful.

LORD TOUCH. My thoughts were on serious business not worth your hearing.

CYNT. Mine were on treachery concerning you, and may be worth your hearing.

LORD TOUCH. Treachery concerning me? Pray be plain. Hark! What noise?

MASK. (within) Will you not hear me?

LADY TOUCH. (within) No, monster! traitor! No.

CYNT. My lady and Maskwell! This may be lucky. My lord, let me entreat you to stand behind this screen and listen: perhaps this chance may give you proof of what you ne'er could have believed from my suspicions.

SCENE XVII.

LADY TOUCHWOOD *with a dagger*; MASKWELL; CYNTHIA *and* LORD TOUCHWOOD *abscond, listening*.

LADY TOUCH. You want but leisure to invent fresh falsehood, and soothe me to a fond belief of all your fictions: but I will stab the lie that's forming in your heart, and save a sin, in pity to your soul.

MASK. Strike then, since you will have it so.

LADY TOUCH. Ha! A steady villain to the last.

MASK. Come, why do you dally with me thus?

LADY TOUCH. Thy stubborn temper shocks me, and you knew it would; this is cunning all, and not courage. No; I know thee well, but thou shalt miss thy aim.

MASK. Ha, ha, ha!

LADY TOUCH. Ha! Do you mock my rage? Then this shall punish your fond, rash contempt. Again smile! [*Goes to strike.*] And such a smile as speaks in ambiguity! Ten thousand meanings lurk in each corner of that various face.

Oh! that they were written in thy heart,

That I, with this, might lay thee open to my sight!

But then 'twill be too late to know—

Thou hast, thou hast found the only way to turn my rage. Too well thou knowest my jealous soul could never bear uncertainty. Speak, then, and tell me. Yet are you silent. Oh, I am wildered in all passions. But thus my anger melts. [*Weeps.*] Here, take this poniard, for my very spirits faint, and I want strength to hold it; thou hast disarmed my soul. [*Gives the dagger.*]

LORD TOUCH. Amazement shakes me. Where will this end?

MASK. So, 'tis well—let your wild fury have a vent; and when you have temper, tell me.

LADY TOUCH. Now, now, now I am calm and can hear you.

MASK. [*Aside*.] Thanks, my invention; and now I have it for you. First, tell me what urged you to this violence: for your passion broke in such imperfect terms, that yet I am to learn the cause.

LADY TOUCH. My lord himself surprised me with the news you were to marry Cynthia, that you had owned our love to him, and his indulgence would assist you to attain your ends.

CYNT. How, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. Pray forbear all resentments for a while, and let us hear the rest.

MASK. I grant you in appearance all is true; I seemed consenting to my lord—nay, transported with the blessing. But could you think that I, who had been happy in your loved embraces, could e'er be fond of an inferior slavery?

LORD TOUCH. Ha! Oh, poison to my ears! What do I hear?

CYNT. Nay, good my lord, forbear resentment; let us hear it out.

LORD TOUCH. Yes, I will contain, though I could burst.

MASK. I, that had wantoned in the rich circle of your world of love, could be confined within the puny province of a girl? No. Yet though I dote on each last favour more than all the rest, though I would give a limb for every look you cheaply throw away on any other object of your love: yet so far I prize your pleasures o'er my own, that all this seeming plot that I have laid has been to gratify your taste and cheat the world, to prove a faithful rogue to you.

LADY TOUCH. If this were true. But how can it be?

MASK. I have so contrived that Mellefont will presently, in the chaplain's habit, wait for Cynthia in your dressing-room; but I have put the change upon her, that she may be other where employed. Do you procure her night-gown, and with your hoods tied over your face, meet him in her stead. You may go privately by the back stairs, and, unperceived, there you may propose to reinstate him in his uncle's favour, if he'll comply with your desires—his case is desperate, and I believe he'll yield to any conditions. If not here, take this; you may employ it better than in the heart of one who is nothing when not yours. [*Gives the dagger*.]

LADY TOUCH. Thou can'st deceive everybody. Nay, thou hast deceived me; but 'tis as I would wish. Trusty villain! I could worship thee.

MASK. No more; it wants but a few minutes of the time; and Mellefont's love will carry him there before his hour.

LADY TOUCH. I go, I fly, incomparable Maskwell!

SCENE XVIII.

MASKWELL, CYNTHIA, LORD TOUCHWOOD.

MASK. So, this was a pinch indeed, my invention was upon the rack, and made discovery of her last plot. I hope Cynthia and my chaplain will be ready; I'll prepare for the expedition.

SCENE XIX.

CYNTHIA *and* LORD TOUCHWOOD.

CYNT. Now, my lord?

LORD TOUCH. Astonishment binds up my rage! Villainy upon villainy! Heavens, what a long track of dark deceit has this discovered! I am confounded when I look back, and want a clue to guide me through the various mazes of unheard-of treachery. My wife! Damnation! My hell!

CYNT. My lord, have patience, and be sensible how great our happiness is, that this discovery was not made too late.

LORD TOUCH. I thank you, yet it may be still too late, if we don't presently prevent the execution of their plots;—ha, I'll do't. Where's Mellefont, my poor injured nephew? How shall I make him ample satisfaction?

CYNT. I dare answer for him.

LORD TOUCH. I do him fresh wrong to question his forgiveness; for I know him to be all goodness. Yet my wife! Damn her:—she'll think to meet him in that dressing-room. Was't not so? And Maskwell will expect you in the chaplain's chamber. For once, I'll add my plot too:—let us haste to find out, and inform my nephew; and do you, quickly as you can, bring all the company into this gallery. I'll expose the strumpet, and the villain.

SCENE XX.

LORD FROTH *and* SIR PAUL.

LORD FROTH. By heavens, I have slept an age. Sir Paul, what o'clock is't? Past eight, on my

conscience; my lady's is the most inviting couch, and a slumber there is the prettiest amusement! But where's all the company?

SIR PAUL. The company, gads-bud, I don't know, my lord, but here's the strangest revolution, all turned topsy turvy; as I hope for providence.

LORD FROTH. O heavens, what's the matter? Where's my wife?

SIR PAUL. All turned topsy turvy as sure as a gun.

LORD FROTH. How do you mean? My wife?

SIR PAUL. The strangest posture of affairs!

LORD FROTH. What, my wife?

SIR PAUL. No, no, I mean the family. Your lady's affairs may be in a very good posture; I saw her go into the garden with Mr. Brisk.

LORD FROTH. How? Where, when, what to do?

SIR PAUL. I suppose they have been laying their heads together.

LORD FROTH. How?

SIR PAUL. Nay, only about poetry, I suppose, my lord; making couplets.

LORD FROTH. Couplets.

SIR PAUL. Oh, here they come.

SCENE XXI.

[*To them*] Lady Froth, Brisk.

BRISK. My lord, your humble servant; Sir Paul, yours,—the finest night!

LADY FROTH. My dear, Mr. Brisk and I have been star-gazing, I don't know how long.

SIR PAUL. Does it not tire your ladyship? Are not you weary with looking up?

LADY FROTH. Oh, no, I love it violently. My dear, you're melancholy.

LORD FROTH. No, my dear; I'm but just awake.

LADY FROTH. Snuff some of my spirit of hartshorn.

LORD FROTH. I've some of my own, thank you, dear.

LADY FROTH. Well, I swear, Mr. Brisk, you understood astronomy like an old Egyptian.

BRISK. Not comparably to your ladyship; you are the very Cynthia of the skies, and queen of stars.

LADY FROTH. That's because I have no light but what's by reflection from you, who are the sun.

BRISK. Madam, you have eclipsed me quite, let me perish. I can't answer that.

LADY FROTH. No matter. Hark 'ee, shall you and I make an almanac together?

BRISK. With all my soul. Your ladyship has made me the man in't already, I'm so full of the wounds which you have given.

LADY FROTH. O finely taken! I swear now you are even with me. O Parnassus, you have an infinite deal of wit.

SIR PAUL. So he has, gads-bud, and so has your ladyship.

SCENE XXII.

[*To them*] Lady Plyant, Careless, Cynthia.

LADY PLYANT. You tell me most surprising things; bless me, who would ever trust a man? Oh my heart aches for fear they should be all deceitful alike.

CARE. You need not fear, madam, you have charms to fix inconstancy itself.

LADY PLYANT. O dear, you make me blush.

LORD FROTH. Come, my dear, shall we take leave of my lord and lady?

CYNT. They'll wait upon your lordship presently.

LADY FROTH. Mr. Brisk, my coach shall set you down.

ALL. What's the matter? [*A great shriek from the corner of the stage*.]

SCENE XXIII.

[*To them*] Lady Touchwood *runs out affrighted, my lord after her, like a parson.*

LADY TOUCH. Oh, I'm betrayed. Save me, help me!

LORD TOUCH. Now what evasion, strumpet?

LADY TOUCH. Stand off, let me go.

LORD TOUCH. Go, and thy own infamy pursue thee. You stare as you were all amazed,—I don't wonder at it,—but too soon you'll know mine, and that woman's shame.

SCENE the last.

Lord Touchwood, Lord Froth, Lady Froth, Lady Plyant, Sir Paul, Cynthia, Mellefont, Maskwell, Mellefont *disguised in a parson's habit and pulling in* Maskwell.

MEL. Nay, by heaven you shall be seen. Careless, your hand. Do you hold down your head? Yes, I am your chaplain, look in the face of your injured friend; thou wonder of all falsehood.

LORD TOUCH. Are you silent, monster?

MEL. Good heavens! How I believed and loved this man! Take him hence, for he's a disease to my sight.

LORD TOUCH. Secure that manifold villain. [*Servants seize him.*]

CARE. Miracle of ingratitude!

BRISK. This is all very surprising, let me perish.

LADY FROTH. You know I told you Saturn looked a little more angry than usual.

LORD TOUCH. We'll think of punishment at leisure, but let me hasten to do justice in rewarding virtue and wronged innocence. Nephew, I hope I have your pardon, and Cynthia's.

MEL. We are your lordship's creatures.

LORD TOUCH. And be each other's comfort. Let me join your hands. Unwearied nights, and wishing days attend you both; mutual love, lasting health, and circling joys, tread round each happy year of your long lives.

> Let secret villany from hence be warned;
> Howe'er in private mischiefs are conceived,
> Torture and shame attend their open birth;
> Like vipers in the womb, base treachery lies,
> Still gnawing that, whence first it did arise;
> No sooner born, but the vile parent dies.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*]

EPILOGUE
Spoken by Mrs. Mountford.

Could poets but foresee how plays would take,
Then they could tell what epilogues to make;
Whether to thank or blame their audience most.
But that late knowledge does much hazard cost:
Till dice are thrown, there's nothing won, nor lost.
So, till the thief has stolen, he cannot know
Whether he shall escape the law, or no.
But poets run much greater hazards far
Than they who stand their trials at the bar.
The law provides a curb for it's own fury,
And suffers judges to direct the jury:
But in this court, what difference does appear!
For every one's both judge and jury here;
Nay, and what's worse, an executioner.
All have a right and title to some part,
Each choosing that in which he has most art.
The dreadful men of learning all confound,
Unless the fable's good, and moral sound.
The vizor-masks, that are in pit and gallery,
Approve, or damn, the repartee and raillery.
The lady critics, who are better read,
Inquire if characters are nicely bred;
If the soft things are penned and spoke with grace;
They judge of action too, and time, and place;
In which we do not doubt but they're discerning,
For that's a kind of assignation learning.
Beaus judge of dress; the witlings judge of songs;
The cuckoldom, of ancient right, to cits belongs.

Thus poor poets the favour are denied
Even to make exceptions, when they’re tried.
’Tis hard that they must every one admit:
Methinks I see some faces in the pit
Which must of consequence be foes to wit.
You who can judge, to sentence may proceed;
But though he cannot write, let him be freed
At least from their contempt who cannot read.

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