

OF all the causes which conspire to blind
 Man's erring judgement, and misguide the mind,
 What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
 Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools.
 Whatever nature has in worth denied,
 She gives in large recruits of needless pride;
 For as in bodies, thus in souls we find
 What wants in blood and spirits, swelled with wind;
 Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
 And fills up all the mighty void of sense! 10
 If once right reason drives that cloud away,
 Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.
 Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
 Make use of ev'ry friend---and ev'ry foe.

A little learning is a dang'rous thing;
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.
 Fired at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
 In fearless youth we tempt the heights of arts, 20
 While from the bounded level of our mind,
 Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;
 But more advanced, behold with strange surprise
 New, distant scenes of endless science rise!
 So pleased at first the tow'ring Alps we try,
 Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky;
 Th' eternal snows appear already past,
 And the first clouds and mountains seem the last:
 But, those attained, we tremble to survey
 The growing labours of the lengthened way, 30
 Th' increasing prospect tires our wand'ring eyes,
 Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

A perfect judge will read each work of wit
 With the same spirit that its author writ,
 Survey the whole, nor seek slight faults to find,
 Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
 Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
 The gen'rous pleasure to be charmed with wit.
 But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,
 Correctly cold, and regularly low, 40
 That shunning faults, one quiet tenor keep;
 We cannot blame indeed---but we may sleep.
 In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts
 Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;
 'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
 But the joint force and full result of all.
 Thus when we view some well-proportioned dome,
 (The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome!)
 No single parts unequally surprise,

All comes united to th' admiring eyes; 50
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The whole at once is bold and regular.

Some to conceit alone their taste confine,
And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;
Pleased with a work where nothing's just or fit,
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.
Poets, like painters, thus, unskilled to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With gold and jewels cover every part,
And hide with ornaments their want of art. 60
True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;
Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind:
As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit:
For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
As bodies perish through excess of blood.

Others for language all their care express,
And value books, as women men, for dress: 70
Their praise is still,---the style is excellent;
The sense, they humbly take upon content.
Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.
False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,
Its gaudy colours spreads on ev'ry place;
The face of nature we no more survey,
All glares alike, without distinction gay:
But true expression, like th' unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon, 80
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.

Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent as more suitable;
A vile conceit in pompous words expressed
Is like a clown in regal purple dressed;
For diff'rent styles with diff'rent subjects sort,
As several garbs with country, town and court.
Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense!
Such laboured nothings, in so strange a style, 90
Amaze th' unlearned, and make the learned smile.
Unlucky as Fungoso in the play,
These sparks with awkward vanity display
What the fine gentleman wore yesterday!
And but so mimic ancient wits at best,
As apes our grandsires, in their doublets dressed.
In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold,

Alike fantastic, if too new, or old;
Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside. 100

But most by numbers judge a poet's song,
And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong:
In the bright Muse though thousand charms conspire,
Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire,
Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,
Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the music there.

These equal syllables alone require,
Though oft the ear the open vowels tire,
While expletives their feeble aid *do* join, 110
And ten low words oft creep in one dull line,
While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
With sure returns of still expected rhymes.

Where'er you find `the cooling western breeze',
In the next line, it `whispers through the trees';
If crystal streams `with pleasing murmurs creep',
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with `sleep'.
Then, at the last and only couplet fraught
With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,

A needless Alexandrine ends the song, 120
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.
Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know
What's roundly smooth, or languishingly slow;
And praise the easy vigour of a line,
Where Denham's strength and Waller's sweetness join.
True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows, 130
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move slow:
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.