Mary Astell (1666–1731)

Mary Astell was an English feminist of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century who wrote political works on a range of subjects from 1694 to 1713. She lived from 1666 to 1731 but did not continue active writing later in life. She is often termed a conservative feminist because she held uncompromising royalist principles and was a loyal follower of the Church of England during an age where some scholars have located feminist origins within the religious and political left. While Astell looked askance upon those who would undermine social and political order, this did not prevent her from questioning women’s inferior status during the late 1600s. This conflictual perspective permeates her feminist, religious, and political writings, in which she often used conservative perspectives as a springboard for her feminist arguments. This complex mixture of loyalties and intellectual principles made her an intriguing figure among seventeenth-century political theorists and among early feminist theorists.

Her reputation grew from her first work, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest, written in 1694 when she was just twenty-eight years old. Interestingly, she signed it “by a Lover of Her Sex” and, like many seventeenth-century women, published it anonymously. It quickly became an open secret that the author was Mary Astell, a young woman from Newcastle upon Tyne, who came from a successful commercial family, her father being an innkeeper and her grandfather the mayor and a well-known royalist during the English Civil War of 1640–60. She did not come from aristocratic roots but from a respectable merchant family, and she later made friends among a circle of aristocratic women after she moved to London in 1690. She had no independent income to live on and had to work as a governess or teacher in a girls’ school or accept financial help from her wealthier friends. Resentful of the teaching positions she was forced to accept, Astell became bitter in old age following the death of Queen Anne, when, to her mind, there was little support for an intellectual woman such as herself. She saw the failing as twofold: first, there was much ridicule of the educated woman and of ideas she had first offered thirty years ago in A Serious Proposal; second, although there were pensions for male intellectuals and institutions such as universities, the Inns of Court, and the Royal Society to perpetuate their work, there was nothing similar for women.

Although Astell wrote ten separate works, the Serious Proposal remained the one most closely associated with her name up to her death. In this work she combined advocacy of women’s higher education with a proposed refuge for them to develop spiritual, moral, and intellectual qualities. As a strong Anglican, she grounded her arguments for women’s learning in the promise from God that both men and women possessed rational minds and immortal souls capable and obligated to seek his truth and imitate his goodness. Reason was an effective tool to understand God’s grandeur and his plan for humanity. Women’s serious learning would always make them better Christians, and ones who realized the superiority of the Anglican church. But such learning would not merely produce within them sure Christian principles, it would make them serious beings, interested in issues of morality and social import. Above all, Astell resented her society’s waste of women’s potential, their languishing in lives focused on superficial beauty and social customs unworthy of a creature created in God’s image. She disliked what many of her contemporaries believed was women’s proper path to faith: reading scripture and memorizing the catechism while failing to grasp the reasoning behind God’s teachings.

The first part of A Serious Proposal is written in often sarcastic, sharp language directed at women who would ignore their potential and, in her words, “be content to be in the World like Tulips in a Garden, to make a fine shew and be good for nothing; have all your Glories set in the Grave, or perhaps much sooner!” Yet her strongest rebuke was aimed at a society which cared so little about women that its members would leave them to wither among selections of lace, appropriate colors, and insignificant social customs. She railed at the fashions, neighborhood visits, and gossip that characterized the lives of upper-class women. Such a waste infuriated her, and she expressed this view especially through an unrelenting attack on chivalry which she saw as a hypocritical attempt by men to keep women ignorant, idle, and powerless while heaping praise upon them. The true meaning of chivalry was summed up in the following: “give me leave therefore to hope, that no Gentleman who has honourable designs, will henceforward decry Knowledge and Ingenuity in her he would pretend to Honour.”

In the second part of the Serious Proposal, published separately in 1697, Astell outlined the systematic education she intended for women which included philosophy and theology, as well as history, along with traditional artistic and social lessons. She wanted women’s minds to be tested because God would hold them accountable even if they could not live a life which
allowed time for serious thought and spiritual contemplation.

Scholars have argued that Some Reflections upon Marriage, Occasion'd by the Duke and Duchess of Mazarin’s Case (1700) holds her most radical feminist critique of seventeenth-century society because of its broad-based attack on the institution of marriage. Yet it, as well as the Serious Proposal, blunted the attack on male/female relationships and the family through a strong Christian overlay. Obviously Astell saw marriage as an institution that oppressed women, gave them few choices, and rendered them virtually powerless. Yet marriage was a Christian institution ordained by God for the propagation of humankind. Thus she did not openly attack it but argued that seventeenth-century men debased the institution, ignoring God’s directive that they should seek a helpermeet. Rather, she contended, men were driven either by a desire for transitory beauty or by a grasping search for wealth, marrying a wife who had an estate to maintain them comfortably. This meant that few men sought intelligent, moral, and religious companions or gave a wife an opportunity to pursue such qualities following marriage. She argued that men often despised their wives because they held all women in contempt.

While stressing the goodness of Christian marriage, Astell contended that the seventeenth-century institution was one in which power dictated relationships. A woman had limited choice in establishing the union and virtually none following the marriage no matter how poor, cruel, or dishonest a companion she had married. Often her choice was made for her, and, following wedlock, the sexual double standard gave her little opportunity to find pleasure elsewhere whatever her husband’s habits, and his legal control over her property left little economic flexibility. Marriage catered to men’s needs, soothing their egos and supplying them with “an upper servant.” Although she agreed that, according to scripture, men should have the upper hand, in reality she left little opportunity for them to use that superiority to control their wives. Some Reflections upon Marriage is an essay placed squarely in the feminist framework of an unequal power structure between the sexes.

Astell’s explicit political tracts were royalist documents that lamented the execution of the Stuart monarch, Charles I, in 1649. Charles came quickly to be known as the royal martyr, and Astell was one of the most uncompromising royalists to vilify those who executed him and governed following his death. She argued that there was no justification whatsoever for opposition to Charles and that a group of evil men duped a naive public into believing that Charles was establishing a tyranny. She felt so strongly about this that she published a tract arguing against a sermon offered on January 30, 1704 (the anniversary of Charles’s execution), by White Kennett, a leading Anglican divine. Such commemoration sermons were given well into the eighteenth century, and January 30 became a day of sacred memory for royalists. Kennett, while honoring the king’s memory, admitted that people might have been misled about his arbitrary rule. Kennett’s sermon seems reasonable and written in a compromising tone, trying to bring a wide spectrum of those loyal to the crown back into the royalist and Anglican fold. Yet Astell would allow no good words to be said about those “Miscreants, who set whole Nations on fire, only that their own despicable selves may be talk’d of.” And, just as surely, she would allow no criticism of the royal martyr. For her, there was no honorable way to compromise with traitors. Her tract, An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War in This Kingdom, took White Kennett to task in no uncertain terms and was the strongest expression of her antirevolutionary sentiments and her fear of social disorder.

Although all of her works are permeated with her attachment to the Church of England, she presented those views most fully in 1705 in The Christian Religion, as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church of England. Her strong adherence to Anglicanism and the integration it offered between reason and faith convinced her that it was the best representative of the early church established by Christ. She had few doubts about its superiority, but this was not a proselytizing essay; rather, it reflects her genuine admiration and affection for the Anglican faith.

Although Mary Astell disliked the spreading heterodoxy of Protestant sectarians and any doctrine on the fundamental rights of the people to sovereignty or rebellion, she argued strongly for women to be able to resist, as she called it, “a private tyranny” within the home. Her feminism blended with her political views in that she saw that Puritans who supported revolution ignored women’s rights and that the emotionalism of much radical Protestantism was dismissive of women’s intelligence. Yet it is fair to say that she did not always honestly grapple with the contradictions within her thought. She was a conservative, and she was a feminist, but it seems clear that she was not a conservative feminist. For the 1690s, in many ways, she was a radical feminist, often more so than those who were more radical politically and religiously than she.

The selections are from A Serious Proposal to the Ladies (Part I, 2nd ed., 1695; Part II, 1697); Some Reflections upon Marriage (4th ed., 1730); and An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War in This Kingdom (1704).
Sources and Suggested Readings


A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest

By a Lover of Her Sex

Part I (2nd ed., 1695)

Ladies,

Since the Profitable Adventures that have gone abroad in the World have met with so great Encouragement, . . . I therefore persuade my self, you will not be less kind to a Proposition that comes attended with more certain and substantial Gain; whose only design is to improve your Charms and heighten your Value, by suffering you no longer to be cheap and contemptible. Its aim is to fix that Beauty, to make it lasting and permanent, which Nature with all the helps of Art cannot secure, and to place it out of the reach of Sickness and Old Age, by transferring it from a corruptible Body to an immortal Mind. An obliging Design, which wou’d procure them inward Beauty, to whom Nature has unkindly denied the outward, and not permit those Ladies who have comely Bodies, to tarnish their Glory with deformed Souls. Wou’d have you all be wits, or what is better, Wise. Raise you above the Vulgar by something more truly illustrious, than a sounding Title or a great Estate. Wou’d excite in you a generous Emulation to excel in the best things, and not in such Trifles as every mean person who has but Money enough may purchase as well as you. Not suffer you to take up with the low thought of distinguishing your selves by any thing that is not truly valuable, and procure you such Ornaments as all the Treasures of the Indies are not able to purchase. Wou’d help you to surpass the Men as much in Vertue and Ingenuity, as you do in Beauty, that you may not only be as lovely, but as wise as Angels. Exalt and Establish your Fame, more than the best wrought Poems and loudest Panegyricks, by ennobling your Minds with such Graces as really deserve it. And instead of the Fustian Complements and Fulsive Platteries of your Admirers, obtain for you the Plaudit of Good Men and Angels, and the approbation of Him who cannot err. In a word, render you the Glory and Blessing of the present Age, and the Admiration and Pattern of the next . . .

Remember, I pray you, the famous Women of former Ages, the *Orinda’s* of late [seventeenth-century poet Katherine Philips], and the more Modern Heroins, and blush to think how much is now, and will hereafter be said of them, when you your selves (as great a Figure as you make) must be buried in silence and forgetfulness! Shall your Emulation fail there only where ’tis commendable? Why are you so preposterously humble, as not to contend for one of the highest Mansions in the Court of Heav’n? Believe me, Ladies, this is the only Place worth contending for, you are neither better nor worse in your selves for going before, or coming after now, but you are really so much the better, by how much the higher your station is in an Orb of Glory. How can you be content to be in the World like Tulips in a Garden, to make a fine shew and be good for nothing; have all your Glories set in the Grave, or perhaps much sooner! What your own sentiments are I know not, but I can’t without pity and resentment

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reflect, that those Glorious Temples on which your kind Creator has bestow'd such exquisite workmanship, shou'd enshrine no better than Aegyptian Deities; be like a garnish'd Sepulchre, which for all its glittering, has nothing within but emptiness or putrefaction! . . .

For shame let's abandon that Old, and therefore one wou'd think, unファッション employment of pursuing Butterflies and Trifles! No longer drudge on in the dull beaten road of Vanity and Folly, which so many have gone before us, but dare to break the enchanted Circle that custom has plac'd us in, and scorn the vulgar way of imitating all the Impertinencies of our Neighbours. Let us learn to pride our selves in something more excellent than the invention of a Fashion, and not entertain such a degrading thought of our own worth, as to imagine that our Souls were given us only for the service of our Bodies, and that the best improvement we can make of these, is to attract the Eyes of Men. We value them too much, and our selves too little, if we place any part of our desert in their Opinion, and don't think our selves capable of Nobler Things than the pitiful Conquest of some worthless heart. She who has opportunities of making an interest in Heaven, of obtaining the love and admiration of GOD and Angels, is too prodigal of her Time, and injurious to her Charms, to throw them away on vain insignificant men. . . .

Pardon me the seeming rudeness of this Proposal, which goes upon a supposition that there's something amiss in you, which it is intended to amend. My design is not to expose, but to rectify your Failures. To be exempt from mistake, is a priviledge few can pretend to, the greatest is to be past Conviction and too obstinate to reform. Even the Men, as exact as they wou'd seem, and as much as they divert themselves with our Miscarriages, are very often guilty of greater faults, and such, as considering the advantages they enjoy, are much more inexcusable. But I will not pretend to correct their Errors, who either are, or at least think themselves too wise to receive Instruction from a Womans Pen.

My earnest desire is, That you Ladies, would be as perfect and happy as 'tis possible to be in this imperfect state; for I love you too well to endure a spot upon your Beauties, if I can by any means remove and wipe it off. I would have you live up to the dignity of your Nature, and express your thankfulness to GOD for the benefits you enjoy by a due improvement of them: As I know very many of you do, who countenance that Piety which the men decry, and are the brightest Patterns of Religion that the Age affords, 'tis my grief that all the rest of our Sex do not imitate such Illustrious Examples, and therefore I would have them encrase'd and render'd more conspicuous, that Vice being put out of countenance, (because Vertue is the only thing in fashion) may sneak out of the World, and its darkness be dispell'd by the confluence of so many shining Graces.

The Men perhaps will cry out that I teach you false Doctrin, for because by their deductions some amongst us are become very mean and contemptible, they would fain persuade the rest to be as despicable and forlorn as they. We're indeed oblig'd to them for their management, in endeavouring to make us so, who use all the artifice they can to spoil, and deny us the means of improvement. So that instead of inquiring why all Women are not wise and good, we have reason to wonder that there are any so. Were the Men as much neglected, and as little care taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they wou'd be so far from surpassing those whom they now despise, that they themselves wou'd sink into the greatest stupidity and brutality. . . . Hither, Ladies, I desire you wou'd aspire, 'tis a noble and becoming Ambition, and to remove such Obstacles as lie in your way is the design of this Paper. We will therefore enquire what it is that stops your flight, that keeps you groveling here below, like Domitian catching Flies when you should be busied in obtaining Empires.

Altho' it has been said by Men of more Wit than Wisdom, and perhaps of more malice than either, that Women are naturally incapable of acting Prudently, or that they are necessarily determined to folly, I must by no means grant it; that Hypothesis would render my endeavours impertinent, for then it would be in vain to advise the one, or endeavour the Reformation of the other. Besides, there are Examples in all Ages, which sufficiently confute the Ignorance and Malice of this assertion.

The Incapacity, if there be any, is acquired not natural, and none of their Follies are so necessary, but that they might avoid them if they pleas'd themselves. Some disadvantages indeed they labour under, and what these are we shall see by and by and endeavour to surmount; but Women need not take up with mean things, since (if they are not wanting to themselves) they are capable of the best. Neither God nor Nature have excluded them from being Ornaments to their Families and useful in their Generation; there is therefore no reason they should be content to be Cyphers in the World, useless at the best, and in a little time a burden and nuisance to all about them. And 'tis very great pity that they who are so apt to overrate themselves in smaller Matters, shou'd, where it most concerns them to know and stand upon their Value, be so
insensible of their own worth. The Cause therefore of the defects we labour under is, if not wholly, yet at least in the first place, to be ascrib’d to the mistakes of our Education, which like an Error in the first Concoction, spreads its ill Influence through all our Lives.

The Soil is rich and would if well cultivated produce a noble Harvest. . . . Women are from their very Infancy debar’d those Advantages, with the want of which they are afterwards reproach’d, and nurs’d up in those Vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them. So partial are Men as to expect Brick where they afford no Straw; and so abundantly civil as to take care we shou’d make good that obliging Epithet of Ignorant, which out of an excess of good Manners, they are pleas’d to bestow on us!

One would be apt to think indeed, that Parents shou’d take all possible care of their Children Education, not only for their sakes, but even for their own. And tho’ the Son convey the Name to Posity, yet certainly a great Part of the Honour of their Families depends on their Daughters. . . . To introduce poor Children into the World and neglect to fence them against the temptations of it, and so leave them expos’d to temporal and eternal Miseries, is a wickedness for which I want a Name; ’tis beneath Brutality; the Beasts are better natur’d for they take care of their offspring, till they are capable of caring for themselves. And if Mothers had a due regard to their Posity, how Great soever they are, they wou’d not think themselves too Good to perform what Nature requires, nor through Pride and Delicacy remit the poor little one to the care of a Foster Parent. Or if necessity force them to depute another to perform their Duty, they wou’d be as choice at least, in the Manners and Inclinations, as they are in the complections of their Nurses, lest with their Milk they transfuse their Vices, and form in the Child such evil habits as will not easily be eradicated.

. . . She who rightly understands wherein the perfection of her Nature consists, will lay out her Thoughts and Industry in the acquisition of such Perfections: But she who is kept ignorant of the matter, will take up with such Objects as first offer themselves, and bear any plausible resemblance to what she desires; a shew of advantage being sufficient to render them agreeable baits to her who wants Judgment and Skill to discern between reality and pretence. From whence it easily follows, that she who has nothing else to value her self upon, will be proud of her Beauty, or Money and what that can purchase, and think her self mightily oblig’d to him, who tells her she has those Perfections which she naturally longs for. Her inbred self-esteem and desire of good, which are degenerated into Pride and mistaken Self-love, will easily open her Ears to whatever goes about to nourish and delight them; and when a cunning designing Enemy from without, has drawn over to his Party these Traitors within, he has the Poor unhappy Person, at his Mercy, who now very glibly swallows down his Poison, because ’tis presented in a Golden Cup, and credulously hearkens to the most disadvantageous Proposals, because they come attended with a seeming esteem. She whose Vanity makes her swallow praises by the whole-sale, without examining whether she deserves them, or from what hand they come, will reckon it but gratitude to think well of him who values her so much, and think she must needs be merciful to the poor despairing Lover whom her Charms have reduc’d to die at her feet.

Love and Honour are what every one of us naturally esteem, they are excellent things in themselves and very worthy our regard, and by how much the reader we are to embrace what ever resembles them, by so much the more dangerous it is that these venerable Names should be wretchedly abus’d and affix’d to their direct contraries, yet this is the Custom of the World: And how can she possibly detect the fallacy, who has no better Notion of either than what she derives from Plays and Romances? How can she be furnished with any solid Principles whose very Instructors are Froth and emptiness? Whereas Women were they rightly Educated, had they obtain’d a well-inform’d and discerning Mind, they would be proof against all those Batteries, see through and scorn those little silly Artifices which are us’d to ensnare and deceive them. . . .

Whence is it but from ignorance, from a want of Understanding to compare and judge of things, to chuse a right End, to proportion the Means to the End, and to rate ev’ry thing according to its proper value, that we quit the Substance for the Shadow, Reality for Appearance, and embrace those very things which if we understood we shou’d hate and fly, but now are reconcil’d to, merely because they usurp the Name, tho’ they have nothing of the Nature of those venerable Objects we desire and seek? Were it not for this delusion, is it probable a Lady who passionately desires to be admir’d, should ever consent to such Actions as render her base and contemptible? . . . In sum, did not ignorance impose on us, we would never lavish out the greatest part of our Time and Care, on the decoration of a Tenement, in which our Lease is so very short, and which for all our industry, may loose it’s Beauty e’er that Lease be out, and in the mean while neglect a more glorious and durable Mansion! We would never be so curious of the House and so careless of the
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Inhabitant, whose beauty is capable of great improvement and will endure for ever without diminution or decay!

Thus Ignorance and a narrow Education lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation and Custom rear it up. Custom, that merciless torrent that carries all before it, and which indeed can be stem'd by none but such as have a great deal of Prudence and a rooted Vertue. For 'tis but Decorous that she who is not capable of giving better Rules, shou'd follow those she sees before her, least she only change the instance and retain the absurdity. 'Tou'd puzzle a considerate Person to account for all that Sin and Folly that is in the World (which certainly has nothing in it self to recommend it) did not Custom help to solve the difficulty. For Vertue without question has on all accounts the preeminence of Vice, 'tis abundantly more pleasant in the Act, as well as more advantageous in the Consequences, as any one who will but rightly use her reason, in a serious reflection on her self and the nature of things, may easily perceive. 'Tis Custom therefore, that Tyrant Custom, which is the grand motive to all those irrational choices which we daily see made in the World, so very contrary to our present interest and pleasure, as well as to our Future. We think it an unpardonable mistake not to do as our neighbours do, and part with our Peace and Pleasure as well as our Innocence and Vertue, meerly in compliance with an unreasonable Fashion. And having inur'd ourselves to Folly, we know not how to quit it; we go on in Vice, not because we find satisfaction in it, but because we are unacquainted with the Joys of Vertue. . . .

. . . She is it may be, taught the Principles and Duties of Religion, but not Acquainted with the Reasons and Grounds of them; being told 'tis enough for her to believe, to examine why, and where fore, belongs not to her. And therefore, though her Piety may be tall and spreading, yet because it wants foundation and Root, the first rude Temptation overthrows and blasts it, or perhaps the short liv'd Gourd decays and withers of its own accord. But why should she be blamed for setting no great value on her Soul, whose noblest Faculty her Understanding is render'd useless to her? Or censur'd for relinquishing a course of Life, whose Prerogatives she was never acquainted with, and tho' highly reasonable in itself, was put upon the embracing it with as little reason as she now forsakes it? For if her Religion it self be taken up as the Mode of the Country, 'tis no strange thing that she lays it down again in conformity to the Fashion. Whereas she whose Reason is suffer'd to display it self, to inquire into the grounds and Motives of Religion, to make a disquisition of its Graces and search out its hidden Beauties; who is a Christian out of Choice, not in conformity to those among whom she lives; and cleaves to Piety, because 'tis her Wisdom, her Interest, her Joy, not because she has been accustom'd to it; she who is not only eminently and unmoveably good, but able to give a Reason why she is so, is too firm and stable to be mov'd by the pitiful Allurements of sin, too wise and too well bottom'd to be undermining'd and supplanted by the strongest Efforts of Temptation. Doubtless a truly Christian Life requires a clear Understanding as well as regular Affections, that both together may move the Will to a direct choice of Good and a steadfast adherence to it. For tho' the heart may be honest, it is but by chance that the Will is right if the Understanding be ignorant and Cloudy. . . .

And now having discovered the Disease and its cause, 'tis proper to apply a Remedy; single Medicines are too weak to cure such complicated Distempers, they require a full Dispensatory; and what would a good Woman refuse to do, could she hope by that to advantage the greatest part of the World, and to improve her Sex in Knowledge and true Religion? . . . I have therefore no more to do but to make the Proposal, to prove that it will answer these great and good Ends, and then 'twill be easy to obviate the Objections that Persons of more Wit than Vertue may happen to raise against it.

Now as to the Proposal, it is to erect a Monastery, or if you will (to avoid giving offence to the scrupulous and injudicious, by names which tho' innocent in themselves, have been abuse'd by superstitious Practic'es,) we will call it a Religious Retirement, and such as shall have a double aspect, being not only a Retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage, but likewise, an Institution and previous discipline, to fit us to do the greatest good in it; such an Institution as this (if I do not mightily deceive my self,) would be the most probable method to amend the present, and improve the future Age. . . .

You are therefore Ladies, invited into a place, where you shall suffer no other confinement, but to be kept out of the road of sin: You shall not be deprived of your Grandeur but only exchange the vain Pomp's and Pageantry of the world, empty Titles and Forms of State, for the true and solid Greatness of being able to despise them. You will only quit the Chat of insignificant people for an ingenious Conversation; the froth of flashy Wit for real Wisdom; idle tales for instructive discourses . . . Happy Retreat! which will be the introducing you into such a Paradise as your Mother Eve forfeited, where you shall feast on Pleasures, that do not like those of the World, disappoint your expectations, pall your Appetites, and by the which

when obtain'd are as empty as the former; but such as will make you truly happy now, and prepare you to be perfectly so hereafter. . . .

But because we were not made for our selves, nor can by any means so effectually glorify GOD, and do good to our own Souls, as by doing Offices of Charity and Benevolence to others; and to the intent that every Virtue, and the highest degrees of every Virtue may be exercis'd and promoted the most that may be; your Retreat shall be so manag'd as not to exclude the good works of an Active, from the pleasure and serenity of a Contemplative Life, but by a due mixture of both retain all the advantages and avoid the inconveniences that attend either. It shall not so cut you off from the world as to hinder you from bettering and improving it, but rather qualify you to do it the greatest Good, and be a Seminary to stock the Kingdom with pious and prudent Ladies, whose good Example it is to be hop'd, will so influence the rest of their Sex, that Women may no longer pass for those little useless and impertinent Animals, which the ill conduct of too many has caus'd 'em to be mistaken for.

. . . Therefore, one great end of this Institution shall be, to expel that cloud of Ignorance which Custom has involv'd us in, to furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful Knowledge, that the souls of Women may no longer be the only unadorn'd and neglected things. . . . Such a course of Study will neither be too troublesome nor out of the reach of a Female Virtuoso; for it is not intended that she shou'd spend her hours in learning words but things, and therefore no more Languages than are necessary to acquaint her with useful Authors. Nor need she trouble herself in turning over a great number of Books, but take care to understand and digest a few well chosen and good ones. Let her but obtain right Ideas, and be truly acquainted with the nature of those Objects that present themselves to her mind, and then no matter whether or no she be able to tell what fanciful people have said about them: And thoroughly to understand Christianity as profess'd by the Church of England, will be sufficient to confirm her in the truth, tho' she have not a Catalogue of those particular errors which oppose it. . . .

For since GOD has given Women and Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us the faculty of Thinking, why shou'd we not (at least in gratitude to him) employ our Thoughts on himself their noblest Object, and not unworthily bestow them on Trifles and Gaities and secular Affairs? Being the Soul was created for the contemplation of Truth as well as for the fruition of Good, is it not as cruel and unjust to exclude Women from the knowledge of the one as from the enjoyment of the other? Especially since the Will is blind, and cannot chuse but by the direction of the Understanding; or to speak more properly, since the Soul always Wills according as she Understands, so that if she Understands amiss, she Wills amiss. . . .

Let such therefore as deny us the improvement of our Intellectuals, either take up his Paradox, who said that Women have no Souls, (which at this time a day, when they are allow'd to Brutes, wou'd be as unphilosophical as it is unmannerly,) or else let them permit us to cultivate and improve them. There is a sort of Learning indeed which is worse than the greatest Ignorance: A Woman may study Plays and Romances all her days, and be a great deal more knowing but never a jot wiser. Such a knowledge as this serves only to instruct and put her forward in the practice of the greatest Follies, yet how can they justly blame her who forbid, or at least won't afford opportunity of better? A rational mind will be employ'd, it will never be satisfy'd in doing nothing, and if you neglect to furnish it with good materials, 'tis like to take up with such as come to hand.

We pretend not that Women shou'd teach in the Church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow'd them; permit us only to understand our own duty, and not be forc'd to take it upon trust from others; to be at least so far learned, as to be able to form in our minds a true Idea of Christianity, it being so very necessary to fence us against the danger of these late and perilous days, in which Deceivers a part of whose Character is to lead captive silly Women, need not creep into Houses since they have Authority to proclaim their Errors on the House top. And let us also acquire a true Practical knowledge, such as will convince us of the absolute necessity of Holy Living as well as of Right Believing, and that no Heresy is more dangerous than that of an ungodly and wicked Life. And since the French Tongue is understood by most Ladies, methinks they may much better improve it by the study of Philosophy (as I hear the French Ladies do) Des Cartes, Malebranche and others, than by reading idle Novels and Romances. 'Tis strange that we shou'd be so forward to imitate their Fashions and Fopperies, and have no regard to what really deserves our Imitation. And why shall it not be thought as genteel to understand French Philosophy, as to be account'd in a French mode? Let therefore the famous Madam D'acier, Scudery, &c, and our own incomparable Oriunda, excite the Emulation of the English Ladies.

The Ladies, I'm sure, have no reason to dislike this Proposal, but I know not how the Men will resent it to have their enclosure broke down, and Women invited
to taste of that Tree of knowledge they have so long unjustly Monopoliz'd. But they must excuse me, if I be as partial to my own Sex as they are to theirs, and think Women as capable of Learning as Men are, and that it becomes them as well. . . .

To enter into the detail of the particulars concerning the Government of the Religious, their Offices of Devotion, Employments, Work &c. is not now necessary. Suffice it at present to signify, that they will be more than ordinarily careful to redeem their Time. . . . For a stated portion of it being daily paid to GOD in Prayers and Praises, the rest shall be employ'd in innocent, charitable, and useful Business; either in study in learning themselves or instructing others, for it is design'd that part of their Employment be the Education of those of their own Sex; or else in spiritual and corporal Works of Mercy, relieving the Poor, healing the Sick, mingling Charity to the Soul with that they express to the Body, instructing the Ignorant, counselling the Doubtful, comforting the Afflicted, and correcting those that err and do amiss. . . .

And as this institution will strictly enjoy all pious and profitable Employments, so does it not only permit but recommend harmless and ingenious Diversions, Musick particularly, and such as may refresh the Body without enervating the Mind. They do a disservice to Religion which make it an enemy to innocent Nature, and injure the almighty when they represent him as imposing burdens that are not to be born. . . .

As to Lodging, Habit, and Diet, they may be quickly resolv'd on by the Ladies who shall subscribe; who I doubt not will make choice of what is most plain and decent, what Nature not Luxury requires. . . . She who considers to how much better account that Money will turn which is bestow'd on the Poor, than that which is laid out in unnecessary Expenditures of her self, needs no Admonitions against superfluities. . . .

In a word, this happy Society will be but one Body, whose Soul is love--animating and instructing us; and perpetually breathing forth it self in flames of holy desires after GOD and acts of Benevolence to each other. . . .

In the last place, by reason of this loss of time and the continual hurry we are in, we can find no opportunities for thoughtfulness and recollection; we are so busied with what passes abroad, that we have no leisure to look at home, nor to rectifie the disorders there. And such an unthinking mechanical way of living, when like Machines we are condemn'd every day to repeat the impertinencies of the day before, shortens our Views, contracts our Minds, exposes to a thousand practical Errors, and renders Improvement impossible, because it will not permit us to consider and recollect, which is the only means to attain it. So much for the inconveniences of living in the World; if we enquire concerning Retirement, we shall find it does not only remove all these, but brings considerable advantages of its own.

For first, it helps us to mate Custom and delivers us from its Tyranny, which is the most considerable thing we have to do, it being nothing else but the habituating our selves to Folly that can reconcile us to it. . . .

And by that Learning which will be here afforded, and that leisure we have to enquire after it, and to know and reflect on our own minds, we shall rescue our selves out of that woeful incognitancy we have slept into, awoken our sleeping Powers and make use of that reason which GOD has given us. . . .

Farther yet, besides that holy emulation which a continual view of the brightest and most exemplary Lives will excite in us, we shall have opportunity of contracting the purest and noblest Friendship; a Blessing, the purchase of which were richly worth all the World besides! For she who possesses a worthy Person, has certainly obtain'd the richest Treasure. A Blessing that Monarchs may envy, and she who enjoys is happier than she who fills a Throne! A Blessing, which next to the love of GOD, is the choicest Jewel in our Celestial Diadem; which, were it duly practis'd would both fit us for Heav'n and bring it down into our hearts whilst we tarry here. For Friendship is a Vertue which comprehends all the rest; none being fit for this, who is not ador'd with every other Vertue. Probably one considerable cause of the degeneracy of the present Age, is the little true Friendship that is to be found in it; or perhaps you will rather say that this is the effect of our corruption. The cause and the effect are indeed reciprocal; for were the World better there would be more Friendship, and were there more Friendship we shou'd have a better World. But because Iniquity abounds, therefore the love of many is not only waxen cold, but quite benumb'd and perish'd. But if we have such narrow hearts, be so full of mistaken Self-love, so unreasonably fond of our selves, that we cannot spare a hearty Goodwill to one or two choice Persons, how can it ever be thought, that we shou'd well acquaint our selves of that Charity which is due to all Mankind? For Friendship is nothing else but Charity contracted; it is (in the words of an admired Author) a kind of revenging our selves on the narrowness of our Faculties, by exemplifying that extraordinary Charity on one or two, which we are willing, but not able to exercise towards all. . . .

[1] [I]t were well if we could look into the very Soul of the beloved Person, to discover what resemblance it bears to our own, and in this Society we shall have the best opportunities of doing so. There are no Interests here to serve, no contrivances for another to be a stale to; the Souls of all the Religious will be open and free,
and those particular Friendships must be no prejudice to the general Amity. But yet, as in Heav’n that region of perfect Love, the happy Souls (as some are of opinion) now and then step aside from more general Conversations, to entertain themselves with a peculiar Friend; so, in this little emblem of that blessed place, what shou’d hinder, but that two Persons of a sympathizing disposition, the make and frame of whose Souls bears an exact conformity to each other, and therefore one wou’d think were purposely design’d by Heaven to unite and mix; what shou’d hinder them from entering into an holy combination to watch over each other for Good, to advise, encourage and direct, and to observe the minutest fault in order to its amendment. The true effect of love being to endeavour the bettering the beloved Person. And therefore nothing is more likely to improve us in Vertue, and advance us to the very highest pitch of Goodness than unforeigned Friendship, which is the most beneficial, as well as the most pleasant thing in the world. . . .

If any object against a Learned Education, that it will make Women vain and assuming, and instead of correcting encrease their Pride: I grant that a smattering in Learning may, for it has this effect on the Men, none so Dogmatical and so forward to shew their Parts as your little Pretenders to Science. But I wou’d not have the Ladies content themselves with the shew, my desire is, that they shou’d not rest till they obtain the Substance. And then, she who is most knowing will be forward to own with the wise Socrates that she knows nothing: nothing that is matter of Pride and Ostentation; nothing but what is attended with so much ignorance and imperfection, that it cannot reasonably elate and puff her up. The more she knows, she will be the less subject to talkativeness and its sister Vices, because she discerns, that the most difficult piece of Learning is to know when to use and when to hold ones Tongue, and never to speak but to the purpose.

But the men if they rightly understand their own interest, have no reason to oppose the ingenious Education of the Women, since ’twou’d go a great way towards reclaiming the men. Great is the influence we have over them in their Childhood, in which time if a Mother be discreet and knowing as well as devout, she has many opportunities of giving such a Form and Season to the tender Mind of the Child, as will shew its good effects thro’ all the stages of his Life. But tho’ you should not allow her capable of doing good, ’tis certain she may do hurt; If she do not make the Child, she has the power to marr him, by suffering her fondness to get the better of discreet affection. But besides this, a good and prudent wife wou’d wonderfully work on an ill man; he must be a Brute indeed, who cou’d hold out against all those innocent Arts, those gentle persuasives and obliging methods she wou’d use to reclaim him. Piety is often offensive when it is accompanied with indiscretion; but she who is as Wise as Good, possesses such Charms as can hardly fail of prevailing. Doubtless her Husband is a much happier Man and more likely to abandon all his ill Courses than he who has none to come home to, and an ignorant, froward and fantastick Creature. An ingenious Conversation will make his life comfortable, and he who can be so well entertain’d at home, needs not run into Temptations in search of diversions abroad. The only danger is that the Wife be more knowing than the Husband; but if she be ’tis his own fault, since he wants no opportunities of improvement; unless he be a natural Blockhead, and then such an one will need a wise Woman to govern him, whose prudence will conceal it from publick Observation, and at once both cover and supply his defects. Give me leave therefore to hope, that no Gentleman who has honourable designs, will hencenforward decay Knowledge and Ingenuity in her he would pretend to Honour; If he does, it may serve for a Test to distinguish the feigned and unworthy from the real Lover.

Now who that has a spark of Piety will go about to oppose so Religious a design? What generous Spirit that has a due regard to the good of Mankind, will not be forward to advance and perfect it? Who will think 500 pounds too much to lay out for the purchase of so much Wisdom and Happiness? Certainly we shou’d not think them too dearly paid for by a much greater Sum did not our pitiful and sordid Spirits set a much higher value on Money than it deserves. But granting so much of that dear Idol were given away, a person thus bred, will easily make it up by her Frugality & other Vertues; if she bring less, she will not waste so much as others do in superfluous and vain Expences. Nor can I think of any expedient so useful as this to Persons of Quality who are over-stock’d with Children, for thus they may honourably dispose of them without impairing their Estates. Five or six hundred pounds may be easily spare’d with a Daughter, when so many thousands would go deep; and yet as the world goes be a very inconsiderable Fortune for Ladies of their Birth, neither maintain them in that Port which Custom makes almost necessary, nor procure them an equal Match, those of their own Rank (contrary to the generous custom of the Germans) chusing rather to fill their Coffers than to preserve the purity of their Blood, and therefore think a wealthy Bag the best Gentility, preferring a wealthy Upstart before the best Descended and best Qualified Lady; their own Extravagancies perhaps having made it necessary, that they may keep up an empty shadow of Greatness, which is all that remains to shew what their Ancestors have been. . . .
Mary Astell

Part II (1697): Wherein a Method is offer'd for the Improvement of their Minds

Chap. III. Concerning the Improvement of the Understanding. I. Of the Capacity of the Humane Mind in General. II. Of Particular Capacities. . . . IV. A Natural Logic. . . .

The perfection of the Understanding consisting in the Clearness and Largeness of its view, it improves proportionably as its Ideas become Clearer and more Extensive. But this is not so to be understood as if all sorts of Notices contributed to our Improvement, there are some things which make us no wiser when we know 'em, others which 'tis best to be ignorant of. But that Understanding seems to me the most exalted, which has the Clearest and most Extensive view of such Truths as are suitable to its Capacity, and Necessary or Convenient to be Known in this Present State. For being that we are but Creatures, our Understanding in its greatest Perfection has only a limited excellency. It has indeed a vast extent, and it were not amiss if we carried a little in the Contemplation of its Powers and Capacities, provided that the Prospect did not make us giddy, that we remember from whose we have receiv'd them, and balance those lofty Thoughts which a view of our Intellectuals may occasion, with the depressing ones which the irregularity of our Mortals will suggest, and that we learn from this inspection, how indecorous it is to busy this bright side of us in mean things, seeing it is capable of such noble ones.

Human Nature is indeed a wonderful Composure admirable in its outward structure, but much more excellent in the Beauties of its Inward, and she who considers in whose Image her Soul was Created, and whose Blood was shed to Redeem it, cannot prize it too much, nor forget to pay it her utmost regard. There's nothing in this Material World to be compar'd to't, all the gay things we dote on, and for which we many times expose our Souls to ruin, are of no consideration in respect of it. 'They are not the good of the Soul, it's happiness depends not on 'em, but they often deceive and withdraw it from its true Good. It was made for the Contemplation and Enjoyment of its GOD, and all Souls are capable of this tho in a different degree and by measures somewhat different, as we hope will appear from that which follows.

I. Truth in general is the Object of the Understanding, but all Truths are not equally Evident, because of the Limitation of the Humane Mind, which tho' it can gradually take in many Truths, yet cannot any more than our sight attend to many things at once: And likewise, because GOD has not thought fit to communicate such Ideas to us as are necessary to the disquisi-

tion of some particular Truths. For knowing nothing without us but by the Idea we have of it, and Judging only according to the Relation we find between two or more Ideas, when we cannot discover the Truth we search after by Intuition or the immediate comparison of two Ideas, 'tis necessary that we shou'd have a third by which to compare them. But if this middle Idea be wanting, though we have sufficient Evidence of those two which we wou'd compare, because we have a Clear and Distinct Conception of them, yet we are Ignorant of those Truths which wou'd arise from their Comparison, because we want a third by which to compare them. . . .

Tho the Human Intellect has a large extent, yet being limited as we have already said, this Limitation is the Cause of those different Modes of Thinking, which for distinction sake we call Faith, Science and Opinion. For in this present and imperfect State in which we know not any thing by Intuition, or immediate View, except a few first Principles which we call Self-evident, the most of our Knowledge is acquir'd by Reasoning and Deduction: And these three Modes of Understanding, Faith, Science and Opinion are no otherwise distinguish'd than by the different degrees of Clearness and Evidence in the Premises from whence the Conclusion is drawn. . . .

In this enumeration of the several ways of Knowing, I have not reckon'd the Senses, in regard that we're more properly said to be Conscious of than to Know such things as we perceive by Sensation. And also because that Light which we suppose to be let into our Ideas by our Senses is indeed very dim and fallacious, and not to be relied on till it has past the Test of Reason; neither do I think there's any Mode of Knowledge which mayn't be reduc'd to those already mentioned.

Now tho there's a great difference between Opinion and Science, true Science being immutable but Opinion variable and uncertain, yet there is not such a difference between Faith and Science as is usually suppos'd. The difference consists not in the Certainty but in the way of Proof; the Objects of Faith are as Rationally and as Firmly Prov'd as the Objects of Science, tho' by another way. As Science Demonstrates things that are Seen, so Faith is the Evidence of such as are Not Seen. And he who rejects the Evidence of Faith in such things as belong to its Cognizance, is as unreasonable as he who denies Propositions in Geometry that are prov'd with Mathematical exactness.

There's nothing true which is not in it self demon-

strable, or which we should not pronounce to be true had we a Clear and Intuitive View of it. But as was said above we see very few things by Intuition, neither are we furnish'd with Mediums to make the Process our
selves in Demonstrating all Truths, and therefore there are some Truths which we must either be totally ignorant of, or else receive them on the Testimony of another Person, to whose Understanding they are clear and manifest tho not to ours. And if this Person be one who can neither be Deceive'd nor Deceive, we're as certain of those Conclusions which we prove by his Authority, as we're of those we demonstrate by our own Reason: nay more Certain, by how much his Reason is more Comprehensive and Infallible than our own.

Science is following the Process our Selves upon Clear and Evident principles; Faith is a Dependance on the Credit of another, in such matters as are out of our View. And when we have very good Reason to submit to the Testimony of the Person we Believe, Faith is as Firm, and those Truths it discovers to us as truly Intelligible, and as strongly Prov'd in their kind as Science.

In a word, as every Sense so every Capacity of the Understanding has its proper Object. The Objects of Science are things within our View, of which we may have Clear and Distinct Ideas, and nothing shou'd be determin'd here without Clearness and Evidence. To be able to repeat any Persons Dogma without forming a Distinct Idea of it our selves, is not to Know but to Remember; and to have a Confused Indeterminate Idea is to Conjuncture not to Understand.

The Objects of Faith are as Certain and as truly, Intelligible in themselves as those of Science, as has been said already, only we become persuaded of the Truth of them by another Method, we do not See them so clearly and distinctly as to be unable to disbelieve them. Faith has a mixture of the Will that it may be rewardable, for who will thank us for giving our Assent where it was impossible to withhold it? Faith then may be said to be a sort of Knowledge capable of Reward, and Men are Infidels not for want of Conviction, but thro an Unwillingness to Believe. . . .

II. It is therefore very fit that after we have consider'd the Capacity of the Understanding in general, we shou'd descend to the view of our own particular, observing the bent and turn of our own Minds, which way our Genius lies and to what it is most inclin'd. I see no reason why there may not be as great a variety in Minds as there is in Faces, that the Soul as well as the Body may not have something in it to distinguish it, not only from all other Intelligent Natures but even from those of its own kind. There are different proportions in Faces which recommend them to some Eyes sooner than to others, and tho All Truth is amiable to a Reasonable Mind, and proper to employ it, yet why may there not be some particular Truths, more agreeable to each individual Understanding than others are? Variety gives Beauty to the Material World and why not to the Intellectual? We can discern the different Abilities which the Wise Author of all things has endow'd us with, the different Circumstances in which he has plac'd us in reference to this World and the Concerns of an Animal Life, that so we may be mutually useful, and that since each single Person is too limited and confin'd to attend to many, much less to all things, we may receive from each other a reciprocal advantage, and why may we not think he has done the like in respect of Truth? That since it is too much for one, our united Strength shou'd be employ'd in the search of her. Especially since the divine Being who contains in himself all Reality and Truth is Infinite in Perfection, and therefore shou'd be Infinitely Ador'd and Lov'd; and If Creatures are by their being so uncapable of rendering to their Incomprehensible Creator an Adoration and Love that's worthy of him, it is but decorous that they shou'd however do as much as they can. All that variety of sublime Truths of Beautiful and Wondrous Objects which surround us, are nothing else but a various display of his unbounded Excellencies, and why shou'd any of 'em pass unobserv'd? Why shou'd not every individual Understanding be in a more especial manner fitted for and employ'd in the disquisition of some particular Truth and Beauty? 'Tis true after all our researches we can no more sufficiently Know GOD than we can worthily Love him, and are as much unable to find out all his Works as we are his Nature, yet this shou'd only prompt us to exert All our Powers and to do our best, since even that were too little cou'd we possibly do more. We can never offer to him so much Praise as he deserves, and therefore it is but fit that he shou'd have All that Mankind can possibly render him. He is indeed immutable in his own Nature, but those discoveries we daily make of his Operations will always afford us somewhat New and Surprizing, for this All-glorious Sun the Author of Life and Light is as inexhaustible a Source of Truth as he is of Joy and Happiness. . . .

IV. As to the Method of Thinking, if it be proper for me to say any thing of that, after those better Pens which have treated of it already, it falls in with the Subject I'me now come to, which is, that Natural Logic I wou'd propose. I call it natural because I shall not send you further than your Own Minds to learn it, you may if you please take in the assistance of some well chosen Book, but a good Natural Reason after all, is the best Director, without this you will scarce Argue well, tho you had the Choicest Books and Tutors to Instruct you, but with it you may, tho' you happen to be destitute of the other. For as a very Judicious Writer on this Subject (to whose Ingenious Remarks and Rules I am much obliged) well observes, "These Operations (of the Mind) proceed meerly from Nature, and that
sometimes more perfectly from those who are altogether ignorant of Logic, than from others who have learned it." (Art of Thinking)

That which we propose in all our Meditations and Reasonings is, either to deduce some Truth we are in search of, from such Principles as we're already acquainted with; or else, to dispose our Thoughts and Reasonings in such a manner, as to be able to Convince others of those Truths which we our selves are Convinc'd of. Other Designs indeed Men may have, such as the Maintenance of their Own Opinions, Actions and Parties without regard to the Truth and Justice of 'em, or the Seduction of their unwise Neighbours, but these are Mean and Base ones, beneath a Man, much more a Christian, who is or ought to be endow'd with greater Integrity and Ingenuity.

Now Reasoning being nothing else but a Comparison of Ideas, and a deducing of Conclusions from Clear and Evident Principles, it is in the first place requisite that our Ideas be Clear and Just, and our Principles True, else all our Discourse will be Nonsense and Absurdity, Falsehood and Error. And that our Idea may be Right, we have no more to do but to look attentively into our Minds, having as we said above, laid aside all Prejudices and whatever may give a false tincture to our Light, there we shall find a Clear and Lively Representation of what we seek for, unsophisticated with the Dross of false Definitions and unintelligible Expressions. But we must not imagine that a transient view will serve the turn, or that our Eye will be Enlightened if it be not fix'd. For tho' Truth be exceeding bright, yet since our Prejudices and Passions have darkned our Eye-sight, it requires no little Pains and Application of Mind to find her out, the neglect of which Application is the Reason that we have so little Truth, and that the little we have is almost lost in the Rubbish of Error which is mingled with it. And since Truth is so near at hand, since we are not oblig'd to tumble over many Authors, to hunt after every celebrated Genius, but may have it for enquiring after in our own Breasts, are we not inexplicable if we do not obtain it? Are we not unworthy of Compassion if we suffer our Understandings to be overrun with Error? Indeed it seems to me most Reasonable and most agreeable to the Wisdom and Equity of the Divine Operations, that every one should have a Teacher in their own Bosoms, who will if they seriously apply themselves to him, immediately Enlighten them so far as that is necessary, and direct them to such Means as are sufficient for their Instruction both in Humane and Divine Truths; for as to the latter, Reason if it be Right and Solid, will not pretend to be our sole Instructor, but will send us to Divine Revelation when it may be had. . . .

The First and Principal thing therefore to be observed in all the Operations of the Mind is, That we determine nothing about those things of which we have not a Clear Idea, and as Distinct as the Nature of the Subject will permit, for we cannot properly be said to Know any thing which does not Clearly and Evidently appear to us. Whatever we see Distinctly we likewise see Clearly, Distinction always including Clearness, tho this does not necessarily include that, there being many Objects Clear to the view of the Mind, which yet can't be said to be Distinct.

That (to use the Words of a Celebrated Author) may be said to be "Clear which is Present and Manifest to an attentive Mind; so as we say we see Objects Clearly, when being present to our Eyes they sufficiently Act on 'em, and our Eyes are disposed to regard 'em. And that Distinct, which is so Clear, Particular, and Different from all other things, that it contains not any thing in it self which appears not manifestly to him who considers it as ought." (Les Principe. De la Philos. De M. Des Cartes, Part I, para 45.) Thus we may have a Clear, but not a Distinct and Perfect Idea of God and of our own Souls; their Existence and some of their Properties and Attributes may be Certainly and Indubitably Known, but we can't Know the Nature of our Souls Distinctly, for Reasons too long to be mentioned here, and less that of GOD, because he is Infinite. Now where our Knowledge is Distinct, we may boldly deny of a subject, all that which after a careful Examination we find not in it: But where our Knowledge is only Clear, and not Distinct, tho' we may safely Affirm what we see, yet we can't without a hardly Presumption Deny of it what we see not. And were it not very common to find People both Talking and Writing of things of which they have no Notion, no Clear Idea; nay and determining Dogmatically concerning the intire Nature of those of which they cannot possibly have an Adequate and distinct one, it might seem Impertinent to desire them to speak no farther than they Apprehend. They will tell you Peremptorily of Contradictions and Absurdities in such matters as they themselves must allow they cannot Comprehend, tho others as Sharp sighted as themselves can see no such thing as they complain of.

As Judgments are form'd by the Comparing of Ideas, so Reasoning or Discourse arises from the Comparison or Combination of several Judgments. Nature teaches us when we can't find out what Relation one Idea bears to another by a Simple view or bare Comparison, to seek for a Common Measure or third Idea, which relating to the other two, we may by Comparing it with each of 'em, discern wherein they agree or differ. Our Invention discovers it self in proposing readily apt Ideas for this Middle Term, our Judgment

in making Choice of such as are Clearest and most to
our purpose, and the excellency of our Reasoning con-
sists in our Skill and Dexterity in Applying them...
Mary Astell

Though much may be said against this, or that Match; though the ridiculousness of some, the Wick- edness of others, and the Imprudence of too many, may provoke our Wonder, or Scorn, our Indignation or Pity; yet Marriage in general is too sacred to be treated with Disrespect, too venerable to be the Subject of Raillery and Buffoonery. None but the Impious will pretend to refine on a Divine Institution, or suppose there is a better Way for Society and Posterity. Whoever scoffs at this, and by odious Representation would possess the married Pair with a frightful Idea of each other, as if a Wife is nothing better than a Domestick Devil, an Evil he must tolerate for his own Convenience; and an Husband must of necessity be a Tyrant or a Dupe; has ill Designs on both, and is himself a dangerous Enemy to the Publick, as well as to private Families. . . .

Is it the being tied to One that offends us? Why this ought rather to recommend it to us, and would really do so, were we guided by Reason, and not by Humour or brutish Passion. He who does not make Friendship the chief Inducement to his Choice, and prefer it before any other Consideration, does not deserve a good Wife, and therefore should not complain if he goes without one. Now we can never grow weary of our Friends; the longer we have had them the more they are endear'd to us; and if we have One well assur'd, we need seek no farther, but are sufficiently happy in her. The Love of Variety in this and other Cases, shews only the ill Temper of our own Mind, for instead of being content with a competent Share of Good, thankfully and cheerfully enjoying what is afforded us, and patiently bearing with the Inconveniencies that attend it, we would set up our Rest here, and expect Felicity where it is not to be found.

The Christian Institution of Marriage provides the best that may be for Domestick Quiet and Content, and for the Education of Children; so that if we were not under the Tie of Religion, even the Good of Society and civil Duty, would oblige us to what Christianity requires: And since the very best of us are but poor frail Creatures, full of Ignorance and Infirmity, so that in Justice we ought to tolerate each other, and exercise that Patience towards our Companions to Day, which we shall give them occasion to shew towards us To-morrow; the more we are accus'tom'd to any one's Conversation, the better shall we understand their Humour, be more able to comply with their Weakness, and less offended at it. . . .

But if Marriage be such a blessed State, how comes it, may you say, that there are so few happy Marriages? Now in answer to this, it is not to be wonder'd that so few succeed, we should rather be surpriz'd to find so many do, considering how imprudently Men engage, the Motives they act by, and the very strange Conduct they observe throughout.

For pray, what do Men propose to themselves in Marriage? What Qualifications do they look after in a Spouse? What will she bring? is the first Enquiry: How many Acres? Or how much ready Coin? Not that this is altogether an unnecessary Question, for Marriage without a Competency, that is, not only a bare Subsistence, but even a handsome and plentiful Provision, according to the Quality and Circumstances of the Parties, is no very comfortable Condition. They who marry for Love, as they call it, find Time enough to repent their rash Folly, and are not long in being convince'd, that whatever fine Speeches might be made in the heat of Passion, there could be no real Kindness between those who can agree to make each other miserable. But tho' an Estate is to be consider'd, so it should not be the Main, much less the only Consideration, for Happiness does not depend on Wealth; That may be wanting, and too often is, where This abounds. He who Marries himself to a Fortune only, must expect no other Satisfaction than that can bring him; but let not him say that Marriage, but that his own covetous or prodigal Temper, has made him unhappy. What Joy has that Man in all his Plenty, who must either run from home to possess it, contrary to all the Rules of Justice, to the Laws of God and Man, nay, even in Opposition to good Nature, and good Breeding too . . .; or else be forc'd to share it with a Woman whose Person or Temper is disagreeable . . .?

Few Men have so much Goodness as to bring themselves to a Liking of what they loath'd, meekly because it is their duty to like; on the contrary, when they Marry with an Indifferency, to please their Friends or increase their Fortune, the Indifferency proceeds to an Aversion, and perhaps even the Kindness and Complaisance of the poor abus'd Wife, shall only serve to increase it. What follows then? There is no Content at home, so it is sought elsewhere, and the Fortune so unjustly got, is as carelessly squander'd; the Man takes a Loose, what should hinder him? He has all in his Hands, and Custom has almost taken off that small Restraint Reputation us'd to lay. The Wife finds too late what was the Idol the Man adored, which her Vanity, perhaps, or it may be the Commands and Importunities of Relations, would not let her see before; and now he has got That into his Possession, she must make court to him for a little sorry Alimony out of her own Estate. If Discretion and Piety prevail upon her Passions, she sits down quietly contented with her Lot, seeks no Consolation in the Multitude of Adorers, since he whom only she desir'd to please because it was her Duty to do so, will take no Delight in her Wit or Beauty: She follows no Diversion to allay her Grief,
uses no Cordials to support her Spirit, that may sully her Vertue or bring a Cloud upon her Reputation; she makes no Appeals to the mis-judging Croud, hardly mentions her Misfortunes to her most intimate Acquaintance, nor lays a Load upon her Husband to ease her self; but would, if it were possible, conceal his Crimes, though her Prudence and Vertue give him a thousand Reproaches without her Intention or Knowledge; and retiring from the World, she seeks a more solid Comfort than it can give her, taking Care to do nothing that Censoriousness, or even Malice it self can misconstrue to her Prejudice. Now she puts on all her Reserves, and thinks even innocent Liberties scarce allowable in her disconsolate State; she has other Business to mind: Nor does she in her Retirements reflect so much upon the Hand that administers this bitter Cup, as consider what is the best Use she can make of it. And thus indeed, Marriage, however unfortunate in other respects, becomes a very great Blessing to her. . . .

But it must not be suppos'd that Womens Wit approaches those Heights which Men arrive at, or that they indulge those Liberties the other take. Decency lays greater Restraints on them, their Timoroussness does them this one, and perhaps this only Piece of Service, it keeps them from breaking through these Restraints, and following their Masters and Guides in many of their daring and masculine Crimes. As the World goes, your Witty Men are usually distinguish'd by the Liberty they take with Religion, good Manners, or their Neighbour's Reputation: But, God be thank'd, it is not yet so bad, as that Women should form Cabals to propagate Atheism and Irreligion ([Author's note:] This was wrote in the Beginning of the present Century.) A Man then cannot hope to find a Woman whose Wit is of a Size with his, but when he doats on Wit, it is to be imagin'd he makes Choice of that which comes the nearest to his own.

In a word, when we have reckon'd up how many look no further than the making of their Fortune, as they call it; who don't so much propose to themselves any Satisfaction in the Woman to whom they Plied their Faith, seeking only to be Masters of her Estate, that so they may have Money enough to indulge all their irregular Appetites; who think they are as good as can be expected, if they are but, according to the fashionable Term, Civil Husbands; when we have taken the Number of your giddy Lovers, who are not more violent in their Passion than they are certain to repent of it; when to these you have added such as marry without any Thought at all, further than it is the Custom of the World, what others have done before them, that the Family must be kept up, the antient Race preserve'd, and therefore their kind Parents and Guardians choose as they think convenient, without ever consulting the Young one's Inclinations, who must be satisfied or pretend so at least, upon Pain of their Displeasure, and that heavy Consequence of it, Forfeiture of their Estate: These set aside, I fear there will be but a small Remainder to Marry out of better Considerations; and even amongst the Few that do, not one in a Hundred takes Care to deserve his Choice.

But do the Women never choose amiss? Are the Men only in fault? That is not pretended; for he who will be just, must be forc'd to acknowledge, that neither Sex are always in the right. A Woman indeed can't properly be said to Choose; all that is allow'd her, is to Refuse or Accept what is offer'd. And when we have made such reasonable Allowances as are due to the Sex, perhaps they may not appear so much in Fault as one would at first imagine, and a generous Spirit will find more Occasion to Pity, than to Reprove . . . nor is there a Man of Honour amongst the whole Tribe, that would not venture his Life, nay, and his Salvation too, in their Defence, if any but himself attempts to injure them. But I must ask Pardon if I can't come up to these Heights, nor flatter them with the having no Faults, which is only a malicious Way of continuing and increasing their Mistakes.

Women, it's true, ought to be treated with Civility; for since a little Ceremony and out-side Respect is all their Guard, all the Privilege that's allow'd them, it were barbarous to deprive them of it; and because I would treat them civilly, I would not express my Civility at the usual rate. I would not, under Pretence of Honouring and paying a mighty Deference to the Ladies, call them Fools, or what's worse, to their Faces; For what are all the fine Speeches and Submissions that are made, but an abusing them in a well-bred Way? She must be a Fool with a Witness, who can believe a Man, Proud and Vain as he is, will lay his boasted Authority, the Dignity and Prerogative of his Sex, one Moment at her Feet, but in Prospect of taking it up again to more Advantage; he may call himself her Slave a few Days, but it is only in order to make her his all the rest of his Life. . . .

A Meek Obedience, such as is paid only to Authority, and not out of Love and a sense of the Justice and Reasonableness of the Command, will be of an uncertain Tenure. As it can't but be uneasy to the Person who pays it, so he who receives it will be sometimes disappointed when he expects to find it: for that Woman must be endow'd with a Wisdom and Goodness much above what we suppose the Sex capable of, I fear much greater than any Man can pretend to, who can so constantly conquer her Passions, and divest her self even of Innocent Self-love, as to give up the Cause.
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when she is in the Right, and to submit her inlightned Reason, to the imperious Dictates of a blind Will, and wild Imagination, even when she clearly perceives the ill Consequences of it, the Imprudence, ray, Folly and Madness of such a Conduct.

And if a Woman runs such a Risque when she marries prudently, according to the Opinion of the World, that is, when she permits her self to be dispos'd of to a Man equal to her in Birth, Education and Fortune, and as good as the most of his Neighbours, (for if none were to marry, but Men of strict Vertue and Honour, I doubt the World would be but thinly Peopled) if at the very best her Lot is hard, what can she expect who is Sold, or any otherwise betray'd into mercenary Hands, to one who is in all, or most respects, unequal to her? A Lover who comes upon what is call'd equal Terms, makes no very advantageous Proposal to the Lady he Courts, and to whom he seems to be an humble Servant. For under many sounding Compliments, Words that have nothing in them, this is his true meaning; He wants one to manage his Family, an House-keeper, one whose Interest it will be not to wrong him, and in whom therefore he can put greater Confidence than in any he can hire for Money. One who may breed his Children, taking all the care and trouble of their Education, to preserve his Name and Family. One whose Beauty, Wit, or good Humour and agreeable Conversation, will entertain him at Home when he has been contradicted and disappointed Abroad; who will do him that Justice the ill-natur'd World denies him; that is, in any one's Language but his own, sooth his Pride and flatter his Vanity, by having always so much good Sense as to be on his Side, to conclude him in the Right, when others are so igno- rant, or so rude, as to deny it. Who will not be Blind to his Merit nor contradict his Will and Pleasure, but make it her Business, her very Ambition to content him; whose Softness and gentle Compliance will calm his Passions, to whom he may safely disclose his troublesome Thoughts, and in her Breast discharge his Cares; whose Duty, Submission and Observance, will heal those Wounds other Peoples Opposition or Neglect have given him. In a word, one whom he can entirely Govern, and consequently may form her to his Will and Liking, who must be his for Life, and therefore cannot quit his Service, let him treat her how he will. . . .

And if this be what every Man expects, the Sum of his violent Love and Courtship, when it is put into Sense, and rendred Intelligible, to what a fine pass does she bring her self who purchases a Lord and Master, not only with her Money, but with what is of greater Value, at the Price of her Discretion! . . . She will not find him less a Governor because she was once his Superior, on the contrary, the Scum of the People are most Tyrannical when they get the Power, and treat their Betters with the greatest Insolence. For, as the wise Man long since observ'd, A Servant when he Reigns, is one of those Things for which the Earth is disquieted, and which no body is able to bear. . . .

Let us see then what is their Part, what must they do to make the Matrimonial Yoke tolerable to themselves as well as pleasing to their Lords and Masters? That the World is an empty and deceitful Thing, that those Enjoyments which appear'd so desirable at a Distance, which rais'd our Hopes and Expectations to such a mighty Pitch, which we so passionately coveted, and so eagerly pursued, vanish at our first Approach, leaving nothing behind them but the Folly of Delu- sion, and the Pain of disappointed Hopes, is a common Outcry; and yet, as common as it is, though we com- plain of being deceiv'd this Instant, we do not fail of contributing to the Cheat the very next. Though in reality it is not the World that abuses us, 'tis we abuse ourselves; it is not the Emptiness of That, but our own false Judgments, our unreasonable Desires and Expectations that torment us; for he who exerts his whole Strength to lift a Straw, ought not to complain of the Burden, but of his own disproportionate Endeavour which gives him the Pain he feels. The World affords us all the Pleasure a sound Judgment can expect from it, and answers all those Ends and Purposes for which it was design'd; let us expect no more than is reason- able, and then we shall not fail of our Expectations.

It is even so in the Case before us; a Woman who has been taught to think Marriage her only Prefer- ment, the Sum-Total of her Endeavours, the comple- tion of all her Hopes, that which must settle and make her Happy in this World, and very few, in their Youth especially, carry a Thought steadily to a greater Dis- tance; She who has seen a Lover dying at her Feet, and can't therefore imagine that he who professes to re- ceive all his Happiness from her, can have any other Design or Desire than to please her; whose Eyes have been dazzled with all the Glitter and Pomp of a Wed- ding, and, who hears of nothing but Joy and Congratu- lation; who is transported with the Pleasure of being out of Pupillage, and Mistress not only of her self, but of a Family too: She who is either so simple or so vain, as to take her Lover at his Word either as to the Praises he gave her, or the Promises he made for himself; in sum, she whose Expectation has been rais'd by Court- ship, by all the fine things that her Lover, her Govern- ess and Domestic Flatterers say, will find a terrible Disappointment when the hurry is over, and when she comes calmly to consider her Condition, and views it no more under a false Appearance, but as it truly is. . . .
But how can a Woman scruple intire Subjection, how can she forbear to admire the Worth and Excellency of the superior Sex, if she at all considers it? Have not all the great Actions that have been perform'd in the World been done by Men? Have not they founded Empires and over-turn'd them? Do not they make Laws and continually repeal and amend them? Their vast Minds lay Kingdoms waste, no Bounds or Measures can be prescrib'd to their Desires. War and Peace depend upon them; they form Cabals and have the Wisdom and Courage to get over all the Rubs, the petty Restraints which Honour and Conscience may lay in the way of their desired Grandeur. What is it they cannot do? They make Worlds and ruin them, form Systems of universal Nature, and dispute eternally about them; their Pen gives Worth to the most trifling Controversy; nor can a fray be inconsiderable if they have drawn their Swords in. . . . It is a Woman's Happiness to hear, admire and praise them, especially if a little Ill-nature keeps them at any time from bestowing due Applauses on each other! And if she aspires no further, she is thought to be in her proper Sphere of Action; she is as wise and as good as can be expected from her!

She then who Marries, ought to lay it down for an indisputable Maxim, that her Husband must govern absolutely and entirely, and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey. She must not attempt to divide his Authority, or so much as dispute it; to struggle with her Yoke will only make it gall the more, but must believe him Wise and Good and in all respects the best, at least he must be so to her. She who can't do this is no way fit to be a Wife, she may set up for that peculiar Coronet the antient Fathers talk'd of, but is not qualified to receive that great Reward, which attends the eminent Exercise of Humility and Self-denial, Patience and Resignation, the Duties that a Wife is call'd to.

But some refractory Woman perhaps will say, how can this be? Is it possible for her to believe him Wise and Good who by a thousand Demonstrations convinces her, and all the World, of the contrary? Did the bare Name of Husband confer Sense on a Man, and the mere being in Authority infallibly qualify him for Government, much might be done. But since a wise Man and a Husband are not Terms convertible, and how loft soever one is to own it, Matter of Fact won't allow us to deny, that the Head many times stands in need of the Inferior's Brains to manage it, she must beg leave to be excus'd from such high Thoughts of her Sovereign, and if she submits to his Power, it is not so much Reason as Necessity that compels her. . . .

To wind up this Matter; If a Woman were duly principled, and taught to know the World, especially the true Sentiments that Men have of her, and the Traps they lay for her under so many gilded Compliments, and such a seemingly great Respect, that Disgrace would be prevented which is brought upon too many Families; Women would Marry more discreetly, and demean themselves better in a Married State, than some People say they do. The Foundation, indeed, ought to be laid deep and strong, she shou'd be made a good Christian, and understand why she is so, and then she will be everything else that is Good. . . .

Indeed nothing can assure Obedience, and render it what it ought to be, but the Conscience of Duty, the paying it for God's sake. Superiors don't rightly understand their own Interest when they attempt to put out their Subjects Eyes to keep them Obedient. A blind Obedience is what a Rational Creature should never Pay, nor would such an one receive it, did he rightly understand its Nature. For Human Actions are no otherwise valuable, than as they are conformable to Reason; but a blind Obedience is an Obeying without Reason, for ought we know, against it. God himself does not require our Obedience at this rate; he lays before us the Goodness and Reasonableness of his Laws, and were there any thing in them whose Equity we could not readily comprehend, yet we have this clear and sufficient Reason, on which, to found our Obedience, that nothing but what's just and fit, can be enjoin'd by a Just, a Wise and Gracious God; but this is a Reason will never hold in respect of Men's Commands, unless they can prove themselves Infallible, and consequently Impeccable too.

It is therefore very much a Man's Interest, that Women should be good Christians; in this as in every other Instance, he who does his Duty, finds his own Account in it. Duty and true Interest are one and the same Thing, and he who thinks otherwise is to be pitied for being so much in the Wrong; but what can be more the Duty of the Head, than to instruct and improve those who are under Government? She will freely leave him the quiet Dominion of this World, whose Thoughts and Expectations are plac'd on the next. A Prospect of Heaven, and that only, will cure that Ambition which all generous Minds are fill'd with, not by taking it away, but by placing it on a right Object. She will discern a Time when her Sex shall be no Bar to the best Employments, the highest Honour; a Time when that distinction, now so much us'd to her Prejudice, shall be no more; but, provided she is not wanting to her self, her Soul shall shine as bright as the greatest Hero's. This is a true, and indeed, the only Consolation, this makes her a sufficient Compensation for all the Neglect and Contempt the ill-grounded Customs of the World throw on her; for all the Injuries

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brutal Power may do her, and is a sufficient Cordial to support her Spirits, be her Lot in this World what it may.

But some sage Persons may, perhaps object, that were Women allow'd to Improve themselves, and not, amongst other Discouragements, driven back by those wise Jests and Scoffs that are put upon a Woman of Sense or Learning, a Philosophical Lady as she is call'd by way of Ridicule; they would be too wise and too good for the Men; I grant it, for vicious and foolish Men. Nor is it to be wonder'd that He is afraid he should not be able to Govern them were their Understandings improv'd, who is resolv'd not to take too much Pains with his own. But these, 'tis to be hop'd, are no very considerable Number, the Foolish at least; and therefore this is so far from being an Argument against Womens Improvement, that it is a strong one for it, if we do but suppose the Men to be as capable of Improvement as the Women; but much more, if, according to Tradition, we believe they have greater Capacities. This, if any thing, would stir them up to be what they ought, and not permit them to waste their Time and abuse their Faculties, in the Service of their irregular Appetites and unreasonable Desires, and so let poor contemptible Women who have been their Slaves, excel them in all that is truly excellent. This would make them Blush at employing an immortal Mind no better than in making Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof, since Women, by a wiser Conduct, have brought themselves to such a Reach of Thought, to such Exactness of Judgment, such Clearness and Strength of Reasoning, such Purity and Elevation of Mind, such Command of their Passions, such Regularity of Will and Affection, and in a Word, to such a Pitch of Perfection, as the Human Soul is capable of attaining in this Life by the Grace of God, such true Wisdom, such real Greatness, as though it do not qualify them to make a Noise in this World, to found or overturn Empires, yet it qualifies them for what is infinitely better, a Kingdom that cannot be mov'd, an incorruptible Crown of Glory. . .

Again, it may be said, If a Wife's Case be as it is here represented, it is not good for a Woman to Marry, and so there's an End of Human Race. But this is no fair Consequence, for all that can be justly be infer'd from hence, is that a Woman has no mighty Obligations to the Man who makes Love to her; she has no Reason to be fond of being a Wife, or to reckon it a piece of Preferment when she is taken to be a Man's Upper-Servant; it is no Advantage to her in this World; if rightly manag'd it may prove one as to the next. For she who marries purely to do good, to educate Souls for Heaven, who can be so truly mortified as to lay aside her own Will and Desires, to pay such an Intire Submission for Life, to one whom she cannot be sure will always deserve it, does certainly perform a more Heroick Action than all the famous Masculine Heroes can boast of, she suffers a continual Martyrdom to bring Glory to God and Benefit to Mankind; which Consideration, indeed, may carry her through all Difficulties. . .

To conclude. Perhaps I've said more than most Men will thank me for; I cannot help it, for how much soever I may be their Friend and humble Servant, I am more a Friend to Truth. . . If they have usurp'd, I love Justice too much to wish Success and Continuance to Usurpations, which, though submitted to out of Prudence, and for Quietness sake, yet leave everybody free to regain their lawful Right whenever they have Power and Opportunity. I don't say that Tyranny ought, but we find in Fact, that it provokes the Oppress'd to throw off even a Lawful Yoke that sits too heavy: And if he who is freely Elected, after all his fair Promises and the fine Hopes he rais'd, proves a Tyrant, the Consideration that he was one's own Choice, will not render one more Submissive and Patient, but I fear, more Refractory. For though it is very unreasonable, yet we see 'tis the Course of the World, not only to return Injury for Injury, but Crime for Crime; both Parties indeed are Guilty, but the Aggressors have a double Guilt, they have not only their own, but their Neighbour's Ruin to answer for.

As to the Female Reader, I hope she will allow I've endeavoured to do her Justice; not betray'd her Cause as her Advocates usually do, under Pretence of defending it. A Practice too mean for any to be guilty of who have the least Sense of Honour, and who do any more than meeter pretend to it. I think I have held the Balance even, and not being conscious of Partiality, I ask no Pardon for it. To plead for the Oppress'd, and to defend the Weak, seem'd to me a generous Under-taking; for though it may be secure, 'tis not always Honourable, to run over to the strongest Party. And if she infers from what has been said, that marriage is a very Happy State for Men, if they think fit to make it so; that they govern the World, they have Prescription on their Side; Women are too weak to dispute with them, therefore they, as all other Governors, are most, if not only, accountable, for what's amiss, for whether other Governments in their Original, were or were not confer'd according to the Merit of the Person, yet certainly in this Case, if Heaven has appointed the Man to Govern, it has Qualified him for it: So far I agree with her: But if she goes on to infer, that therefore, if a man has not these Qualifications, where is his Right? That if he misemploys, he abuses it? And if he abuses, according to modern Deduction, he forfeits it, I must leave her there. A peaceable Woman, indeed, will not
An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War in This Kingdom (1704)

In an Examination of Dr. Kennett’s Sermon, Jan. 31. 1703/4 and Vindication of the Royal Martyr:

... [Charles I, executed January 30, 1649] was an Orthodox and most Regular Prince, steadfast in the Faith and Communion of our Church, to whose Memory we must in Justice own, no Prince had his Heart more fix’d on the Improvement of the Church, and Support and Honour of the Clergy, as the Dr. [Kennett] confesses; who besides that Impartiality and Sincerity of which he makes profession, gives us no reason, from the Beginning to the End of his Sermon, to think that he would say any more in favour of the Martyr [Charles] than Truth extorted from him.

But sure we of this Age, who have this dismal Tragedy so fresh in our Memories, must be the greatest Fools in nature, if we suffer ourselves to be bubbled any more by Men of the same Principles, and by the same Artifices so often detected, and so justly abhor’d. Have we not had Warnings enough to beware of those Miscreants, who set whole Nations on fire, only that their own despicable selves may be talk’d of, and that they may warm them at the Flame? Men who are equally ruinous to Prince and People, who effectually destroy the Liberties of the Subject under pretence of defending them; who bring in Popery, for they act by some of the very worst Popish Principles, whilst they rail against it!

Far be it from us to think that the Body of the Nation ever concur’d in that Villany we deplore, or even the Majority, any further than by a Supine Neglect of opposing it vigorously and in time. Wicked Men are active and unwearied, they stick at no Methods, use the vilest Means to carry their Point. They become the Flatterers of Mens Follies, and the Panders of their Vices, to gain them to their Party. They Bribe, they Threaten, they Solicit, they Fawn, they Dissemble, they Lye, they break through all the Duties of Society, violate all the Laws of GOD and of Man, where they can do it with present Impunity. They fright the Timorous, and tire out the Impatient; if they meet with any of an invincible Spirit and Prudence to countertermine them, all the hard Words, all the scandalous stories that may be are thrown upon these Men, they are Malignants, High-flyers, and what not: No Stratagem’s are omitted to make them weary of Well doing. No wonder then that by such ways as these they get what passes for a Majority, and draw in thoughtless Men, who are so far from approving their Villanies, that they do not so much as suspect them. For one of their Arts is to lay their own Designs of overturning the Government, at the Door of those very Men, who are it’s most faithful Supporters.

But as it will ever become a wise Government to be watchful over every little Cloud of Faction, and to suppress it in its Rise, so there is no Artifice us’d by Factious Men that Governours ought to be more upon their Guard against, than those suspicious Fears and Jealousies, that are artfully instill’d into the Minds of the People, by Cunning Men and their Instruments. I do not only mean that Governours shou’d provide against this, by taking care that their Good be not Evil spoken of, and by cutting off occasion as much as in them lies, from those that desire and seek occasion; for after all this caution, Factious men will still find something to misrepresent. A sad instance of which, we have in their Usage of our Royal Martyr; whose very best Actions, as well as those Mistakes and Infirmities that are incident to Humane Nature, they took occasion to Calumniate. But Governours must vigorously exert that lawful Authority GOD has given them, to be a Terror to Evil-doers, as well as a Praise and Encouragement to those who do well. They shou’d not suffer Men to infect the Peoples Minds with evil Principles and Representations, with Speeches that have double Meanings and equivocal Expressions, Innuendo’s, and secret Hints and Insinuations.

An honest man dares always speak out; he who means well, needs no Softnings, no cautious Periphras-
Mary Astell

...
any Unnatural Rebellions, but for the meaning at least of Self-Preservation! . . .
And, Oh! how happy had it been for the Peace of the Martyr's Reign, if even Doubts and Suspicions had been wanting! If Hardships (the softest Name we can call them by) had not serv'd to exasperate the Minds of the People, and prepar'd them by degrees to be led out first in Riots and Tumults, and then in Troops and Armies, against their lawful Sovereign! Poor good-natur'd People, to be forc'd to this upon Thoughts, Suspicions, and Hardships! Doubtless, they never meant such ill Effects, any more than the King did those, which the Dr. tells us were beyond his Intentions, but which rais'd such a Jealousy, and spread such a damp upon the English Subjects, that it was unhappily turn'd into one of the unjust Occasions of the Civil War. But who could help this Civil War? since the People thought themselves too much under French Counsels and a French Ministry? . . . But without this Thought, the good People, alas! cou'd never have been drawn into this Great Rebellion! How we come to call it a Rebellion, is another Question: which Harrington shall answ.

Treason does never prosper; what's the Reason?
For if it prosper none dares call it Treason
The People were not secure in their Legal Rights and Tenures, at least they thought so. There was Ship-mony, Loans, and Benevolences exacted, which they, good Souls! had no Notion of. The King, 'tis true, had set this Right, but why shou'd you trust him who once has Injur'd you? or to whom you have been Injurious?
There was an unhappy Suspicion of an Arbitrary Executive Power, and the Spirit of a Free People will always shake off the Yoke. For Tyranny and Oppression were a Grievance Here in the remotest Times of Old. And for the Future (hear, and take Warning O ye English Princes!) it shall never be attempted, or which is the same thing, thought to be attempted, without bringing down Ruin and Confusion upon those who shall attempt it, or whom Crafty Men, I shou'd say Good Patriots, shall tell the People, and make them think that they design to attempt it . . .

I hope then our Rights, and the Rights of Englishmen, tender Lovers of their Faith and Country, have been retrieved, and committed down to Posterity, beyond a Capacity of their being ever depriv'd of them; for the Dr. has very wisely, and very industriously establish'd that Supreme Law, the Safety of the People: it being evident from him, that it is not enough that a Prince be Orthodox, Regular, free from Ambition and Sinister Ends; . . . if there be the least Attempts towards Exorbitant Power, . . . the Appearance of a Yoke, or so much as the Remoter Fears and Apprehensions of one; . . . tho' he himself be ever so innocent; yet the Good Prince, we find by experience, must answer for all, and pay down his Royalty and his Life! . . .

. . . [A]nd tho' when a Prince does any irregular or disoblging Action this may be a good Pretence, yet a Civil War may be indeed begun more out of Hatred to a Party, who are, or who we fear may be uppermost, than out of any Dissatisfaction to the Prince: for these, and no doubt for other reasons, 'tis highly necessary, the Truth which we have taught of late, the Justice we have practis'd, and Charity, which always begins at home, taking care in the first place to make our own Fortunes, are all of them nearly concern'd to keep this Fundamental Right in the Peoples view, viz. "That Power is originally from the People, and that Princes are responsible to them for the exercise thereof." The People must ever and anon be reminded as plainly as we dare, and as Prudence, the Humour of the Times, and the Service of the Cause will permit; that this Right has often been exercis'd; that there are many Precedents, or that the Suspicion, the very Thought and Dread of Popery, Oppression, and Illegal Power, the very Prospect that their Liberties and Estates were in some Danger, have drawn in their great Forefathers to stand upon their Guard, meaning Self-preservation; and that Princes, how sacred soever they be, must not think to attempt upon the Liberties of a Free People, without bringing down Ruin and Confusion upon themselves.

For if a Busie Man, or Party of Men, have Policy and Courage enough, and some lucky Opportunities to persuade the People into Jealousies and Fears, and to Head them against their Sovereign, 'tis all a case whether the Dangers are Real or Imaginary; if they happen to succeed, they shall find Advocates enough to Justify them, Success will Crown the Work.

Is it not an Inconsistency to deplore the Fate of Char. I. and to justify that of other Princes? If we think their Fall to be Just, and his to be Unjust and Deporable, we may in time come to abhor those Principles that brought him to the Block, and the Practices that flow from them, as being equally destructive of the Best, as well as of the worst Princes; and then what will become of the Peoples Right to shake off an Oppressor? Must we take that dull way which David took, and which the old-fashion'd Homilies talk of, Wait God's time, and let him go down to the Grave in Peace? Why at this rate we may tamely have our Throats cut; and sure it is better to be beforehand and with him! If you deny us the Lawfulness of the Self-defence, we have done twenty actions that we can't justify. . .

Is it not best therefore, when these 30th of Januarys come about, to persuade ourselves and the People,
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with as much respect to King Charles's Memory as the matter will bear, that this Good Prince, tho' he meant no hurt, was over-persuaded by a Popish Queen [Henrietta Maria], and high Church men, such as the Laudian Faction [of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury], and Arbitrary Ministers, to do things worthy of blame. That tho' matters were afterwards carry'd too far, farther than the Honest Presbyterians, and the Tender and Loyal moderate Men intended, yet the King may thank himself for it; for he gave the Occasion by the French Alliance, and the Consequences of it.

Such an Indictment as this, drawn up against this unfortunate Prince, with Plainness of Truth, and Sincerity of Heart, even when it is said to be dangerous, and an invidious Subject, but yet entred upon with Simplicity and godly Sincerity, for the sake of Truth, and Justice, and Charity, may, it's like, open Peoples eyes, and convince them that a Friend to Popery, and an Invader of our Liberties, a Prince in whose Reign the People, the good-nature'd People, thought themselves too much under French Counsels and a French Ministry, ought not to stand as a Martyr in our English Calendars; the Example is dangerous, and the Consequences pernicious.

What greater Service then can be done our Country, and those Noble Assertors of its Rights and Liberties, than to let Princes know, that they must, from the very beginning, avoid everything that may raise a Suspicion, a Thought, in the Peoples Minds, of their Inclinations to France, to Popery, or Arbitrary Power? Since it is not enough to retract past Mistakes, King Charles did this, but to no manner of purpose. Or rather, to prevent all Misunderstanding, 'tis best for them at first To part with their Power, and Trust it to them, as Mr. Hambden answered one of his Fellow Members, who ask'd him, What they cou'd desire more of the King, seeing he had granted them so much? . . .

Now they who are curious to know what Popery is, and who do not rail at it at a venture, know very well, that every Doctrine which is profess'd by the Church of Rome, is not Popish; GOD forbid it shou'd, for they receive the Holy Scriptures, and teach the Gospels. But that Superstructure of Hay and Stubble, those Doctrines of Men or Devils, which they have built upon this good Foundation, this is Popery; and it is upon account of our rejecting those Corruptions, that we stile our selves Reform'd. It is not necessary to enumerate those Errors here; the Learned Writers of the Church of England having sufficiently expos'd them in those excellent Tracts, whereby they most Gloriously defended the Truth with their Pens, in a Primitive manner, in the late Reign. I shall only take notice of one Error, which is proper to my present purpose, and that is the Depositing Doctrine, which is as rank Popery as Transubstantiation, and has ever been so accounted by Church of England Writers . . .

We see then, that this is the declar'd Doctrine of the Roman Doctors, of all Orders, and of all Nations; . . . And I shall only at present make a small Request to those good Protestants who profess it, (viz.) that if it is not Popish, but true Orthodox Protestant Doctrine, they wou'd be pleas'd to prove it to us from Authentick Protestant Authors; for I make no reckoning of a Buchanan, a Milton, or any of those Mercenary Scriblers whom all sober Men condemn, and who only write after the Fact, or in order to it, to make their own Fortunes, or to justify their own wickedness. Or rather, and which is much better, let it be prov'd to us from Holy Scripture, and those best expositors, as well as Practisers of Holy Writ, the Primitive Church.

But if they will not, or cannot give us this Proof, then I wou'd beg them, for their own Credit sake, to talk no more against Popery, much less to affix this odious Name, either openly or indirectly, upon Men who are the greatest and truest Enemies to Popery, since they themselves espouse some of the vilest Popish Doctrines . . . It is but setting up . . . Cunning and Popular Men, and good Speakers, . . . to obstruct the King's Business, and to weaken his Authority: And then, tho' the Royal and English Heart be continually labouring for the Good of the People, these evil Ministers may easily pervert and misrepresent the best Intentions and most noble Designs. For Princes, how good soever, are neither infallible in their judgments, whether of Things or Persons, nor exempt from the Passions of Humane Nature. And if the Principles and Measures that brought the Royal Head to the Block be so tenderly handled, and so carefully pursu'd, woe unto us! for how much soever we make shew of detesting the Consequences, whilst the Premises please, we are in the high Road towards drawing the fatal Conclusion! We may harangue as much as we please against Popery and Arbitrary Power, so did our Forefathers whose Off-spring we are, and all the World knows to what End and Purpose; these being only the Baits that cover the Hook of home-bre'd Cabals and Rebellious Projects. Strange! that such Principles shou'd be suffered in a Christian Nation, a Nation that has smarted so severely by them! But stranger yet, that any Prince shou'd Employ and Trust Men of these Principles! 'Tis certain he can have no hold of them; for whenever they get Power, and Think that a Change will be for their Interest, they will never want Pretences to throw him out of the Saddle. Nor will they be long in persuading themselves that it will turn to their own Account, even tho' the Prince may have heaped the utmost Favours on them. For in all Changes there's something to be got, by the Mercenary and Rebellious
Hands that effect them. Forbid it Heaven! that they should ever any more be able to give us a Tryal of their Skill. . . .

Our Excellent Church . . . teaches us to acknowledge in our daily Prayers, That GOD is the only Ruler of Princes; that the Parliament is assembled under our most Religious and Gracious Queen [Queen Anne—1700–1714]; and therefore can have no Coercive Power over their Princes. In the Communion Service we are taught to own in our very Prayers, That the Queen is GOD's Chosen Servant, GOD's Minister, but our Queen and Governor; that she has GOD's Authority that it is GOD's Word and Ordinance that we should faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey Her, in GOD, and for GOD, that is, in the Apostle's words, not only for Wrath, but for Conscience sake. Where then is the Original and Supreme Authority of the People? Besides; this is the Law of the Land, as well as the Doctrine of the Church, for the Liturgy is Established by Act of Parliament: which may be one Reason why some are so willing to have it Reviewed. It is a lasting and daily Reproach to their Disloyalty, reminding them how far they have gone towards the breach of that excellent Constitution, about the Preservation of which they make so great and so Hypocritical a Clamour: For, allowing that the People have a Right to Design the Person of their Governor; it does by no means follow that they Give him his Authority, or that they may when they please resume it. None can give what they have not: The People have no Authority over their own Lives, consequently they can't invest such an Authority in their Governors. And tho' we should grant that People, when they first enter into Society, may frame their Laws as they think fit; yet these Laws being once Established, they can't legally and Honestly be chang'd, but by that Authority in which the Founders of the Society thought fit to place the Legislature. Otherwise we have been miserably imposed upon by all those Arguments that were urg'd against a Dispensatory Power.

And since our Constitution lodges the Legislative Power in the Prince and the Three Estates assembled in Parliament; as it is not in the Power of the Prince and one of the Houses, to Make or Abrogate any Law, without the Concurrence of the other House, so neither can it be Lawfully done by the Prince alone, or by the two Houses without the Prince. All such pretended Acts, and all the Consequences of them, being Illegal and Void in themselves, without the Formality of a Repeal, as is evident to every honest Man, if he will but attend to common Sense, plain English, and the unalterable Reason of things. I hope then we shall hear no more of the People's Supremacy till these Good Men have got the Act of Uniformity Repeal'd. But, alas, what do Laws signify to Rebels, who have Power to Break or Cuning to Evade them! For all sides must allow, that there are even yet many other Good Laws in force, which sufficiently condemn those Principles and Practices in which they glory. . . .

Popery was the Cry 'tis true, but the Establish'd Church was the thing aim'd at; . . .

The short is: The true and the principal Cause of that Great Rebellion, and that Horrid Fact which compleated it, and which we can never enough deplore, was this: Some Cuning and Self-minded Men, whose Wickedness was equal to their Craft, and their Craft sufficient to carry them thro' their Wickedness; these had Thoughts and Meanings to destroy the government in Church and State, and to set up a Model of their own Invention, agreeable to their own private Interests and Designs, under the specious Pretences of the Peoples Rights and Liberties. They did not indeed speak out, and declare this at first, for that wou'd have spoil'd the Intrigue, every body wou'd have abhor'd them; but a little Discernment might have found what they drove at. For to lessen and incroach upon the Royal Authority, is the only way to null it by degrees, as an ingenious Person observes upon this Occasion. . . .

As little did we hear of Illegal Acts and Arbitrary Power, of Oppression and Persecution, in a Reign [of Oliver Cromwell] that tugg'd hard for a Standing Army in time of Peace; that had Interest to suspend the Habeeus Corpus Act several times, tho' it be the great Security of the English Liberties; that outed 7 or 8 Reverend Prelates, the Ornament and Glory of the English Church, besides several of the inferior Clergy, and Members of the Universities, and that only for Conscience sake, and because they cou'd not swallow such new Oaths, as they believ'd to be contrary to the old ones: And tho' 12 of them were thought so deserving, that there was a Provision made in their Favour, even by that Act that depriv'd them of their Freeholds and Subsistance, of their Rights as English-men and Ministers of GOD's Church, yet not one of them enjoy'd, in that Human, Charitable and Religious Reign! the Advantages which the Body of Good-nature'd English People designed them. Who cry'd out Persecution? or put in a word for a Sister Church, when Episcopacy was destroy'd Root and Branch in a Neighbouring Kingdom [Scotland], that us'd to interest itself mightily in our Affairs, and still believes it is under Covenant Engagements, to work the same Blessed Reformation here? And tho' all of the Clergy, who were but suspected to be favourers of Episcopacy, were treated in the most outrageous and cruel manner; 'tho a whole Clan of defenceless Men were barbarously Massacred in cold Blood, after promises of Security; which Action, if not done by Authority, was done at least by
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contrivance, the Actors being protected and kept from Punishment. When —— etc. more might be said, but let this suffice; nor are these bare Suspicions, Doubts, etc. no, they are true and notorious Facts; which will be remembered, and call’d by their proper Names, whatever a Set of Men may endeavour to the contrary.

But no sooner was her Majesty happily plac’d in the Throne of her Fathers, thro’ GOD’s great and most seasonable Mercy to an unworthy People, but all the old Clamours are revi’d, tho’ she has done nothing to Provok, but every thing to Oblige them! Tho’ her only fault, if Duty and Respect will allow that Expression, consists in too much of the Royal Martyr’s Clemency and Goodness; Her Majesty’s Reign having left us nothing to wish, but that she had less of K. Charles and more of the Spirit of Q. Elizabeth, since a Factious People can no way be kept inbounds, but by a sprightly and vigorous Exertion of just Authority. . . .

To come then to account for the Causes of our deplorable Civil Wars, we may be allow’d to do it in this manner: Tho’ Government is absolutely necessary for the Good of Mankind, yet no Government, no not that of GOD himself, can suit with their deprav’d and boundless Appetites. Few govern themselves by Reason, and they who transgress its Laws, will always find somewhat or other to be uneasy at, and consequently will ever desire, and as far as they can endeavour, to change their Circumstances. But since there are more Fools in the World than Wise Men, and even among those who pass for Wise, that is, who have Abilities to be truly so, too many abuse and warp their Understandings to petty and evil Designs, and to such Tricks and Artifices as appear the readiest way to attain them. Since Riches and Power are what Men covet, supposing these can procure them all they wish; Hopes to gain more, or at least to secure what one has, will always be a handle by which Humane nature may be mov’d, and carry’d about as the cunning Manager pleases. And therefore of Necessity in all Civil Wars and Commotions, there must be some Knaves at the Head of a great many Fools, whom the other wheedle and cajole with many plausible Pretences, according to the Opportunity, and the Humour of those they manage. . . .

I will not pretend to justify all the Actions of our Princes, but it is much more Difficult; nay, it is impossible to justify, or honestly excuse the Behaviour of our People towards them. Tyranny and Oppression are no doubt a grievance; they are so to the Prince, as well as to the Subject. Nor shou’d I think a Prince wou’d fall into them, unless seduc’d by some of his Flattering Courtiers and Ambitious Ministers; and therefore our Law very Reasonably provides, that these, and these only, shou’d suffer for it. But are Sedition and Rebellion no Grievances? they are not less, perhaps more Grievous than Tyranny, even to the People; for they expose us to the Oppression of a multitude of Tyrants.

And as we here in this Nation may have suffer’d by the former, so have we ofter and much more grievously by the latter. The accursed Roots of which are I fear still left among us, and there are but too many wicked ones who cultivate these Tares with the utmost Arts and Industry. May GOD inspire the Heart of his Vice-regent with the Spirit of Courage and Understanding, to restrain and keep under all such workers of Iniquity, as turn Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction. That so She may never leave it in their power to prevail either against her Royal Person or her Good and Faithful Subjects, or to triumph in the Ruin of GOD’s Church among us; seeing they have not fail’d upon occasion to give us too evident Proof, that when they have the Power to hurt, they never want the Inclination.

FINIS