

THOUGHTS
ON
Various Subjects

[47] ALTHOUGH Men are accus'd for not knowing their own Weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own Strength. It is in Men as in Soils, where sometimes there is a Vein of Gold, which the Owner knows not of.

5 [48] SATYR is reckon'd the easiest of all Wit; but I take it to be otherwise in very bad Times: For it is as hard to satyryze well a Man of distinguish'd Vices, as to praise well a Man of distinguish'd Virtues. It is easy enough to do either to People of moderate Characters.

[49] INVENTION is the Talent of Youth, and Judgment of Age; so that our Judgment grows harder to please, when we have fewer Things to offer it: This goes through the whole Commerce of Life. When we are old, our Friends find it difficult to please us, and are less concern'd whether we be pleas'd or no.

[50] No wise Man ever wished to be younger.

15 [51] AN idle Reason lessens the Weight of the good ones you gave before.

[52] THE Motives of the best Actions will not bear too strict an Enquiry. It is allow'd, that the Cause of most Actions, good or bad, may be resolved into the Love of ourselves: But the Self-Love of some Men inclines them to please others; and the Self-Love of others is wholly employ'd in pleasing themselves. This makes the great Distinction between Virtue and Vice. Religion is the best Motive of all Actions, yet Religion is allow'd to be the highest Instance of Self-Love.

25 [53] WHEN the World has once begun to use us ill, it afterwards continues the same Treatment with less Scruple or Ceremony, as Men do to a Whore.

[54] OLD Men view best at distance with the Eyes of their Understanding, as well as with those of Nature.

30 [55] SOME People take more care to hide their Wisdom than their Folly.

5 SATYR] Satire 1754

The present text is taken from David Woolley's own copy of *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse: The First Volume* (London: Benjamin Motte, 1727), pp. 398-408 (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 25 [1a]), now at the Ehrenpreis Centre (EC 8586). It has been collated with *The Works of J.S. D.D. D.S.P.D.: In Four Volumes* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1735), I, 303-10 (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 49); and *The Works of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin*, ed. John Hawkesworth, large 8vo, 12 vols (London: C. Bathurst, 1754), III, 401-11 (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 88). There is one manuscript correction in Swift's own copy of *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse: The First Volume* (THE ROTHSCHILD LIBRARY, I, 367-68 [1422]).

[56] ARBITRARY Power is the natural Object of Temptation to a Prince, as Wine or Women to a young Fellow, or a Bribe to a Judge, or Avarice to old Age, or Vanity to a Woman.

[57] ANTHONY Henly's Farmer dying of an Asthma, said, Well, if I can get this Breath once out, I'll take care it shall never get in again. 5

[58] THE Humour of exploding many Things under the Names of Trifles, Fopperies, and only imaginary Goods, is a very false Proof either of Wisdom or Magnanimity, and a great Check to virtuous Actions. For instance, with regard to Fame: There is in most People a Reluctance and Unwillingness to be forgotten. We observe, even among the Vulgar, how fond they are to have an Inscription over their Grave. It requires but little Philosophy to discover and observe that there is no intrinsick Value in all this; however, if it be founded in our Nature, as an Incitement to Virtue, it ought not to be ridicul'd. 10

[59] COMPLAINT is the largest Tribute Heaven receives, and the sincerest Part of our Devotion. 15

[60] THE common Fluency of Speech in many Men, and most Women, is owing to a Scarcity of Matter, and Scarcity of Words; for whoever is a Master of Language, and hath a Mind full of Ideas, will be apt in speaking to hesitate upon the Choice of both; whereas common Speakers have only one Set of Ideas, and one Set of Words to cloath them in; and these are always ready at the Mouth: So People come faster out of a Church when it is almost empty, than when a Crowd is at the Door. 20

[61] FEW are qualified to shine in Company; but it is in most Mens Power to be agreeable. The Reason, therefore, why Conversation runs so low at present, is not the Defect of Understanding, but Pride, Vanity, ill Nature, Affectation, Singularity, Positiveness, or some other Vice, the Effect of a wrong Education. 25

[62] To be vain is rather a Mark of Humility than Pride. Vain Men delight in telling what Honours have been done them, what great Company they have kept, and the like; by which they plainly confess, that these Honours were more than their Due, and such as their Friends would not believe if they had not been told: Whereas a Man truly proud, thinks the greatest Honours below his Merit, and consequently scorns to boast. I therefore deliver it as a Maxim, that whoever desires the Character of a proud Man, ought to conceal his Vanity. 30 35

[63] LAW, in a free Country, is or ought to be the Determination of the Majority of those who have Property in Land.

3 Woman] Female 1735 18 a Scarcity of Matter] the Scarcity of Matter 1735
18 Scarcity of Words] a Scarcity of Words 1754 29 than Pride] than of Pride 1735

[64] ONE Argument used to the Disadvantage of Providence, I take to be a very strong one in its Defence. It is objected, that Storms and Tempests, unfruitful Seasons, Serpents, Spiders, Flies, and other noxious or troublesome Animals, with many more Instances of the like kind, discover an Imperfection in Nature, because human Life would be much easier without them: But the Design of Providence may clearly be perceived in this Proceeding. The Motions of the Sun and Moon; in short, the whole System of the Universe, as far as Philosophers have been able to discover and observe, are in the utmost Degree of Regularity and Perfection; but wherever God hath left to Man the Power of interposing a Remedy by Thought or Labour, there he hath plac'd Things in a State of Imperfection, on Purpose to stir up human Industry, without which Life would stagnate, or indeed rather could not subsist at all: *Curis acuunt mortalia corda.*

15 [65] PRAISE is the Daughter of present Power.

[66] How inconsistent is Man with himself!

[67] I HAVE known several Persons of great Fame for Wisdom in publick Affairs and Counsels, govern'd by foolish Servants.

20 [68] I HAVE known great Ministers distinguish'd for Wit and Learning, who preferred none but Dunces.

[69] I HAVE known Men of great Valour Cowards to their Wives.

[70] I HAVE known Men of the greatest Cunning perpetually cheated.

25 [71] I KNEW three great Ministers, who could exactly compute and settle the Accounts of a Kingdom, but were wholly ignorant of their own OEconomy.

[72] THE Preaching of Divines helps to preserve well-inclin'd Men in the Course of Virtue, but seldom or never reclaims the Vicious.

30 [73] PRINCES usually make wiser Choices than the Servants whom they trust for the Disposal of Places: I have known a Prince more than once chuse an able Minister, but I never observ'd that Minister to use his Credit in the Disposal of an Employment to a Person whom he thought the fittest for it. One of the greatest in this Age own'd and excus'd the Matter from the Violence of Parties, and the Unreasonableness of Friends.

35 [74] SMALL Causes are sufficient to make a Man uneasy, when great ones are not in the Way: For want of a *Block* he will stumble at a *Straw*.

13 *acuunt*] *acuens* 1735 14 *corda*] *Concordia* 1735 16 How inconsistent is Man with himself!] *om.* 1735; himself!] himself? 1754 21 of great Valour] of Valour 1735 33 the Matter] the Matter to me 1735

[75] DIGNITY, high Station, or great Riches are in some sort necessary to old Men, in order to keep the younger at a Distance, who are otherwise too apt to insult them upon the Score of their Age.

[76] EVERY Man desires to live long; but no Man would be old.

[77] LOVE of Flattery in most Men proceeds from the mean Opinion they have of themselves; in Women from the contrary. 5

[78] IF Books and Laws continue to increase as they have done for fifty Years past, I am in some concern for future Ages, how any Man will be Learned, or any Man a Lawyer.

[79] KINGS are commonly said to have long Hands, I wish they had as long Ears. 10

[80] PRINCES in their Infancy, Childhood, and Youth, are said to discover prodigious Parts and Wit, to speak Things that surprize and astonish: Strange, so many hopeful Princes, and so many shameful Kings! If they happen to die young, they would have been Prodigies of Wisdom and Virtue: If they live, they are often Prodigies indeed, but of another sort. 15

[81] POLITICKS, as the Word is commonly understood, are nothing but Corruptions, and consequently of no Use to a good King, or a good Ministry, for which Reason Courts are so over-run with Politicks.

[82] SILENUS, the Foster Father of Bacchus, is always carried by an Ass, and has Horns on his Head. The Moral is, that Drunkards are led by Fools, and have a great Chance to be Cuckolds. 20

[83] VENUS, a beautiful good-natur'd Lady, was the Goddess of Love; Juno, a terrible Shrew, the Goddess of Marriage; and they were always mortal Enemies. 25

[84] THOSE who are against Religion, must needs be Fools; and therefore we read that, of all Animals, God refus'd the First-born of an Ass.

[85] A VERY little Wit is valued in a Woman, as we are pleas'd with a few Words spoken plain by a Parrot.

[86] A NICE Man is a Man of nasty Ideas. 30

[87] APOLLO was held the God of Physick, and Sender of Diseases: Both were originally the same Trade, and still continue.

[88] OLD Men and Comets have been reverenc'd for the same Reason; their long Beards, and Pretences to foretel Events.

[89] A PERSON was ask'd at Court what he thought of an Ambassador, and his Train, who were all Embroidery and Lace, full of Bows, Cringes, and Gestures. He said, it was Solomon's Importation, Gold and Apes. 35

35 A PERSON] I 1735 35 he] I 1735 35 an Ambassador] the French Ambassador
1735 37 Gestures.] Gestures? 1735 37 He] I 1735

[90] THERE is a Story in Pausanias of a Plot for betraying of a City discover'd by the Braying of an Ass: The Cackling of Geese sav'd the Capitol; and Cataline's Conspiracy was discover'd by a Whore. These are the only three Animals, as far as I remember, famous in History for Evidences and
5 Informers.

[91] MOST Sorts of Diversion in Men, Children, and other Animals, are an Imitation of Fighting.

[92] AUGUSTUS meeting an Ass with a lucky Name, foretold himself good Fortune. I meet many Asses, but none of them have lucky Names.

10 [93] IF a Man makes me keep my Distance, the Comfort is, he keeps his at the same Time.

[94] WHO can deny that all Men are violent Lovers of Truth, when we see them so positive in their Errors, which they will maintain out of their Zeal to Truth, although they contradict themselves every Day of their
15 Lives?

[95] THAT was excellently observ'd, say I, when I read a Passage in an Author, where his Opinion agrees with mine. When we differ, there I pronounce him to be mistaken.

20 [96] VERY few Men, properly speaking, live at present, but are providing to live another Time.

[97] As universal a Practice as Lying is, and as easy one as it seems, I do not remember to have heard three good Lyes in all my Conversation, even from those who were most celebrated in that Faculty.

F I N I S.

6 Sorts] Kinds 1735 7 are] 1735, 1754; is 1727, corrected by Swift in his own copy, now THE ROTHSCHILD LIBRARY, I, 367-68 [1422] 21 one] a one 1735
24 FINIS.] om. 1735