

We consider the Author as influenced by a Motive of doing Good in general; whereas the Friend is acted by a Concern for us in particular; and this Consideration makes us lay his Advice more to Heart. A Society of Friends will not think it sufficient to reprove a Man for flagrant, enormous Faults; but will make it their Business to animadvert upon any little Indecency or Flaw in his Conduct. Dr. HAMMOND used to say, it was a poor Design in Friendship to keep the Man we admitted to our Bosom only from being *scandalous*; as if the Physician should only secure his Patient from the Plague.

Hly, Upon the Subject Matter of Conversation.

If I were to propose any Model for Conversation; I should chuse that of XENOPHON'S *Symposium*, where the Discourse was *diverting* without any Levity or Impertinence, and *Instructive* without any Stiffness or Austerity. We are told in the *Bibliothèque Choisie*, that Mr. LOCKE, Mr. LE CLERC, and Mr. LIMBORCH used to meet constantly once a Week, and discuss some very important Question, which they had pitched upon before. This method these famous Authors took, to enlarge the Sphere of their Knowledge by communicating their Thoughts. If Discourse were altogether confined to stated subjects, it might perhaps be too formal; if intirely occasioned, it might evaporate in light Trifles. The best Way therefore would be to observe a Medium, and to set apart about two Hours for some stated Subject, and to give up the rest to any incidental Conversation.

I have known some Companies, in which, if a Man talked virtuously he incurred the Imputation of Hypocrisy; if learnedly, that of Pedantry. Surely no Man of Merit will ever prostitute his good Sense to low Ribaldry and Obscenity, when Learning opens to him the noblest Fields of Speculation. Wit must run very low, if nothing but the *Dregs* and *Sediments* of Impurity appear; and it is a Maxim with me, that no one, that had wherewithall to entertain a sound and unbiaffed Reason, would ever address himself with lewd Talk to the corrupt Passions and Inclinations of Mankind.

To return from this Digression; I would by all Means, next to *Virtue* and *Religion* in general, recommend *Polemical Divinity*. It

would be too shocking to attack Christianity directly and immediately: Therefore those, who are no Friends to it, sap it's Foundations by Degrees, and begin with it's fundamental Articles. One Error is to pave the Way for another, that they may bring their Designs to bear: And the Mask is to be worn till all Things are ripe for Execution. They look upon all the rest of the World as Men of narrow Views, and therefore deal with them as with strait-mouthed Vessels: If they should go rashly to work, and attempt to throw in too much at once, their Labour would be lost, and their Doctrine fall to the Ground; they, for this Reason, strive to carry their Point by *pouring* in their Tenets *gently* and by Degrees. To prevent this stale Artifice of the *Deists*, and to check the gradual Advances of Error; it is a Duty incumbent upon all Men of good Abilities to lay in a competent Stock of *Divinity*: And, in Order to this, it is necessary to impart their Thoughts for their mutual Advantage; which will make them talk as pertinent upon these Topicks as if the Bent of their Studies had been almost entirely applied this Way. Spirit of Emulation will quicken their Endeavours; and it will be pleasant as well as useful, to point out to one another the Sophistry to which Hereticks have Recourse, to support a sinking Cause.

When a Man knows he must shortly deliver his Thoughts in Conversation upon any important Article or material Question; he reads with more Attention: endeavours to draw off the Flower and Spirit of many Authors upon the same Subject; thoroughly digests his Notions, and treasures them up in his memory. Besides, his Studies center in one Point: whereas, at other Times, he may be apt to shoot at Rovers, without aiming at any certain Mark.

If any should object, That what I have recommended would too much pall and flatten the Spirit of Conversation; I beg Leave to observe, that ludicrous Wit and facetious Discourses may beget in us a short, unsatisfactory Gleam of Joy; whereas solid Sense and virtuous Reflections impress upon the Mind a calm, lasting Serenity of Temper; the former, if too much indulged, sink, weaken, and debase the Majesty of a rational Soul; whereas the latter raise, elevate, and ennoble it's Disposition: When a Man has been laying out that Time in improving Discourse which

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